CAMBRIDGE
REFERENCE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 250

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1994–95

COMPRISING PERIOD
16 November—2 December 1994

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Chronology of "The Parliamentary Debates"

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

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[Returned at the General Election, 9 April 1992]

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Abbott, Ms Diane Julie (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington)
Adams, Mrs. Katherine (Paisley, North)
Adley, Robert James (Christchurch) *[died, May 1993]*
Ainger, Nicholas Richard (Pembroke)
Ainsworth, Peter Michael (East Surrey)
Ainsworth, Robert William (Coventry, North-East)
Aitken, Rt. Hon. Jonathan William Patrick (South Thanet)
Alexander, Richard Thain (Newark)
Alison, Rt. Hon. Michael James Hugh (Selby)
Allason, Rupert William Simon (Torbay)
Allen, Graham William (Nottingham, North)
Alton, David Patrick Paul (Liverpool, Mossley Hill)
Amess, David Anthony Andrew (Basildon)
Ancram, Michael (Devizes)
Anderson, Donald (Swansea, East)
Anderson, Janet (Rossendale and Darwen)
Arbuthnot, James Norwich (Wanstead and Woodford)
Armstrong, Ms Hilary Jane (North-West Durham)
Arnold, Jacques Arnold (Gravesham)
Arnold, Sir Thomas Richard (Hazel Grove)
Ashby, David Glynn (North-West Leicestershire)
Ashdown, Rt. Hon. Jeremy John Durham (Yeovil)
Ashton, Joseph William (Bassetlaw)
Aspinwall, Jack Heywood (Wansdyke)
Atkins, Robert James (South Ribble)
Atkinson, David Anthony (Bournemouth, East)
Atkinson, Peter Landreth (Hexham)
Austin-Walker, John Eric (Woolwich)

B

Baker, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Wilfred CH (Mole Valley)
Baker, Nicholas Brian (Dorset, North)
Baldry, Antony Brian (Banbury)
Banks, Matthew Richard William (Southport)
Banks, Robert George (Harrogate)
Banks, Tony (Newham, North-West)
Barnes, Harold (North-East Derbyshire)
Barron, Kevin John (Rother Valley)
Bates, Michael Walton (Langbaurgh)
Batiste, Spencer Lee (Elmet)
Battle, John Dominic (Leeds, West)
Bayley, Hugh (York)
Beckett, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Mary (Derby, South)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Beith, Rt. Hon. Alan James (Berwick-upon-Tweed)
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Bellingham, Henry Campbell (North-West Norfolk)
Bendall, Vivian Walter Hough (Ilford, North)
Benn, Rt. Hon. Anthony Neil Wedgwood (Chesterfield)
Bennett, Andrew Francis (Denton and Reddish)
Benton, Joseph Edward (Bootle)
Beresford, Sir Alexander Paul (Croydon, Central)
Bermingham, Gerald Edward (St. Helens, South)
Berry, Roger Leslie (Kingswood)
Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Biffen, Rt. Hon. William John (North Shropshire)
Blackburn, John Graham (Dudley, West) *[died, October 1994]*
Blair, Rt. Hon. Anthony Charles Lynton (Sedgefield)
Blunkett, David (Sheffield, Brightside)
Boateng, Paul Yaw (Brent, South)
Body, Sir Richard Bernard Frank Stewart (Holland with Boston)
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas Cosmo (Upminster)
Booth, Vernon Edward Hartley (Finchley)
Boothroyd, Rt. Hon. Miss Betty (West Bromwich, West)
Boswell, Timothy Eric (Daventry)
Bottomley, Peter James (Eltham)
Bottomley, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Virginia Hilda Brunette Maxwell (South-West Surrey)
Bowden, Sir Andrew MBE (Brighton, Kemptown)
Bowis, John Crocket OBE (Battersea)
Boyce, James (Rotherham) *[died, January 1994]*
Boyes, Roland (Houghton and Washington)
Boyson, Rt. Hon. Sir Rhodes (Brent, North)
Bradley, Keith John Charles (Manchester, Withington)
Brandreth, Gyles Daubeney (City of Chester)
Bray, Dr. Jeremy William (Motherwell, South)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy (Canterbury)
Bright, Sir Graham Frank James (Luton, South)
Brooke, Rt. Hon. Peter Leonard (City of London and Westminster, South)
Brown, James Gordon (Dunfermline, East)
Brown, Michael Russell (Brigg and Cleethorpes)
Brown, Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne, East)
Browning, Mrs. Angela Frances (Tiverton)
Bruce, Ian Cameron (South Dorset)
Bruce, Malcolm Gray (Gordon)
Budgen, Nicholas William (Wolverhampton, South-West)
Burden, Richard Haines (Birmingham, Northfield)
Burns, Simon Hugh McGuigan (Chelmsford)
Burt, Alistair James Hendrie (Bury, North)
Butcher, John Patrick (Coventry, South-West)
Butler, Peter (Milton Keynes, North-East)
Butterfill, John Valentine (Bournemouth, West)
Byers, Stephen John (Wallsend)

C

Caborn, Richard George (Sheffield, Central)
Callaghan, James (Heywood and Middleton)
Campbell, Anne (Cambridge)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
Campbell, Walter Menzies CBE QC (Fife, North-East)
Campbell-Savours, Dale Norman (Workington)
Canavan, Dennis Andrew (Falkirk, West)
Cann, James Charles (Ipswich)

Carlile, Alexander Charles QC (Montgomery)
Carlisle, John Russell (Luton, North)
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth Melville (Lincoln)
Carrington, Matthew Hadrian Marshall (Fulham)
Carttiss, Michael Reginald Harry (Great Yarmouth)
Cash, William Nigel Paul (Stafford)
Channon, Rt. Hon. Henry Paul Guinness (Southend, West)
Chaplin, Mrs. Sybil Judith OBE (Newbury) *[died, February 1993]*
Chapman, Sydney Brookes (Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David William George (Eastleigh) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Chisholm, Malcolm George Richardson (Edinburgh, Leith)
Church, Judith Ann (Dagenham) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Churchill, Winston Spencer (Davyhulme)
Clapham, Michael (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
Clappison, William James (Hertsmere)
Clark, David George (South Shields)
Clark, Michael (Rochford)
Clarke, Eric Lionel (Midlothian)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry QC (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Thomas CBE (Monklands, West)
Clelland, David Gordon (Tyne Bridge)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey Robert (Cirencester and Tewkesbury)
Clwyd, Mrs. Ann (Cynon Valley)
Coe, Sebastian Newbold (Falmouth and Camborne)
Coffey, Ann (Stockport)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton)
Colvin, Michael Keith Beale (Romsey and Waterside)
Congdon, David Leonard (Croydon, North-East)
Connarty, Michael (Falkirk, East)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Robert Finlayson (Livingston)
Coombs, Anthony Michael Vincent (Wyre Forest)
Coombs, Simon Christopher (Swindon)
Cope, Rt. Hon. Sir John Ambrose (Northavon)
Corbett, Robin (Birmingham, Erdington)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Sir Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Corston, Jean Ann (Bristol, East)
Couchman, James Randall (Gillingham)
Cousins, James Mackay (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Cran, James Douglas (Beverley)
Critchley, Julian Michael Gordon (Aldershot)
Cryer, George Robert (Bradford, South) *[died, April 1994]*
Cummings, John Scott (Easington)
Cunliffe, Lawrence Francis (Leigh)
Cunningham, James Dolan (Coventry, South-East)
Cunningham, Rt. Hon. John Anderson (Copeland)
Currie, Mrs. Edwina (South Derbyshire)
Curry, David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)

D

Dafis, Cynog Glyndwr (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North)
Dalyell, Tam (Linlithgow)
Darling, Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davidson, Ian Graham (Glasgow, Govan)
Davies, Bryan (Oldham, Central and Royton)
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, John Quentin (Stamford and Spalding)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, David Michael (Boothferry)
Davis, Terence Anthony Gordon (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Day, Stephen Richard (Cheadle)
Denham, John Yorke (Southampton, Itchen)
Deva, Niranjan Joseph Aditya (Brentford and Isleworth)
Devlin, Timothy Robert (Stockton, South)
Dewar, Donald Campbell (Glasgow, Garscadden)
Dickens, Geoffrey Kenneth (Littleborough and Saddleworth)
Dicks, Terence Patrick (Hayes and Harlington)
Dixon, Donald (Jarrow)
Dobson, Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Donohoe, Brian (Cunninghame, South)
Dorrell, Rt. Hon. Stephen James (Loughborough)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Edinburgh, West)
Dover, Densmore Ronald (Chorley)
Dowd, James Patrick (Lewisham, West)
Duncan, Alan James Carter (Rutland and Melton)
Duncan Smith, George Iain (Chingford)
Dunn, Robert John (Dartford)
Dunnachie, James Francis (Glasgow, Pollok)
Dunwoody, Hon. Mrs. Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)
Durant, Sir Robert Anthony Bevis (Reading, West)
Dykes, Hugh John Maxwell (Harrow, East)

E

Eagle, Angela (Wallasey)
Eastham, Kenneth (Manchester, Blackley)
Eggar, Timothy John Crommelin (Enfield, North)
Elletson, Harold Daniel Hope (Blackpool, North)
Emery, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Frank Hannibal (Honiton)
Enright, Derek Anthony (Hemsworth)
Etherington, William (Sunderland, North)
Evans, David John (Welwyn Hatfield)
Evans, John (St. Helens, North)
Evans, Jonathan Peter (Brecon and Radnor)
Evans, Nigel Martin (Ribble Valley)
Evans, Roger Kenneth (Monmouth)
Evennett, David Anthony (Erith and Crayford)
Ewing, Mrs. Margaret Anne (Moray)

F

Faber, David James Christian (Westbury)
Fabricant, Michael Louis David (Mid-Staffordshire)
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas Hardwick QC (Perth and Kinross)
Fatchett, Derek John (Leeds, Central)
Faulds, Andrew Matthew William (Warley, East)
Fenner, Dame Peggy Edith (Medway)
Field, Barry John Anthony (Isle of Wight)
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fishburn, John Dudley (Kensington)
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport, West)
Fookes, Dame Janet Evelyn (Plymouth, Drake)
Forman, Francis Nigel (Carshalton and Wallington)
Forsyth, Michael Bruce (Stirling)

Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric (Mid-Worcestershire)
Foster, Rt. Hon. Derek (Bishop Auckland)
Foster, Donald Michael Ellison (Bath)
Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fowler, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Norman (Sutton Coldfield)
Fox, Sir John Marcus MBE (Shipley)
Fox, Liam (Woodspring)
Fraser, John Denis (Norwood)
Freeman, Rt. Hon. Roger Norman (Kettering)
French, Douglas Charles (Gloucester)
Fry, Sir Peter Derek (Wellingborough)
Fyfe, Mrs. Maria (Glasgow, Maryhill)

G

Galbraith, Samuel Laird (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Gallie, Philip Roy (Ayr)
Galloway, George (Glasgow, Hillhead)
Gapes, Michael John (Ilford, South)
Gardiner, Sir George Arthur (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, William Armand Thomas Tristan (Watford)
Garnier, Edward Henry (Harborough)
Garrett, John Laurence (Norwich, South)
George, Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)
Gerrard, Neil Francis (Walthamstow)
Gilbert, Rt. Hon. John William (Dudley, East)
Gill, Christopher John Fred RD (Ludlow)
Gillan, Mrs. Cheryl Elise Kendall (Chesham and Amersham)
Godman, Norman Anthony (Greenock and Port Glasgow)
Godsiff, Roger Duncan (Birmingham, Small Heath)
Golding, Mrs. Llinos (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Goodlad, Alastair Robertson (Eddisbury)
Goodson-Wickes, Dr. Charles (Wimbledon)
Gordon, Mrs. Mildred (Bow and Poplar)
Gorman, Mrs. Theresa Ellen (Billericay)
Gorst, Sir John Michael (Hendon, North)
Gould, Bryan Charles (Dagenham) *[resigned, May 1994]*
Graham, Thomas (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde)
Grant, Bernard Alexander Montgomery (Tottenham)
Grant, Sir John Anthony (South-West Cambridgeshire)
Greenway, Harry (Ealing, North)
Greenway, John Robert (Ryedale)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh, South)
Griffiths, Peter Harry Steve (Portsmouth, North)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grocott, Bruce Joseph (The Wrekin)
Grylls, Sir William Michael John (North-West Surrey)
Gummer, Rt. Hon. John Selwyn (Suffolk, Coastal)
Gunnell, John (Leeds, South and Morley)

H

Hague, William Jefferson (Richmond, Yorks)
Hain, Peter Gerald (Neath)
Hall, Mike Thomas (Warrington, South)
Hamilton, Rt. Hon. Sir Archibald Gavin (Epsom and Ewell)
Hamilton, Mostyn Neil (Tatton)
Hampson, Keith (Leeds, North-West)
Hanley, Rt. Hon. Jeremy James (Richmond and Barnes)
Hannam, [illegible]n Gordon (Exeter)
Hanson, [illegible]vid George (Delyn)
Hardy, Peter (Wentworth)
Hargreaves, Andrew Raikes (Birmingham, Hall Green)
Harman, Ms Harriet Ruth (Peckham)
Harris, David Anthony (St. Ives)
Harvey, Nick (North Devon)
Haselhurst, Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Hattersley, Rt. Hon. Roy Sydney George (Birmingham, Sparkbrook)
Hawkins, John Nicholas (Blackpool, South)
Hawksley, Philip Warren (Halesowen and Stourbridge)
Hayes, Jeremy Joseph James (Harlow)
Heald, Oliver (North Hertfordshire)
Heath, Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Richard George MBE (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Heathcoat-Amory, David Philip (Wells)
Henderson, Douglas John (Newcastle upon Tyne, North)
Hendron, Dr. Joseph Gerard (Belfast, West)
Hendry, Charles (High Peak)
Heppell, John (Nottingham, East)
Heseltine, Rt. Hon. Michael Ray Dibdin (Henley)
Hicks, Robert Adrian (South-East Cornwall)
Higgins, Rt. Hon. Sir Terence Langley (Worthing)
Hill, Trevor Keith (Streatham)
Hill, Stanley James Allen (Southampton, Test)
Hinchliffe, David Martin (Wakefield)
Hodge, Margaret Eve (Barking) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Hoey, Catharine Letitia (Vauxhall)
Hogg, Rt. Hon. Douglas Martin QC (Grantham)
Hogg, Norman (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Home Robertson, John David (East Lothian)
Hood, James (Clydesdale)
Hoon, Geoffrey William (Ashfield)
Horam, John Rhodes (Orpington)
Hordern, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Maudslay (Horsham)
Howard, Rt. Hon. Michael QC (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Alan Thomas CBE (Stratford-on-Avon)
Howarth, George Edward (Knowsley, North)
Howell, Rt. Hon. David Arthur Russell (Guildford)
Howell, Sir Ralph Frederic (North Norfolk)
Howells, Dr. Kim Scott (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Eric Douglas Harvey (Warrington, North)
Hughes, Kevin Michael (Doncaster, North)
Hughes, Robert Gurth (Harrow, West)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen, North)
Hughes, Royston John (Newport, East)
Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark and Bermondsey)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunt, Rt. Hon. David James Fletcher MBE (Wirral, West)
Hunt, Sir John Leonard (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurd, Rt. Hon. Douglas Richard CBE (Witney)
Hutton, John Matthew Patrick (Barrow and Furness)

I

Illsley, Eric Evelyn (Barnsley, Central)
Ingram, Adam Paterson (East Kilbride)

J

Jack, John Michael (Fylde)
Jackson, Glenda May (Hampstead and Highgate)

Jackson, Helen Margaret (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Jamieson, David Charles (Plymouth, Devonport)
Janner, Hon. Greville Ewan QC (Leicester, West)
Jenkin, Bernard Christison (Colchester, North)
Jessel, Toby Francis Henry (Twickenham)
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey (Wealden)
Johnston, Sir David Russell (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber)
Jones, Gwilym Hadyn (Cardiff, North)
Jones, Ieuan Wyn (Ynys Môn)
Jones, Jonathan Owen (Cardiff, Central)
Jones, Lynne Mary (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
Jones, Martyn David (Clwyd, South-West)
Jones, Nigel David (Cheltenham)
Jones, Robert Brannock (West Hertfordshire)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
Jopling, Rt. Hon. Thomas Michael (Westmorland and Lonsdale)
Jowell, Tessa Jane Helen Douglas (Dulwich)

K

Kaufman, Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Keen, David Alan (Feltham and Heston)
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Mary Elaine (Lancaster)
Kennedy, Charles Peter (Ross, Cromarty and Skye)
Kennedy, Jane Elizabeth (Liverpool, Broadgreen)
Key, Simon Robert (Salisbury)
Khabra, Piara Singh (Ealing, Southall)
Kilfedder, Sir James Alexander (North Down)
Kilfoyle, Peter (Liverpool, Walton)
King, Rt. Hon. Thomas Jeremy CH (Bridgwater)
Kinnock, Rt. Hon. Neil Gordon (Islwyn)
Kirkhope, Timothy John Robert (Leeds, North-East)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnstone (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knapman, Roger Maurice (Stroud)
Knight, Mrs. Angela Ann (Erewash)
Knight, Gregory (Derby, North)
Knight, Dame Joan Christabel Jill DBE (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Knox, Sir David Laidlaw (Staffordshire, Moorlands)
Kynoch, George Alexander Bryson (Kincardine and Deeside)

L

Lait, Mrs. Jacqueline Anne Harkness (Hastings and Rye)
Lamont, Rt. Hon. Norman Stewart Hughson (Kingston upon Thames)
Lang, Rt. Hon. Ian Bruce (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Lawrence, Sir Ivan John QC (Burton)
Legg, Barry Charles (Milton Keynes, South-West)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough and Horncastle)
Leighton, Ronald (Newham, North-East) *[died, March 1994]*
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark Alexander (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Lester, James Theodore (Broxtowe)
Lestor, Miss Joan (Eccles)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Liddell, Mrs. Helen (Monklands, East) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Lidington, David Roy (Aylesbury)
Lightbown, David Lincoln (South-East Staffordshire)
Lilley, Rt. Hon. Peter Bruce (St. Albans)
Litherland, Robert Kenneth (Manchester, Central)
Livingstone, Kenneth Robert (Brent, East)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Stretford)
Lloyd, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Robert Cable (Fareham)
Llwyd, Elfyn (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey (Pontefract and Castleford)
Lord, Michael Nicholson (Central Suffolk)
Loyden, Edward (Liverpool, Garston)
Luff, Peter James (Worcester)
Lyell, Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Walter QC (Mid-Bedfordshire)
Lynne, Elizabeth (Rochdale)

M

McAllion, John (Dundee, East)
McAvoy, Thomas (Glasgow, Rutherglen)
McCartney, Ian (Makerfield)
McCrea, Rev. Robert Thomas William (Mid-Ulster)
MacDonald, Calum Alasdair (Western Isles)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
McGrady, Edward Kevin (South Down)
MacGregor, Rt. Hon. John Roddick Russell OBE (South Norfolk)
MacKay, Andrew James (East Berkshire)
McKelvey, William (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Mackinlay, Andrew Stuart (Thurrock)
Maclean, David John (Penrith and The Border)
McLeish, Henry Baird (Fife, Central)
Maclennan, Robert Adam Ross (Caithness and Sutherland)
McLoughlin, Patrick Allen (West Derbyshire)
McMaster, Gordon (Paisley, South)
MacNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick Michael Ernest David (New Forest)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Kingston upon Hull, North)
MacShane, Denis (Rotherham) *[By-election, May 1994]*
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Madden, Maxwell Francis (Bradford, West)
Maddock, Mrs. Diana (Christchurch) *[By-election, July 1993]*
Madel, Sir William David (South-West Bedfordshire)
Maginnis, Kenneth (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Mahon, Mrs. Alice (Halifax)
Maitland, Olga Helen (Sutton and Cheam)
Major, Rt. Hon. John (Huntingdon)
Mallon, Seamus (Newry and Armagh)
Malone, Peter Gerald (Winchester)
Mandelson, Peter Benjamin (Hartlepool)
Mans, Keith Douglas Rowland (Wyre)
Marek, Dr. John (Wrexham)
Marland, Paul (West Gloucestershire)
Marlow, Antony Rivers (Northampton, North)
Marshall, David (Glasgow, Shettleston)
Marshall, James (Leicester, South)
Marshall, John Leslie (Hendon, South)
Marshall, Sir Robert Michael (Arundel)
Martin, David John Pattison (Portsmouth, South)

Martin, Michael John (Glasgow, Springburn)
Martlew, Eric Anthony (Carlisle)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Mawhinney, Rt. Hon. Brian Stanley (Peterborough)
Maxton, John Alston (Glasgow, Cathcart)
Mayhew, Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Barnabas Burke QC (Tunbridge Wells)
Meacher, Michael Hugh (Oldham, West)
Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mellor, Rt. Hon. David John QC (Putney)
Merchant, Piers Rolf Garfield (Beckenham)
Michael, Alun Edward (Cardiff, South and Penarth)
Michie, Mrs. Janet Ray (Argyll and Bute)
Michie, William (Sheffield, Heeley)
Milburn, Alan (Darlington)
Miller, Andrew Peter (Ellesmere Port and Neston)
Milligan, Stephen David Wyatt (Eastleigh) *[died, February 1994]*
Mills, Iain Campbell (Meriden)
Mitchell, Andrew John Bower (Gedling)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Mitchell, Sir David Bower (North-West Hampshire)
Moate, Sir Roger Denis (Faversham)
Molyneaux, Rt. Hon. James Henry (Lagan Valley)
Monro, Sir Hector Seymour Peter AE (Dumfries)
Montgomery, Sir William Fergus (Altrincham and Sale)
Moonie, Dr. Lewis George (Kirkcaldy)
Morgan, Hywel Rhodri (Cardiff, West)
Morley, Elliot Anthony (Glanford and Scunthorpe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Alfred (Manchester, Wythenshawe)
Morris, Estelle (Birmingham, Yardley)
Morris, Rt. Hon. John QC (Aberavon)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Michael Wolfgang Laurence (Northampton, South)
Moss, Malcolm Douglas (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie (Redcar)
Mudie, George Edward (Leeds, East)
Mullin, Christopher John (Sunderland, South)
Murphy, Paul Peter (Torfaen)

N

Needham, Rt. Hon. Richard Francis (North Wiltshire)
Nelson, Richard Anthony (Chichester)
Neubert, Sir Michael Jon (Romford)
Newton, Rt. Hon. Antony Harold OBE (Braintree)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
Nicholson, David John (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss Emma Harriet (Torridge and West Devon)
Norris, Steven John (Epping Forest)

O

Oakes, Rt. Hon. Gordon James (Halton)
O'Brien, Michael (North Warwickshire)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Hara, Edward (Knowsley, South)
Olner, William John (Nuneaton)
O'Neill, Martin John (Clackmannan)
Onslow, Rt. Hon. Sir Cranley Gordon Douglas (Woking)
Oppenheim, Phillip Anthony Charles Lawrence (Amber Valley)
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley (Salford, East)
Ottaway, Richard Geoffrey James (Croydon, South)

P

Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (Cambridge, South East)
Paisley, Rev. Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Parry, Robert (Liverpool, Riverside)
Patchett, Terry (Barnsley, East)
Patnick, Sir Cyril Irvine (Sheffield, Hallam)
Patten, Rt. Hon. John Haggitt Charles (Oxford, West and Abingdon)
Pattie, Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Edwin (Chertsey and Walton)
Pawsey, James Francis (Rugby and Kenilworth)
Peacock, Mrs. Elizabeth Joan (Batley and Spen)
Pearson, Ian (Dudley, West)
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Pickles, Eric Jack (Brentwood and Ongar)
Pickthall, Colin (West Lancashire)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Pope, Greg James (Hyndburn)
Porter, David John (Waveney)
Porter, George Barrington (Wirral, South)
Portillo, Michael Denzil Xavier (Enfield, Southgate)
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Powell, William Rhys (Corby)
Prentice, Mrs. Bridget Theresa (Lewisham, East)
Prentice, Gordon (Pendle)
Prescott, Rt. Hon. John Leslie (Kingston upon Hull, East)
Primarolo, Ms Dawn (Bristol, South)
Purchase, Kenneth (Wolverhampton, North East)

Q

Quin, Ms Joyce Gwendolen (Gateshead, East)

R

Radice, Giles Heneage (North Durham)
Randall, Stuart Jeffrey (Kingston upon Hull, West)
Rathbone, John Rankin (Lewes)
Raynsford, Wyvill Richard Nicolls (Greenwich)
Redmond, Martin (Don Valley)
Redwood, Rt. Hon. John Alan (Wokingham)
Reid, John (Motherwell, North)
Rendel, David Digby (Newbury) *[By-election, May 1993]*
Renton, Rt. Hon. Ronald Timothy (Mid-Sussex)
Richards, Roderick (Clwyd, North-West)
Richardson, Miss Josephine (Barking) *[died, February 1994]*
Riddick, Graham Edward Galloway (Colne Valley)
Rifkind, Rt. Hon. Malcolm Leslie QC (Edinburgh, Pentlands)
Robathan, Andrew Robert George (Blaby)
Roberts, Rt. Hon. Sir Ieuan Wyn Pritchard (Conwy)
Robertson, George Islay Macneill (Hamilton)
Robertson, Raymond Scott (Aberdeen, South)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Mark Noel Foster (Somerton and Frome)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)

Roche, Barbara Maureen (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Roe, Mrs. Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)
Rogers, Allan Ralph (Rhondda)
Rooker, Jeffrey William (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Rooney, Terence Henry (Bradford, North)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Ross, William (East Londonderry)
Rowe, Andrew John Bernard (Mid-Kent)
Rowlands, Edward (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Ruddock, Ms Joan Mary (Lewisham, Deptford)
Rumbold, Rt. Hon. Dame Angela Claire Rosemary CBE (Mitcham and Morden)
Ryder, Rt. Hon. Richard Andrew OBE (Mid-Norfolk)

S

Sackville, Hon. Thomas Geoffrey (Bolton, West)
Sainsbury, Rt. Hon. Sir Timothy Alan Davan (Hove)
Salmond, Alexander Elliott Anderson (Banff and Buchan)
Scott, Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Paul MBE (Chelsea)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Shaw, David Lawrence (Dover)
Shaw, Sir John Giles Dunkerley (Pudsey)
Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
Sheldon, Rt. Hon. Robert Edward (Ashton under Lyne)
Shephard, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Gillian Patricia (South-West Norfolk)
Shepherd, Colin Ryley (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Shersby, Julian Michael (Uxbridge)
Shore, Rt. Hon. Peter David (Bethnal Green and Stepney)
Short, Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Simpson, Alan (Nottingham, South)
Sims, Roger Edward (Chislehurst)
Skeet, Sir Trevor Herbert Harry (North Bedfordshire)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Christopher Robert (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Sir Dudley Gordon (Warwick and Leamington)
Smith, Rt. Hon. John QC (Monklands, East) *[died, May 1994]*
Smith, Llewellyn (Blaenau Gwent)
Smith, Timothy John (Beaconsfield)
Smyth, Rev. William Martin (Belfast, South)
Snape, Peter Charles (West Bromwich, East)
Soames, Hon. Arthur Nicholas Winston (Crawley)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Hammersmith)
Spearing, Nigel John (Newham, South)
Speed, Sir Herbert Keith (Ashford)
Spellar, John Francis (Warley, West)
Spencer, Sir Derek Harold (Brighton Pavilion)
Spicer, Sir James Wilton (West Dorset)
Spicer, William Michael Hardy (South Worcestershire)
Spink, Dr. Robert Michael (Castle Point)
Spring, Richard John Grenville (Bury St. Edmunds)
Sproat, Iain MacDonald (Harwich)
Squire, Mrs. Rachel Anne (Dumfermline, West)
Squire, Robin Clifford (Hornchurch)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Steel, Rt. Hon. Sir David Martin Scott (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Steen, Anthony David (South Hams)
Steinberg, Gerald Neil (City of Durham)
Stephen, Michael (Shoreham)
Stern, Michael Charles (Bristol, North-West)
Stevenson, George William (Stoke-on-Trent, South)
Stewart, John Allan (Eastwood)
Stott, Roger CBE (Wigan)
Strang, Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East)
Straw, John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Streeter, Gary Nicholas (Plymouth, Sutton)
Sumberg, David Anthony Gerald (Bury, South)
Sutcliffe, Gerald (Bradford, South) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Sweeney, Walter Edward (Vale of Glamorgan)
Sykes, John David (Scarborough)

T

Tapsell, Sir Peter Hannay Bailey (East Lindsey)
Taylor, Sir Edward Macmillan (Southend, East)
Taylor, Ian Colin MBE (Esher)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. John David (Strangford)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
Taylor, Matthew Owen John (Truro)
Taylor, Mrs. Winifred Ann (Dewsbury)
Temple-Morris, Peter (Leominster)
Thomason, Kenneth Roy (Bromsgrove)
Thompson, Sir Donald (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Hugh Patrick (Norwich, North)
Thompson, John (Wansbeck)
Thornton, Sir George Malcolm (Crosby)
Thurnham, Peter Giles (Bolton, North-East)
Timms, Stephen Cresswell (Newham, North-East) *[By-election, June 1994]*
Tipping, Simon Patrick (Sherwood)
Townend, John Ernest (Bridlington)
Townsend, Cyril David (Bexleyheath)
Tracey, Richard Patrick (Surbiton)
Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
Trend, Michael St. John (Windsor and Maidenhead)
Trimble, David (Upper Bann)
Trotter, Neville Guthrie (Tynemouth)
Turner, Dennis (Wolverhampton, South-East)
Twinn, Ian David (Edmonton)
Tyler, Paul Archer (North Cornwall)

V

Vaughan, Sir Gerard Folliott (Reading, East)
Vaz, Nigel Keith Anthony Standish (Leicester, East)
Viggers, Peter John (Gosport)

W

Waldegrave, Rt. Hon. William Arthur (Bristol, West)
Walden, George Gordon Harvey CMG (Buckingham)
Walker, Alfred Cecil (Belfast, North)
Walker, Rt. Hon. Sir Harold (Doncaster, Central)
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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 250**

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 1994-95

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 November 1994

The House met at twenty-seven minutes to Twelve o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went; and having returned:

The sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

2.30 pm

On resuming—

SESSIONAL ORDERS

ELECTIONS

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom to make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if anything shall come in question touching the Return or Election of any M, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw until their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That no Peer of the Realm, except a Peer of Ireland, hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be, by Bribery or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such Bribery or other corrupt practices.

WITNESSES

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

METROPOLITAN POLICE

Ordered,

That the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to the House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House, and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House, during the Sitting of Parliament and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Ordered,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by the Speaker; and that she do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as she shall appoint do presume to print the same.

OUTLAWRIES

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries; read the First time; to be read a Second time.

JOURNAL

Ordered,

That the Journal of this House, from the end of the last Session to the end of the present Session, with an index thereto, be printed.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by the appointment and under the direction of Donald William Limon Esq, CB, the Clerk of this House.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by such person as shall be licensed by the Speaker, and that no other person do presume to print the same.

Queen's Speech

Madam Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I look forward to receiving the State Visit of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait in May and His Excellency the President of Finland in October next year.

The Duke of Edinburgh and I look forward to our State Visit to South Africa in March. We also look forward to our visit to New Zealand and to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting there in November next year.

My Government attach the highest importance to national security. They will work to continue the process of NATO's adaptation to the changing security environment to allow it to play a wider role in protecting stability throughout Europe. At the Budapest summit in December they will seek to enhance the role of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in conflict prevention and resolution. They will also work for full implementation of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. The United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent will be maintained.

My Government will continue its efforts to promote a peaceful settlement in the former Yugoslavia.

Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains an important priority. My Government will work to promote the indefinite and unconditional extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; and will pursue energetically negotiations for a verifiable and comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

The fight against terrorism in the United Kingdom and elsewhere will be maintained.

My Government look forward to the enlargement of the European Union in January. They will work with our partners to give greater substance to the Europe agreements between the Union and countries of Central Europe, with the aim of preparing these countries for eventual membership of the Union.

My Government will work for early implementation of the Agreements concluding the GATT trade negotiations, and for early establishment of the World Trade Organisation.

They will seek to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is applied to European legislation. They will promote budgetary discipline in the Union and combat fraud. They will participate in the study group which from June 1995 will prepare for the 1996 Inter-Governmental conference.

My Government will continue to promote respect for human rights. They will maintain a substantial aid programme to promote sustainable development and good government.

The United Nations will celebrate its Fiftieth Anniversary in 1995. My Government will continue efforts to enhance the capabilities of the United Nations, particularly in peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy.

My Government will play an active part in tackling drug misuse, drug trafficking and organised crime at home and abroad.

Support for consolidation of a peaceful and stable democracy in South Africa will remain a priority.

My Government will continue to work for the long-term stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. They will seek to develop co-operation with China to implement the Sino-British Joint Declaration in the best interests of the Hong Kong people and a smooth transition in 1997.

Support for political and economic reform in the former Communist countries of Europe and Asia will continue.

My Government will maintain support for the Middle East Peace Process.

They will work for yet stronger ties with the countries of the Asia Pacific region.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

Legislation will be introduced to give force to the changes in the European Community's system of own resources following the agreement at the Edinburgh European Council.

My Government will continue with firm financial policies designed to support continuing economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation.

Fiscal policy will continue to be set to bring the budget deficit back towards balance over the medium term. My Government will reduce the share of national income taken by the public sector.

My Government will continue to promote enterprise, to improve the working of the labour market, and to strengthen the supply performance of the economy. They will bring forward legislation to promote increased competition in the gas industry and to reform the agricultural tenancy laws in England and Wales. A Bill will be introduced to create a Jobseeker's Allowance, reforming benefits for unemployed people and giving them better help into work.

Legislation will be introduced to equalise the State pension age between men and women and to improve security, equality and choice in non-state pensions.

My Government will continue to implement policies and programmes responsive to the needs of the individual citizen, in line with the principles of the Citizen's Charter.

They will introduce a Bill to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

My Government will bring forward legislation to make further improvements to the management of the National Health Service; and to provide for people with a serious mental disorder discharged from hospital to be cared for under supervision.

Legislation will be introduced to transfer the Crown Agents and the commercial activities of the Atomic Energy Authority to the private sector; and to authorise the construction and operation by the private sector of a high speed rail link between London and the Channel Tunnel.

The delivery of environment policies will be strengthened by legislation to establish environment agencies for England and Wales, and for Scotland.

Legislation will be introduced to reform the Scottish Criminal Justice system.

In Northern Ireland my Government will build on the progress already made to secure peace and a comprehensive political accommodation founded on the principles of democracy and consent. They will uphold law and order and strive to strengthen the economy and create equality of opportunity for all sections of the community. They will seek to maintain close and constructive relations with the Republic of Ireland.

My Government will promote further measures of law reform.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

Madam Speaker: Before I call the mover of the Loyal Address, I must inform the House of the proposed pattern of debate for the Address.

Thursday 17 November—foreign affairs and defence; Friday 18 November—home affairs and environment; Monday 21 November—industry and education; Tuesday 22 November—health and social security; Wednesday 23 November—the economy.

2.35 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

First, may I thank you, Madam Speaker, for calling me early in this debate.

I am conscious of the great honour given to me, my family and my constituency on being asked to move the Loyal Address. It is to my constituency of Dartford that the honour most surely and rightly belongs, as I have been returned as its Member in four successive general elections—at each election, the Conservative vote has been significantly higher than the time before. I note with real humility that, earlier this year, I became the longest continuous serving Member of Parliament that Dartford has had this century.

My record of service to date cannot compete with that of a predecessor, Sir William Hart-Dyke, who, like me, served as an Education Minister but was Conservative Member for Dartford from 1865 to 1906—a period of 41 years. I must tell the House that it is my firm resolve to sit here longer than Sir William.

The constituency, which is triangular, is a perfect blend of town and country. It is about five miles across and eight miles from the River Thames in the north to the apex of the triangle in the middle of the Brands Hatch racing circuit in the south. The House also knows that the Thames provides another service; it separates Kent from Essex.

The constituency comprises the borough of Dartford and the three northern parishes of the Sevenoaks district council—Horton Kirby and South Darenth, Hartley and Fawkham and Ash-cum-Ridley; names that are known to every hon. Member.

For decades, Dartford has made a significant contribution to the social, economic and political history of our region and our country. Given its location near to London, the channel ports, the A2, A20 and M25, Dartford stands ready to seize the opportunities that have been created by the announcement of the Thames gateway project; the proposed relocation of the campus of the university of Greenwich on Dartford north marshes; and the recent go-ahead for the construction of an intermediate station at Ebbsfleet on the channel tunnel rail link. Dartford faces a dynamic and exciting future for jobs and for learning. I am glad to have assisted in the creation of that future.

In 1992, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) seconded the Loyal Address with a witty and noteworthy speech in which, unknowingly perhaps, he gave the definitive description of the qualities necessary for the Members selected to propose and second the Address. In 1992, my hon. Friend told us that he had been advised by a "distinguished and senior member" of our party that

"The motion is nearly always proposed by some genial old codger on the way out and seconded by an oily young man".—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. 56.]

Well, there we have it. The House may remember with some kindness that I was not always a genial old codger on the way out, but that I was once an oily young man.

Indeed, on 4 November 1981, I was asked to second the motion on the Loyal Address. I made inquiries then, which showed that—since 1885, at any rate—I was the first Member of Parliament from Dartford to second the motion. By the same token, I am the first Member of Parliament for Dartford to propose it—thus becoming, in my own lifetime, a legend in joining the select band of Members—such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) and Lord Rippon of Hexham—who have completed the double since 1945.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He is a retread.

Mr. Dunn: I heard a pip squeak.

Thirteen years have elapsed since I seconded the motion on the Queen's speech. The House will remember that, in 1983, I became Minister for Schools, and that in 1988 I stopped—or, rather, was stopped from—holding that post. I was ever conscious of the advice given to me after my return to the Back Benches: "Be sure that the going up is worth the coming down." I also received a second bit of advice: "You can warm your socks in the oven, but that does not make them biscuits." At the time, I did not understand the significance of that advice, but I now see clearly that it applies to the Labour party.

During my time as Minister for Schools, I was delighted to serve under two outstanding Secretaries of State—Lord Joseph, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley. I am able to say that I helped to shape crucial and radical education legislation in the 1980s. I helped to enact the Education Reform Bill of 1988; I contributed to the abolition of the Greater London council; and I myself terminated the wretched existence of the Inner London education authority.

During my time in the House, I have battled with education spokesmen for the official Opposition. The first was a grammar school boy, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). The second was a public school boy, a Wykehamist—the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice). The third was the product of a direct grant school, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw); and the fourth had been head girl in a direct-grant school—the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). It was a matter of supreme irony to me, a secondary modern school boy, that I spent my time defending opportunities in an educational system which those spokesmen seek to destroy, but which had given them the best advantage.

Those people do not like to be reminded of that advantage now—in rather the same way, I suspect, as all references to links between the Labour party and Mr. Clinton are being quietly dropped. Indeed, before I came into the Chamber, rumours were spreading that the Leader of the Opposition was now looking for a new role model,

and had decided to base himself on Ramsay Macdonald; and that the deputy leader of the Opposition had decided to base himself on himself.

The Queen's Speech referred to legislation that will authorise the construction and operation by the private sector of a high-speed rail link between London and the channel tunnel. I welcome that legislation, because it makes Ebbsfleet and all the economic benefits associated with it a closer reality. It will also provide, through parliamentary procedure, local authorities, institutions and, above all, the people of Kent with the opportunity to give Parliament—in the form of petitions—their views on the impact of the rail link as it affects them and their communities.

The Queen's Speech also refers to the environment. It says:

"The delivery of environment policies will be strengthened by legislation to establish environment agencies for England and Wales, and for Scotland."

I welcome that with all its implications for the environment and the National Rivers Authority.

The Queen's Speech also refers to the Government's determination to secure peace in Northern Ireland. We should all give the Prime Minister our thanks, and wish him the best of luck in the great work that he is about.

Other recollections and incidents have gone through my mind while preparing this speech. I remember asking a Liberal Member who is no longer in the House—he was so dim that even the other Liberals noticed—how the Liberals could provide accurate voting intentions within a few days of the start of a by-election campaign. I was congratulating him on his party's efficiency. "Bless you," he said, "We simply think of a figure that seems reasonable and publish it." He moved off, laughing.

Recently, my wife was approached outside church by a constituent who said, "Mrs. Dunn, I am not political, but when I see Tony Blair smile I know what it must have been like to be Red Riding Hood."

I recall speaking with colleagues who agreed that the children of Members of Parliament enjoy stories with a political flavour. There is the one about the time the Labour party stole granny's Christmas bonus, which was followed by a second story the next year.

If the House is sitting quietly, I shall begin my favourite story. Once upon a time, an elderly couple lived out on the windswept moors of Holland Park. They considered themselves to be poor, or at least to identify with the poor. During the day, they spent long hours raising food parcels for needy folk such as Ken Follett, Maureen Lipman, Lady Antonia Pinter and Melvyn Bragg.

One evening, the old man noticed that his wife was crying. He said, "What's the matter, my dear? Is an issue bothering you?" "No," she said, in a strange overseas accent—she came from a distant village over the water—"I'm starving." The old man thought deeply, and then he rang the bell. A footman came in, and the old man ordered bread and butter for his wife. When the old lady had finished eating, they got into their limousine and drove away to the inherited family mansion in Essex, talking happily about the virtues of socialism and the benefits of self-sufficiency.

The moral of the tale is that those who preach the virtues of socialism rarely practise it. For them, self-sufficiency is inherited wealth, marrying inherited wealth, which is not the same as creating wealth. For us on the Conservative Benches, self-sufficiency is sturdy independence and people taking decisions about their lives for themselves. For us, the state is the servant of the people, not the people the servant of the state.

I believe that new and improved cannot beat tried and true. I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

2.48 pm

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): It is a tremendous honour for me to second the motion. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us have some order in the Chamber.

Mr. Robertson: It is an honour for me to second the motion moved so wittily and eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). However, the honour belongs not to me but to my constituents in Aberdeen, South. My constituency is a diverse one, of many contrasts. It has captured the old, and blended it uniquely with the new. It can boast of a magnificent past and look forward with real anticipation to a bright and formidable future.

When I arrived in the House in 1992, I knew well that most new hon. Members are haunted by ghosts of their predecessors, wary of tales of fine speeches made and great battles won. Unlike others, however, I arrived not just to be haunted by ghosts of Members of Parliament from Aberdeen, South past, but to be plagued by their reincarnations.

Those range from the loquacious number cruncher who leads for the Opposition on social security, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), to my smooth, urbane, cricket-loving hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat) and, finally, to my modest, self-effacing—that is what he told me to say—hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Malone), about whom I should not be too rude, as it has often been said to me that greater love hath no man than this—that he loses his seat so that his friend can win it back. I am delighted, however, to inform the House that membership of that unique band is closed, as I intend to remain its newest recruit for a long time.

Earlier this year, when on by-election duty in Monklands, East, my Lanarkshire past caught up with me in a rather vivid way. When canvassing a particular door, I was delighted to recognise a name from my school days—that of a former schoolteacher of mine. When he answered, he looked surprisingly delighted to see me for someone from Airdrie, as the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) will agree.

Before I could tell him what a splendid candidate we had, he said, "Ah, Raymond, I was just thinking of you." My chest puffed with pride. "I have just retired," he went on," and I was counting up the number of ex-pupils of mine who have made it on to the front page of the newspaper." My chest puffed up even more. I thought I must be in some select band. "Do you know that it comes to 12?" he said. "Really," I said, a bit taken aback. "Yes," he said. "Two ministers of the Church of Scotland, one Member of Parliament and nine murderers." I am glad to tell the House, however, that the murder rate has been decreasing recently, and that it is down 15 per cent. in Scotland alone.

[Mr. Robertson]

When I was asked last week by my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip to second the motion, I readily agreed, and then stopped and wondered why. Was it because, as the hon. Member for the most northerly Conservative seat in the country, who probably has the furthest to travel from his constituency to the House, he thought to make my journey today a bit more worth while by asking me to do something useful while I was down? Or was it because, as a Scottish Member attached to the Northern Ireland Office who works four days a week in England and who regularly attends Welsh Questions, I am somehow seen as the very embodiment of this United Kingdom Parliament?

Or could it possibly be that, halfway through the life of this Parliament, it is a timely reminder that, halfway through the previous Parliament, no one gave very much for the Conservative party's chances in the election that was to come? Certainly no one thought that we would increase our representation in Scotland and win seats from Labour. In Aberdeen, South, however, we did just that. Let me assure the House that what we did in Aberdeen, South last time will be repeated throughout the country next time.

My constituency covers the southern half of the great granite city, stretching from the West End communities of Holburn, Hazelhead and Rubieslaw, through Rosemount and Ferryhill and the buoyant international harbour, over the River Dee to Torry and Nigg, and beyond that to the North sea. It also takes in the beach and Pittodrie stadium, the home of Aberdeen football club. I can safely assure my hon. Friends that that club is the only team that plays in red that I support. My hon. Friends will not be surprised to learn, however, that, like other teams of that particular hue, they are dangerously close to the relegation zone and have had a run of bad defeats.

In Aberdeen, there is much talk of changing the manager. When asked, my advice to the director of the club was to watch out. History shows that, when red teams in trouble change manager, it definitely helps and all seems well—for a month or two. Then the inherent problems resurface, the same ones that proved fatal to old regime. Own goals start to be scored again. The left wing resumes its domination when instructions shouted from the manager's dugout are ignored. The midfield collapses under the strain. Added to that, it now seems that someone, somewhere, is always prepared to throw the game. I believe, however, that Aberdeen football club will recover and avoid relegation. Who knows—it might even go on to win the cup. But I cannot say the same for Opposition Members who wear the red jerseys.

My constituents welcome the Gracious Speech, particularly the commitment to deregulate this country's gas market. Although, sadly, Aberdeen has seen the demise of some of its traditional industries such as shipbuilding, and a decline of others such as deep sea fishing, it has at the same time not been frightened to reach out and embrace new challenges, the most notable being oil, gas and their service industries.

Aberdeen's current wealth and prosperity is based very much on the oil and gas industry, a prosperity which goes beyond the city boundaries, as a regional unemployment rate of only 5 per cent.—and falling—graphically illustrates. The rapid expansion of that sector has brought tremendous benefits to the city and its people.

Deregulation of the gas market will help the rest of the United Kingdom to enjoy further the benefits of our oil and gas industry. The United Kingdom has become one of the world's biggest producers and leaders in such technology. One major oil company based in my constituency estimated that that measure alone will reduce gas bills to industry and to the individual household consumer by between 2 per cent. and 8 per cent. That is another example of the benefits to the whole country from the successful exploitation of our precious natural resource, the North sea, which we in Aberdeen have been pioneering for some 25 years.

My constituents also welcome the measure outlined for a Criminal Justice Bill for Scotland. Although—almost uniquely in Europe—crime figures have been falling in Scotland, and now in England, too, there is no room for complacency, and more needs to be done to support our eight Scottish police forces. The Bill will provide that vital support.

As my constituency has a large retired population, it will come as no surprise to the House that the measure intended to safeguard occupational pensions is greatly welcomed in Aberdeen, South, given the many experiences there of Maxwell pensioners. We must ensure that never again can pension funds be stolen and abused for personal profit by another Robert Maxwell seeking to plunder a lifetime's investment and to destroy what for many is their security for retirement.

Although it was not directly mentioned in the Gracious Speech, I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland intends to introduce a Children Bill. My constituents will welcome that, as I do. They will join me in hoping that the new parliamentary procedures agreed in the past Session will be put to use to put that important measure on to the statute book.

The use of those procedures will show that Parliament can be truly sensitive to the differing needs, and flexible to the differing priorities, of the constituent parts of the kingdom. But while there remains one sovereign Parliament, there is more than one way in which to pass legislation. It also shows that Conservative Members are not frightened of constitutional change. But to any such proposed change, we will always supply one fundamental, non-negotiable criterion—does it strengthen or does it weaken the union between Scotland and the rest of the kingdom? Any proposed change that strengthens the union will have our total support. But if any change weakens the union, we will oppose it absolutely, and fight it to the end.

That is why we oppose the constitutional plans of Labour, the Liberals and the nationalists, who in their own way seek first to weaken then destroy the historic union, which in the first decade of the next century will celebrate its 300th anniversary.

My constituents sent me here in 1992, above all else as a vote of confidence in that union; to support that union and to fight for it. That is why they join me in supporting the Gracious Speech, delivered to this the sovereign Parliament of Scotland, of Northern Ireland, of Wales and of England. I have no hesitation in commending it to the House.

2.59 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): As Members may know, my right hon. Friend the Opposition Chief Whip was

taken ill this morning, and before beginning my speech I am pleased to tell the House that his condition is described by the hospital as stable, and not a cause for alarm. I know that we all wish him and Anne well, and we also wish him a speedy return.

It is the custom of the House that the Leader of the Opposition has the pleasant duty of congratulating the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address, and I am delighted to do so. The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) gave a somewhat unusually combative proposal of the Loyal Address, and at some points I was not entirely sure whether he was moving the Loyal Address or giving an after-dinner speech to his local Conservative association.

Nevertheless, I hope that I shall not do the hon. Gentleman irrevocable damage if I disclose to the House that, as he will know, I have personal reasons for being extremely grateful to him. When he was an Education Minister, although he may have done many things wrong, he did one thing right: he reversed the planned closure of a vital special needs school in my constituency of Sedgefield, despite the fact that the education experts wanted it closed.

At the time, I thought that that was merely a one-off act of compassion on the hon. Gentleman's part, but last year in the House he threw greater light on his decision, when he said that the last thing any Minister should sensibly do is to listen to the educational world for advice. The only advice he could give was to listen to what they say and "then do the opposite". Given such an attitude, the only surprise is that the hon. Gentleman never made it to the Cabinet. However, I wish him well most sincerely.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) seconded the motion with great flair, humour and wit, and said that he had the dubious pleasure of being in a House containing no fewer than three other Members who at one time had represented his constituency but had then lost it, only to win again somewhere else. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will understand if I say that, given the size of his majority, I hope that at the next election he will be able to satisfy at least half the requirements of that elite club. Both speeches, the proposing and the seconding of the Loyal Address, were able. I congratulate both hon. Gentlemen.

It is also the custom at this time to review one or two personal events for the House over the past year, and I hope that I shall be forgiven for saying that the past year has been marked by deep sorrow for my party. Twelve months ago, John Smith gave the kind of spirited, witty and principled speech that earned him respect across the Chamber and throughout the nation. I believe that we united across party lines then, and that we still do so now, in his memory.

I pay particular tribute to the life and work of Jo Richardson, who, despite immense physical pain, never wavered in her tireless work for her constituents and for the cause of women everywhere. To those two names must be added the sad loss of colleagues on both sides of the House—James Boyce, Stephen Milligan, Ron Leighton, Bob Cryer and John Blackburn, all of whom served their constituents and their country with dedication, and will be sorely missed.

Parts of the Queen's Speech we welcome. Thanks to the efforts of the British and Irish Governments and the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, there is room for cautious optimism about the future of the Province—more room than at any time, certainly in my generation. The Opposition will continue to support the peace process and to play our part in building a future of conciliation and prosperity. Her Majesty's Opposition exist not only to oppose Her Majesty's Government, and we shall be pleased to continue to support the Government in the peace process. Indeed, we shall take an active part in next month's conference on the economy of Northern Ireland.

We also rejoice at the defeat of apartheid and the return of South Africa to the Commonwealth. The Opposition, at least, are proud of the part that we played in the battle against the evil of the old regime. I play particular tribute to the steadfast work of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), who has made such an outstanding contribution over the years.

We also welcome plans to expand the European Union, and look forward to the entry of new members from northern and eastern Europe, and we shall continue to make constructive suggestions for the reform and improvement of that Union and to press for the Government to regain our influence within Europe.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: In a moment, if I may.

On the detail of the Address, we have long urged legislation on the regulation of pensions, the establishment of an environmental protection agency, a new criminal cases review authority, and rights for disabled people. We shall, however, carefully scrutinise the detail of all those Bills.

The pensions regulations must be comprehensive and clear. We all know of the scandal of people cheated of their savings by unscrupulous advisers who abused poor regulation. Our people will not be satisfied unless there is proper protection for the hard-working majority who save for their retirement and who should have the absolute right to see the benefits in old age.

On the environment, we wish the new agency to be able to take action to protect our environment and to have proper powers of enforcement. I welcome the fact that, as I understand it, there will be legislation on the criminal cases review authority. The new system for investigating miscarriages of justice is long overdue. I very much hope that the method of investigation is independent and fair, and can be seen to be fair.

Disabled people across Britain were greatly angered by the Government's conduct during the passage of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. We welcome new legislation in the Queen's Speech, and we look forward to it being implemented properly.

Millions of people are desperate for changes in the Child Support Agency. Currently, the agency is a complete shambles, which is causing misery to tens of thousands of families. I very much hope that a radical reform of the agency is on the agenda in the coming year.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he supports the Bill on European own resources—yes or no?

Mr. Blair: I am coming to that very point in a moment. I will then answer the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw).

[Mr. Blair]

Taken as a whole, the Queen's Speech expresses the central quandary facing the Conservative party today: whether to praise Thatcherism or to bury it. Four years after the right hon. Lady's departure, the Conservatives still cannot decide. The result is the hallmark of this Government: dogma tempered only by dithering.

Nothing could make the point better than the debacle over Post Office privatisation. There are two extraordinary features of it. The first is not that 10 Tory rebels opposed it, but that 340 Tory Members, including the Prime Minister, supported it. One message at least is clear: "If you don't want the Post Office privatised, don't vote Tory at the next election."

The second extraordinary feature is the manner of decision-making; that is what is most extraordinary. One faction demands privatisation, so the deed is done; it is then the centrepiece of the Queen's Speech. Then another faction rebels, so the proposal is removed. Then the first faction mounts another rebellion, and Ministers fall over themselves to proclaim their sorrow and anguish at this omission from the Queen's Speech. Finally, the Government cast around for any hapless part of the public sector to privatise. Air traffic control is floated as a possibility, until even the genius of this Government's public relations understands that the notion of Group 4 being in charge of air traffic control is not an immediate vote-winner.

Ultimately, what do the Government privatise? They privatise the Atomic Energy Authority commercial services department. It is alighted on as a victim to be sold off. What does that tell us about this Government? It tells us that they are so riven by faction and buffeted from one day's headlines to the next that they cannot address the interests of the country, and that they are woefully out of touch with public opinion. The combination of those factors makes them incapable of delivering good government.

There should be a Bill about the Post Office in the Queen's Speech—not to privatise it, but to liberate it within the public sector. Such a Bill would pass with virtually unanimous support. Why is it not in the Queen's Speech? The reason is that, although the Government do not have the courage to privatise the Post Office, their dogma prevents them from adopting the only sensible alternative. The result is bad government.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): In reviewing my party's attitude to various issues, would the right hon. Gentleman also review his own party's attitude to clause 4, and whether his party really—[*Interruption.*] Does his party really intend to abolish it, or is it just the rhetoric that he opposes?

Mr. Blair: I did not hear the last part of the question, but I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Gentleman is so interested in clause 4. He will no doubt want to participate in the discussions on the matter in the months ahead.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): On the issue of factions, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he agrees with the 61 members of his own party who signed an early-day motion calling on a future Labour Government to scrap Trident? Does he agree with that—yes or no?

Mr. Blair: The position of the Labour leadership has been set out very clearly in the national executive statement at conference, and the hon. Gentleman can read it if he is interested.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Since the right hon. Gentleman commented a little earlier on praising or trying to bury Thatcherism, does he regret voting for the changes in trade union reform which the Government have taken through the House over the past 15 years? If he does, which of the trade union reforms that the Government brought in, despite opposition from the Labour party, would he seek to reverse as a Labour Prime Minister?

Mr. Blair: I have set out many times our position on trade union legislation, and I have said exactly what parts we will change and what parts we will not change. Since the hon. Gentleman intervened in my speech, perhaps he would answer this question. How did he stand at the previous election on the specific promise that he would not raise tax in this country, since he joined the Government in raising it straight after his election to the House?

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): In reference to the right hon. Gentleman's comments on the public sector, does he think it right that inefficiencies in public services should be tolerated at the taxpayers' expense if they lead to greater employment? Does he agree on that comment with his deputy leader? Will he tell the House if he disagrees?

Mr. Blair: I am surprised that, after a week in which it has been revealed that a private health institution in Scotland received £30 million of public money, the hon. Gentleman should ask us about the efficiency of public services.

Hon. Members: More, more.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point) *rose—*

Mr. Blair: I will have to press on, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Spink: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) that the minimum wage would cost tens of thousands of jobs in the country? Will he support the job seeker's allowance, which will help this Government to get the long-term unemployed back into work?

Mr. Blair: The hon. Gentleman should be aware of recent evidence, published in the United States, of precisely the opposite effect. Indeed, it is the case that setting a proper floor for wages is a sensible way in which to operate the labour market. Secondly, let me tell the hon. Gentleman that I think that many people in this country see this Government failing to take action in relation to those privatised utilities and the pay increases awarded to their chairmen and directors, and find it quite obnoxious that the Government oppose a decent living and wage for people at the bottom end of the income scale, but do nothing about the abuses at the top.

I was talking about the conduct of government. We see the same conduct not only in relation to the Post Office but in respect of the quite extraordinary furore which has been whipped up among the Tory party over Europe, with briefings and counter-briefings rolling around the press rooms of Britain today. So desperate are the Government to get their rebels into line that the chairman of the 1922 Committee has been dispatched to tell us that, if the Government are defeated on the Bill about own resources, or "even if there is any amendment to it", a general election will immediately ensue. *[Interruption.]* There is at least some support for that proposition from the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), but that may simply be because he is retiring.

It has surely come to something when a Government can secure the passage of their own legislative programme only by threatening their own demise. The Government might threaten a general election. I think we can be sure that they do not dare call one. However, what a way to run a party and a Government. That underlines the degree to which all those questions become a matter not of the nation's interest, but simply a ball played from one part of the Conservative party over to the other and back again.

I can tell Conservative Members that the country sees the gap between what the Conservative party today represents and what it wants a Government to do, and the country is appalled at how that gap ever widens. That shows that the politics of the 1980s has run its course. The concerns and needs of the British people have changed, and it is the Labour party that speaks for them.

The British people want an end to the laissez-faire economics and the boom and bust of the past 15 years. They want a new economic approach, based on partnership between the public and private sectors and between management and employees to invest in industry to make our performance more dynamic and to give business and families the stability to plan for the future.

The British people want strong public services, decent schools and well-run local hospitals, where pupils and patients, not bureaucrats, receive the resources. They do not want them to be sold off or broken up. They want poverty, inequality and mass unemployment to be attacked, not treated as of no consequence. They want safe communities liberated from violence, drugs and gangs of hooligans, where, in place of piecemeal initiatives, there is a comprehensive strategy—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I believe that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is not giving way at the moment. Is that correct?

Mr. Blair: I must make progress.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has indicated to me that he is not giving way at the moment.

Mr. Blair: The vast majority of people in this country want safe communities, and they do not believe that the Government are delivering them. Above all else, perhaps, they want to feel that their voice is heard and that political institutions work for them and not for the people in charge. They want real democracy, with power devolved downwards, not an ever-increasing centralised state.

The vast majority of people want to feel that they can trust their Government. The truth is that today no one believes a word that the Conservative party says—and no wonder. Let us consider tax, and the promises made at the last election. In March 1992, the Prime Minister said:

"I have made it clear, we have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT."

The former Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"We will not have to increase taxes. I cannot see any circumstances in which that will be necessary."

That was said weeks before the general election. They now say that they did not know how bad the economic situation was.

One might get away with that if one had been in power for 13 days. However, by the last election, the Government had been in power for 13 years. They knew the truth. Look at how many taxes the Conservatives have introduced. Let us consider the new Tory taxes and what they will mean for the average family: home insurance tax, car insurance tax, airport tax, petrol tax, VAT on fuel and cuts in the married couple's allowance and cuts in mortgage tax relief. In total this year, they mean £360 on top of the £500 a year that families are already paying extra in tax since the election; 7p on the standard rate of income tax; £860 for the average family. In the light of the gap between what they have promised and what they have done, is it any wonder to them the cynicism and disgust with which their record is viewed by the majority of British people?

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Government found it necessary to put up taxes in order to reduce borrowing, which was greater than anticipated. The right hon. Gentleman's party fought the election on putting up taxes not in order to produce sound finances, not in order to reduce borrowing, but in order to spend more money. That was why the right hon. Gentleman wanted to put up taxes. The right hon. Gentleman now tells us that he has changed his party's policy. Will he tell this House now that the policies of tax on which his party fought the election are wrong?

Mr. Blair: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what the difference is. We told the truth at the previous election. *[Interruption.]* I suppose that the Prime Minister will be relieved that, at least for once, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) has come in on the Government's side.

Mr. Heald: The right hon. Gentleman was asked whether he would support the European own resources Bill. He said that he would answer the question. He has not. Will he answer now?

Mr. Blair: We will judge that Bill in the light of the principles that we have set out. We have supported the settlement at the Edinburgh summit, but the hon. Gentleman knows that of course we have our differences with the Government over the social chapter. I can tell him, although I was going to deal with it later in my speech, that, in the light of the allegations about fraud and waste in the common agricultural policy, and in the light of the discrepancy between the position set out by the Chancellor last week and the figures given in some newspapers this morning, we will of course press the Government on all those issues.

[Mr. Blair]

Now let me ask the hon. Gentleman, or perhaps the Prime Minister, a question: is it the case that the chairman of the 1922 Committee was speaking on behalf of the Conservative party when he said that the own resources Bill would be treated not as an ordinary piece of legislation but as a motion of confidence in the Government? I have to tell them that, if that is how it is to be treated, life becomes much more difficult, not less difficult, for the Government. The hon. Gentleman will understand that.

I was about to deal with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's interview in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, which, as ever, is interesting to read. The right hon. and learned Gentleman described himself as "fairly panic-proof", which is a reassurance to us since he is in charge of the nation's finances. He went on to say that his policies

"have so far delivered very little to Mr. and Mrs. Smith up and down the country."

So far—they have been in power for 15 years; how much longer do they want before their policies deliver something? What they have delivered is an election programme secured on one basis, then broken with a series of record-breaking tax rises straight after the election.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No. I really must move on.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The right hon. Gentleman keeps giving way to interventions, then failing to answer them and returning to his speech. He was asked a moment ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston (Mr. Lamont) how he now reacted to his election promises of the last election to raise taxation in order to raise public spending. If he now criticises what we are doing, which of the tax increases that he has attacked would he reduce and which spending would he cut—in contrast to the tax increase promises on which he fought the last election?

Mr. Blair: Last week, we published a comprehensive set of tax reforms to close the tax abuses that the Government have allowed to go on. What is more, we set out the huge windfall profits that have been made by utility companies, and will be made on the sale of the national grid. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer wants to get spending down, there is one good way of doing it: get unemployment down, and let the unemployed get back to work.

The tax failure of the Government is in the end the product of their economic failure. The mismanagement of this country's economy over 15 years is a story of incompetence on an epic scale: the two worst recessions in living memory; bankruptcy and insecurity for millions of people; the decimation of large parts of the industrial base. With the boom-bust economics comes the inability to plan or invest for the future.

It is not even as if the living standards in our country had soared above those in other countries. The opposite is the case. According to the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures for average income compared with that in other countries, Britain is just above Finland—lower than Germany, France and Italy, to be sure, but lower now than Belgium, Iceland and many others.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No, I am sorry.

Of course, now the economy has reached a different point in the economic cycle. There is recovery and growth, and inflation is low. We welcome that. However, the question is not whether we are at a different point in the economic cycle. The question is whether this burst of growth will be different from the others that have preceded it. This time, the Government say, the long term will come first, which is precisely what they—noticeably the Prime Minister himself—said at the beginning of the 1980s and at the end of the 1980s.

What is the Government's over-arching priority now? What is the clamour throughout the Tory party for next year's Budget? It is for tax cuts, and the bigger the better. Whether they will be given or not will depend not on the state of the economy but on the state of the Tory party.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: The lesson of the past 15 years is that, unless we put the long term first, unless we have an economic policy that is stable and geared to the needs of the real economy, unless we strengthen our industrial base and make the investment in industry and people that we need, the reality is lower prosperity for all of us. Look even now: when we are barely out of recession, interest rates are raised. The chairman of the Conservative party promises that it will be the last such rise in interest rates. There are capacity constraints on output already. There are skill shortages—with 3 million unemployed—in parts of our economy.

Most galling of all, the Conservative Government uniquely had the one-off, God-given bonus of North sea oil, and squandered it. They had hundreds of billions of pounds' worth of North sea oil. On top of that, they had the privatisation proceeds. They were used not for investment but merely on current spending. What other country with all those resources would have had such a record of failure as the Conservative party has presided over?

If reports are true, there are new oil finds in the west of Shetland field. For heaven's sake, let us not squander that natural advantage as earlier natural advantages were squandered. Let for once the short-term interests of the Conservative party take second place to the long-term interests of the country.

The same prejudice has led the Government to ignore the danger signs of the tearing of the social fabric of our country. We are as a nation more divided and less equal than at any time this century. Millions of people live on benefit, in poverty and without hope for the future. Of course there is a social and moral case for tackling that inequality, but there is an economic case, too. In parts of our inner cities, a generation of young people grows up in a culture of low employment prospects, poor education

opportunities, family instability, drug abuse and crime. With no stake in society, it is hardly surprising when they show little responsibility towards it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: The Government have doubled dependency on welfare since 1979—the very Government who pledged to cut that dependency.

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) should not persist, as it must be obvious that the right hon. Gentleman will not give way.

Mr. Blair: After 15 years of Conservative government, tax and spending as a percentage of national income are up and not down. Why? Because we are paying the bills of failure. We are paying for the dole queues, poverty, low pay, homelessness and crime. The Government never learn that, the stronger and more united our society, the less we waste and the more we can invest. That is the difference.

Good public services are a part of that. A moment ago, the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) asked me about efficient public services. We should look at the national health service. We have been promised even more legislation now to improve

"the management of the National Health Service".

What has happened since the Queen's Speech 15 years ago, when the Conservatives said that they would do the same? Bureaucracy and administration are up £3 billion a year. There are 20,000 general and senior managers, compared with 500 a few years ago. Some £70 million has been spent on company cars.

This week, the true Tory philosophy on the health service was revealed by the chairman of an NHS trust—a serving Tory councillor He said that the duty of doctors is to the balance sheet of their managers, and not to the needs of their patients. We can thank him for his candour, but that is not the national health service that the British people want.

Of course, we need efficient management, but we do not have that. We have expensive management, which is swallowing millions of pounds, while many people are on waiting lists and are forced to wait in indignity and injured on trolleys in hospitals when they should be getting proper care.

This week, it was revealed that £30 million was put into the collapsed Health Care International. That must be added to the hundreds of millions of pounds spent on railway privatisation and the poll tax, and the hundreds of millions wasted on the national curriculum. The Government have wasted public money at every turn, and they have wasted it on dogma.

Last week, one Minister had to admit that he had lost £30 million of public money in four months, while another was found guilty of breaking the law and misusing £240 million in relations with countries overseas. A third—the Home Secretary, no less—was found to have acted unlawfully in respect of his own treatment of the victims of crime.

The tale of how those victims have been treated is a scandal of arrogant incompetence from first to last. The new tariff system of compensation is manifestly unfair, and it was rejected by all victims' groups. It has no support anywhere, and when the Government launched a consultation exercise about it, not a single representation was in favour of the Government's plans. They were warned that it was unlawful—they took not the slightest notice.

Meanwhile, the Home Secretary tells the Conservative party conference that he wants to put the victim at the heart of the criminal justice system. It is as rotten a tale of Conservative hypocrisy as is possible to imagine, even from this Government. The fact is that, whether on combating drugs, juvenile offending, illegal firearms, racial violence or the treatment of victims, it is the Opposition who have been standing up for law and order in this House and not the Government.

The chance of a new start for the Government and the country has been thrown away in the Queen's Speech. It is no wonder that the public turn away from politics when the Government refuse to hear the voice that they are speaking with. It is the Opposition who will continue to speak up for what the people of this country want—a modern and dynamic economy, action on crime, decent schools for all, hospitals run for patients and unemployment and poverty attacked.

The Prime Minister may scorn "the vision thing". He promises "the action thing", but where is it? His Government are not dictated by the action thing, but by the dither thing. That is where they are, all the way through from the Child Support Agency to whether Ministers should resign, the channel tunnel and the Post Office.

There is a case for action on behalf of the people of Britain, and it will be put by the Opposition. We know what needs to be done—the people of Britain know what needs to be done—because we share the hopes and ambitions of our people. We share their schools and hospitals, their values and their basic decency and we share something more—their shame at what has happened to Britain under the Conservative Government.

The Queen's Speech shows a Government who are out of touch and out of steam. At the next election, it will be our pleasure to put them out of office, too.

3.35 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I was sorry to learn earlier that the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) has been taken ill. I was delighted to hear the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) say that the illness does not seem to be serious. I think that I speak for the House in saying that I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will soon be fully recovered and back here carrying out his duties.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield mentioned the sad loss of a number of colleagues on both sides of the House and I join him in the tributes that he paid to them. We may dispute and disagree often and violently in the House—sometimes that is our duty and our responsibility—but, whatever the interest or party that we represent, we are all here to serve the public. From time to time, therefore, it is right for us to put aside our party differences and acknowledge the work that is done by our political opponents. I happily do so today, not only on

[The Prime Minister]

behalf of hon. Friends who are sadly no longer with us but on behalf of Opposition Members who sought to serve their country and their constituents.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield had some grave charges to lay before the Government—I shall deal with those that are relevant later and with some other matters that the right hon. Gentleman overlooked—but if he is going to attack the Government he really should get his facts right. If he is going to disparage the Government, he really should try to keep a straight face while he does it. If he smiles when he does so, it will hardly be a surprise to him that the House and the country are unlikely to take him seriously on those issues. If he shows signs of not believing what he says, he cannot be surprised if other people do not believe him either.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield was graceful about my hon. Friends and their proposing and seconding of the Gracious Speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) entered the House on the same day as I did. We knew one another for many years before we came to this place. I know him well and he has always been blessed with the gift of clarity. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why are you smiling?"] I am not laying charges against my hon. Friend; I am about to praise him. I come here to praise him, not to disparage him. One always knows where one is with my hon. Friend—sometimes that is very good and sometimes it is just very clear.

In this country, at least, we always know where we are with my hon. Friend, but abroad he has a slightly less certain touch. Seeking tickets while on holiday in Italy, he consulted his Italian phrase book, marched up to the booking clerk and, I am reliably informed, said something quite unspeakable in vile Italian. My informant did not tell me what it was, but I understand that it was emphatically not a request for a day return to Milan.

In Florida, my hon. Friend visited Seaworld—*[Interruption.]* Relax. While watching the Walrus of Oz—I do not understand why the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) smiles when I mention the Walrus of Oz—my hon. Friend became a volunteer from the audience to play alongside the walrus. The starring piece of his remarkable performance was a passionate embrace with the walrus. That was embarrassing enough for him, but it was made far more embarrassing by the most deadly words that any Member of Parliament can hear on holiday, uttered by a lady who rushed up and said, "Mr. Dunn, I am one of your constituents." Only time will tell whether that will increase his majority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) entered the House only at the last election. He referred to his first term in this House, which I am sure will be one of many. What he did not mention—we all know that he has a healthy appetite—was his election battle bus, which became notorious in his constituency for being parked outside a fast-food hamburger stop nearly every meal time. Entering with three companions, he ordered four hamburgers. "One each?", asked the attendant politely. "I don't know what they're having", said my hon. Friend, "but these four are for me." Clearly, elections build up the appetite in Aberdeen, but both my hon. Friends added to their growing reputations in their speeches this afternoon.

Last year, I placed Northern Ireland at the head of our priorities: self-evidently, it remains at the head of the Government's priorities. The past year has brought a new atmosphere and measured progress, but there is still a very long way to go before peace is secure and life in Northern Ireland returns to the same gentle tenor that we would expect it to have and would wish to see elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Next month, so long as the ceasefire is maintained, we shall open the exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein and the loyalist political representatives. In those talks, the decommissioning of illegally held weapons will be a vital subject. Last week's outrage in Newry—the murder of Mr. Kerr—showed how urgent that remains. Gun law has no part in democratic politics and the paramilitaries of both sides must abide by democratic principles if they wish to take part in democratic politics.

The people of Northern Ireland, too, are impatient for political progress, and I believe that they are right to be. As part of an overall settlement, we shall make proposals for a possible way forward within Northern Ireland, including a locally accountable assembly.

We have made good progress with the Irish Government on a joint framework document that covers relations between the two Governments and between Northern Ireland and the Republic. I hope that circumstances will allow us to complete the remaining negotiations speedily. The two Governments are seeking joint positions on some difficult issues, including the territorial claim that remains in the Irish constitution.

Northern Ireland's future must be resolved freely, and without prejudice or duress, and that was acknowledged in the Downing street declaration. As part of a balanced settlement, requiring change on both sides, the Irish Government agreed that the Republic's constitution would need to change to reflect fully the principle of consent in Northern Ireland. It is obviously important for Northern Ireland to be recognised as a legitimate part of the United Kingdom while that remains the wish of the greater number of the people of Northern Ireland.

A more relaxed relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic is also important. Many people in the north want links with the south. There is already valuable co-operation and we would like to help it to evolve. Closer links would foster reconciliation and benefit business. Organisations in different sectors—tourism being an obvious example—will, in their own interests, wish to build up relationships. In the joint document, we shall suggest a framework for cross-border structures, working on common ground and on a reciprocal basis.

I know that there are fears about joint authority—not least in the House but also beyond it, and most importantly throughout Northern Ireland—so let me make it clear that joint authority is not under consideration, and has been rejected by both Governments.

I emphasise that those will be proposals; they will not be a straitjacket. This is not a London-Dublin deal, worked out and set to be imposed. The proposals will be published for public consultation and put to the democratic political parties in Northern Ireland. When the final outcome of the talks process is known, it will be submitted to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.

The tasks ahead remain formidable, but each and every day without violence is another small victory for Northern Ireland. The benefits of peace which people are now witnessing will be a powerful disincentive to renewed violence.

I cannot promise that those endeavours will be successful, but I can promise that we shall pursue them, with the hope of reaching a lasting peace. I express my thanks to right hon. and hon. Members, on both sides of the House, who put aside the normal political differences to support the process.

Before I discuss the contents of the Gracious Speech, I wish to mention our economic prospects, as did the right hon. Member for Sedgefield.

A year ago, many people had doubts about economic recovery. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) delved into his stock of gloomy soundbites and forecast

"rising unemployment, falling output and shaky prospects for growth."

Since then, unemployment has decreased steadily, month by month. Today it fell by more than 45,000, to below 9 per cent. for the first time since December 1991. Throughout the European Union— *[Interruption.]*— only Portugal and Luxembourg now have less unemployment and, overall, the average is much greater throughout the Union, at 11.5 per cent.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield told us that one of the ways ahead was to reduce unemployment, but he would have been more gracious if he had acknowledged that we have reduced unemployment far more successfully than any other large country in western Europe, and that only two small countries have a lower rate.

Mr. Skinner: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

The Prime Minister: I shall give way later.

As for growth, output is currently increasing at more than 3.5 per cent., and we are forecast to have the fastest growth among the main economies in the European Union this year and next.

The problem for the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, is that his every forecast turns out to be wrong—not some of them, but all of them. The laws of statistics and probability are suspended for the hon. Gentleman. If any hon. Members wish to win the lottery that we have established, they should ask the hon. Gentleman for numbers that are certain to lose, and their fortune will be guaranteed.

I do not wish to be unfair to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. He is by no means the only misery merchant on the Opposition Front Bench who is seeking to spread despondency. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who is enjoying an agreeable chat with the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), was a trainee misery. He spoke of "big concerns" about how long the recovery would last. He did at least have the honesty to admit that there was a recovery. He spoke of

"big concerns about how long the recovery could be sustained before it led to a balance of payments crisis."

As it happens, the trade balance is narrowing as output grows, and the hon. Gentleman was wrong.

The hon. Gentleman has heavyweight company. The new deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), was in the gloom stakes as well. *[Interruption.]* Yes, he was. He is smiling now, probably because he knows that I am going to remind him that he said

"I don't see much inward investment flooding in, but I see companies flooding out."

I do not know what country the right hon. Gentleman was in when he said that, because it certainly does not apply to this country. The only things that are flooding out are exports, at record levels.

The right hon. Gentleman also seems to have missed the inward investment. Last year, this country attracted 40 per cent. of the total inward investment from the United States and Japan that was made in the European Union. Black and Decker, for example, moved a production line to Britain from Germany—not even from the United States or Japan. Why? Because, in the words of one of its workers,

"Industry is flexible and the social chapter isn't."

Where is the Black and Decker factory? In a place called Spennymoor, bang in the middle of the constituency of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield.

The deputy leader of the Labour party should ask his right hon. Friend whether he has seen any inward investment flooding into this country—or he could ask the hon. Member for Livingston. NEC is investing hundreds of millions of pounds to create hundreds of jobs in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I could have mentioned that Samsung is creating more than 3,000 jobs, that Fujitsu is creating 1,600 or that Asat is creating 1,000. Up and down the land, there has been a vote of confidence from external investors in this country's future, and in this Government's management of the economy.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): At the 1992 general election, the Prime Minister and the then Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear that they could conceive of no circumstances in which they would increase taxes if they won the election, yet afterwards they increased taxes. Can the Prime Minister help the House? At the time of the election, did the Prime Minister and the Chancellor know the true state of public finances and mislead the public, or did they not know the true state of public finances—in which case, why should anyone listen to the Prime Minister's predictions now?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman could have done better than that if he had tried. He may live in his own little dream world, and he may have overlooked the fact that there was a worsening recession not here but elsewhere, which was why, right across Europe, unemployment rose and others ran into the difficulties that we ran into in this country.

If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about inconsistencies—perhaps in view of what his right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield had to say about taxes—perhaps he or his right hon. Friend could tell us why they now propose to introduce a windfall tax, a payroll tax, a health tax, an entertainment tax and a development tax. Perhaps, as they are so concerned about expenditure and taxation, they will tell us which of their spending commitments—to the minimum wage, the emergency employment programme, the new technology trusts or the abolition of compulsory competitive tendering—they will scrap. For if their oratory is honest

[The Prime Minister]

now, their policies are not; and if their policies are honest, their oratory is not. The sooner they square that circle, the sooner we will hear little lecturettes from them.

Up and down the land, there has been a vote of confidence in the British economy from foreign investors. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East and the hon. Members for Livingston and for Dunfermline, East say none of that. They can, if they wish, remain the three blind mice on the Labour Front Bench, but foreign investors see what is happening in this country. To quote the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, they have been "flooding in", they are "flooding in" and, while they have a Conservative Government with the policies that we follow, they will continue to "flood in" and to provide jobs in the right hon. Member for Sedgefield's constituency.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Is the Prime Minister aware that, for every pound that has come into this country, more than two in the last year, and well over two in the past 15, have left? British Steel is investing £97 million in America, but nothing in this country. What policies does the Prime Minister offer to develop manufacturing based on investment by British firms in their own country?

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned British Steel. I was in Port Talbot a fortnight ago—one of the most efficient steelworks in the world. It has the longest export order books that it has had for a long time and it is hugely successful. The hon. Gentleman may know nothing about steel making, but I suggest that he goes to Port Talbot to see for himself what I saw—the efficiency of that manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom.

If the hon. Gentleman went to the motor show he would see a British motor industry that will soon be a net exporter of cars. If he visited Triumph motorcycles, which was killed by the Labour party, he would see it producing top-of-the-range motor cycles to sell to Germany, Japan, the United States and elsewhere. The Opposition run so well the story about British industry doing badly that they believe it. In reality, British industry is up off the knees on which it found itself when the Labour party was in office. It is now growing, investing, expanding and exporting to each and every part of the world. It is about time that the Labour party stopped knocking British industry whenever it has the chance.

Mr. Skinner: Earlier, the Prime Minister talked about unemployment coming down. Is he aware that large sections of the British people do not believe his Government and their fiddled statistics? Does he understand that the other day independent figures were compiled on every British coalfield where many of the pits have shut? In Bolsover and north Derbyshire, the Prime Minister's figures show unemployment at 12.5 per cent., but independent statistics show it to be 23.5 per cent. In Durham, the figure is 33 per cent. and it is the same in Ayrshire. In Wales, the figure is over 30 per cent. The truth is that all this twaddle, which has probably been written by Sarah Hogg, is a stranger to the truth.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is such a believer in conspiracies that he probably does not yet believe that there is really a Wednesday in the week. He should not squeak until he is squoken to.

Dr. Spink: Will my right hon. Friend explain to me, to the House and to the nation why the Opposition are always running down this nation, running down our industry, our schools and our health service? Why do they not start talking Britain up?

The Prime Minister: I suspect that there may be millions of people asking the same question over the next two and a half years.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I suspect that he or his hon. Friends may want to intervene later; I want to make some progress.

I want to deal with the legislative programme for next year contained in the Gracious Speech. Over the years, we have introduced many controversial supply side measures, privatisations and deregulations. Time after time the Opposition have opposed them, yet they do not seem to follow that opposition through. They do not commit themselves to reversing those privatisations. We all know why. They know that the privatisations are right, but they want to capitalise on public concerns when the measures are going through the House. If the Labour party's opposition is genuine, let it commit itself now to reversing all the privatisation measures that we have carried out. If it does not do so, it should keep quiet and realise that those measures have greatly improved the efficiency of British industry in recent years.

The Opposition will not commit themselves to that because they know that privatisation works. They know also that renationalisation would blow for good and all the belief that this is a new Labour party in any sense. Whatever the balance between public and private sector might be, the Opposition usually, and grudgingly, think that it happens to be right at the time. They do not know whether to go forward or back. They do not say yes and they do not say no. They loathe private ownership, but they dare not reverse it.

We intend to proceed with privatisation. This year, we shall privatise the Crown Agents. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am glad to hear support from Opposition Members—I hope that it will be translated into support in the Division Lobby. Crown Agents plays a significant role in delivering our aid programme. We have agreed with its board that the best way of developing its services is in the private sector.

We shall introduce a Gas Bill to bring genuine competition into the gas industry. Consumers already benefit from a fall, after inflation, of more than 20 per cent. in gas prices and they will reap further benefits. New suppliers will be able to enter the gas supply market, giving customers more choice and better service. Safeguards protecting price, safety, standards and social obligations will remain for as long as they are necessary.

The Agricultural Tenancies Bill will make it easier for tenants to rent land and to benefit from the improvements that they make to it. Landlords and tenants will gain

greater freedom in negotiating the terms of a tenancy, within a framework that protects legitimate interests and that guarantees that tenants are rewarded for any improvements that they may make. That has been agreed by landlords and tenants alike and will open up opportunities for young farmers to take their first step in the industry.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The Prime Minister gave a catalogue of successes in industry. Will he comment on how the building industry will prosper in the coming year? There is a need for rented houses and for improvements to houses, yet no reference is made in the Gracious Speech to the building industry. Has he a comment to make on the future of the building industry?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure what legislation, for that is what the Queen's Speech deals with, the hon. Gentleman may have in mind for the building industry. The growth in the economy, which we are now seeing, will bring the building industry back to greater health. That is the way in which to bring it back to proper health.

We shall introduce the Jobseeker's Allowance Bill to help more and more unemployed people back into work. The new allowance will replace unemployment benefit and income support and will underline the bargain between job seekers and taxpayers. Job seekers are right to expect benefits but the taxpayer is right to expect a job seeker to seek a job, and the Bill will ensure that that is so.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Come to my area.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should get his head out of the sand and look at the falling total of unemployed people. The figure has been falling for nearly two years. One day he might acknowledge that this country is doing better than almost any other in western Europe in putting people in work, in keeping people in work and in having the highest level of adult population in work.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill will allow private finance to contribute to the development of one of the most important infrastructure improvements of recent years. Both public and private sectors will have a role to play and the project will be likely to create between 10,000 and 15,000 jobs.

The Pensions Bill will implement all the main recommendations of the Goode committee. It will offer greater protection for members of occupational pensions schemes and it will implement a common pension age for men and women at 65, which I was interested to note was accepted as reasonable by the Commission on Social Justice.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Has the Prime Minister read the report?

The Prime Minister: I have read the commission's report. I recommend it to insomniacs.

We have a meaty programme of supply side reforms and I look forward to introducing them to the House.

We shall also introduce the European Communities (Finance) Bill to give effect to the financial arrangements reached at the Edinburgh summit.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Prime Minister tell us whether the £250 million predicted increase in the United Kingdom's contribution includes forecast increases in gross domestic product by the end of the century? Can we have a straight answer to the question?

The Prime Minister: The straight answer is yes. I hope that that is straight enough for the hon. Gentleman. I must say that, having asked for a straight answer, he looks very discomfited to have actually got one. I suggest that, if he does not want a straight answer, perhaps he should have asked his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I will make some progress, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

I am still saying it: consistency is a virtue.

Those financial arrangements were warmly welcomed at the time, and for good reason. They safeguarded our rebate—worth £2 billion a year. They produced the smallest-ever increase in own resources, and over a longer period, and they moved this country significantly down the list of net contributors to the European Union budget. The difference that the new arrangements will make, compared with what we would otherwise have paid, is to increase this country's net contribution to the European Union by £75 million next year, rising to around £250 million in 1999, with the qualification that I conceded a moment ago. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has set out the figures clearly to all hon. Members.

I have seen suggestions that the new arrangements would double our net contributions, which is nonsense and can safely be dismissed out of hand. The outcome of the Edinburgh agreement was reported to the House and strongly supported here. This Bill is necessary to honour that agreement. We shall introduce it early in the Session and take it through speedily.

No one should doubt the importance of securing the Bill unchanged and early. I know that some hon. Members dislike it, but it is not an optional measure that can be used as a bargaining counter for other European negotiations. It is an international commitment, entered into two years ago with the full support of the Cabinet. No British Government would have credibility in international negotiations if they failed to implement the agreements that they had freely entered into with their partners abroad, so for that reason there is no room for compromise on the Bill. That means that its successful passage in all its essentials is inescapably a matter of confidence, because of the agreements reached with our European partners. I hope that there is no doubt in the House about that.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the Prime Minister making it clear to the House that, if the Government were to lose any vote on the Bill, he would seek a dissolution and the country would have the opportunity of a general election?

The Prime Minister: I have just made it perfectly clear that the Bill must be passed in all its essentials to ensure that we honour the obligations that we entered into with our European partners.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): In the spirit of friendship, may I put it to my right hon. Friend that if

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

the passage of the Bill were made contingent on effective measures and results in combating European fraud he might have a more coherent response?

The Prime Minister: I made it clear in my speech at Leiden earlier this year that it was important that the whole of the European Union attacked the outrageous problem of fraud that exists in Europe. The figures that we have just seen were produced by the Court of Auditors, which, I remind the House, has its present powers because the British Government in general, and I in particular, demanded them in the Maastricht treaty. I must tell my hon. Friend that I did so because I believe that fraud in the European Union is unforgivable and must be rooted out.

The British Government have been the leader in the European Union in rooting out fraud. We have less fraud in this country than anywhere else in the European Union, and my right hon. Friends and I intend to press again and again to ensure that the Court of Auditors has the powers necessary to root out fraud across the Community.

I shall say something else to my hon. Friend, because I hope that he will back me here, too. In order to do as I have said, it may be necessary for the Court of Auditors to have greater powers to go into each country in the Community, including this country as part of the European Union, to root out fraud. I believe that it should have those powers, and I support them. We shall do all that we can to minimise, and then to eliminate, fraud in the European Union. I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance, but he need not tie it to the Bill, for we embarked on that several months ago.

The House will know that earlier this summer the Government began to consult on a range of proposals to improve the position of disabled people. Following the consultation—

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

Following the consultation, we decided to go further and, contrary to our original intimation to hon. Members, to propose a Government Bill in the Gracious Speech, rather than producing a hand-out private Member's Bill.

We have an excellent record over the years, and a great deal has been achieved.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I have already promised to give way to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), and I shall do so in a moment.

A great deal has been achieved, but we can and should do more. The Bill will follow an exercise that focused not only on what should be done but on how it could be done and how quickly. The Government will announce the details of the Bill shortly. Let me simply say now that it will include a right not to be discriminated against in employment, a right of access to goods and services and the establishment of a national disability council to ensure that the voice of disabled people is heard more clearly within Government.

Mr. Wareing: The Prime Minister will be aware that in 1983 I introduced a private Member's Bill to outlaw all discrimination against disabled people, but that it was outrageously attacked by the Government and Conservative Members were dragooned into the Division Lobby to oppose it. The same thing happened to the Bill recently introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). I was told at the time that education and persuasion represented the way forward.

The Queen's Speech says only that the Government will introduce a Bill to "tackle" discrimination. It is not enough simply to select employment and one or two other aspects. Will the Prime Minister give an undertaking that the legislation will make it illegal to discriminate against disabled people, as it is to discriminate against people on the grounds of race, sex or religion?

The Prime Minister: I have set out what will be in the Bill, and the hon. Gentleman will have the chance to read it as soon as it is published. The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will make the details clear.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I am replying to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby. If the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) will do me the courtesy of listening, I shall contemplate giving way to him when I have finished.

I have set out the details of what will be in the Bill, and I advise the hon. Member for West Derby to wait until he sees those details, which will be debated fully in the House and in Committee.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Is the Prime Minister aware that nothing that he has said corresponds with the measures in the Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood sought to introduce, which was disgracefully talked out by Conservative Members? As a former Whip, and as a former Minister responsible for disabled people, will he discourage *The Guardian* from saying that simply because the Government have introduced a Bill nobody else can introduce a Bill on the same subject? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that if my hon. Friend or any other hon. Member introduces such a Bill, he should discourage the Government Whips from talking it out and denying the rights of 6.5 million disabled people and their carers?

The Prime Minister: I have limited influence over *The Guardian*, as recent events have shown; the hon. Gentleman must take up his complaints about *The Guardian* with that newspaper. As for the position of disabled people, he, too, would be wiser to wait and read the Bill before making judgments on it.

The remainder of the legislative programme will honour a number of important commitments that we have given. The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill will be another important step in the Government's battle against crime.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I shall make some progress now; I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

Dr. Godman: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Not on this point.

Like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill will crack down on those who offend on bail, increase the courts' powers to confiscate the assets of crime and streamline the operation of the courts.

The Environment Bill will set up an environment protection agency and a Scottish environment protection agency. I suspect that that will be widely welcomed in the House and elsewhere.

The Health Service Bill will take forward our programme of reform by streamlining the national health service management structure. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield spoke about expenditure in the national health service on administration. I look, therefore, for his support for the abolition of one entire tier of the management structure in the regional health authorities. They will be abolished while the district health authorities and family health authorities will be merged. We shall judge whether the right hon. Gentleman's words are matched by his actions in the Division Lobby as we seek to cut administrative expenditure.

We will introduce a Bill to provide for the supervision of those discharged under the Mental Health Act 1983. This is to ensure greater security for the community and better welfare for those recovering from mental illness. Many hon. Members will be aware of the problems that have arisen in that area. I believe that the Bill will be warmly welcomed and I am grateful for the intimations from the Opposition that they will help to speed the Bill through to law.

There are three important additional measures that we intend to introduce under the general heading of law reform. The Criminal Appeals Bill follows the Government's acceptance of the recommendation of the Royal Commission on criminal justice that a new body is needed to consider possible cases of miscarriage of justice. The new body will be independent of both Government and the courts and it will be able to review wrongful convictions.

The Children (Scotland) Bill will ensure a comprehensive reform of child care in Scotland. It follows the reports of the inquiries into the Orkney and Fife incidents, and the White Paper of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, "Scotland's Children: Proposals for Child Care Policy and Law", published last year.

Dr. Godman: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall tell him bluntly that I shall not give way to him on this occasion.

The Bill's welfare measures include the introduction of more flexible arrangements for local authorities to care for children in need and the introduction of more stringent criteria for taking children into care.

We shall also introduce a Medical Act (Amendment) Bill to introduce new procedures to enable the General Medical Council to deal with the very small minority of doctors whose performance is found to be seriously deficient.

Those are measures of reform which, I believe, will command widespread support in the House. I am encouraged by the overt support already given to these Bills across the House and I trust that we shall be able to agree speedily on their handling. Those are some of the things that are important across the House.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield spoke of many things, but we did not hear a great deal about practical issues from him. We have heard a great deal from the right hon. Gentleman about new Labour, although no one seems quite sure what that means. We are now getting some clues. I was especially interested in the way in which the right hon. Gentleman allocated his shadow Cabinet portfolios.

Whom did the right hon. Member for Sedgefield choose as his shadow Foreign Secretary—Britain's ambassador abroad? He picked the hon. Member for Livingston—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I agree: it is a choice entirely appropriate for the Labour party. Surely the hon. Member for Livingston is not the man who, as the cold war was heating up, "pleaded with" and "begged"—his words—the Labour conference to vote for unilateral nuclear disarmament. Surely this is not the same man who spent much of his political life equivocating over whether Britain should be in the European Union. Apparently, the answer is yes. There is not much new there.

The hon. Member for Livingston is not the only clue—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Tired old arguments.

The Prime Minister: They are tired old arguments, I know, but they are the best that the Labour party has got.

The hon. Member for Livingston is not the only clue; there are other square pegs in round holes. Let us take the shadow defence team. What do they have in common? The answer is consistency. They are consistently against Britain's nuclear defences. The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), the man to whom the Leader of the Opposition would entrust Britain's nuclear defences, is a member of parliamentary CND. Indeed, he is not alone. I have a list, which my hon. Friends may care to hear. It includes the right hon. Member for Derby, South and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."] There are lots more Opposition Members who are against our nuclear capacity. I am just telling the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) who they are. The list includes the hon. Members for Peckham (Ms Harman), for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and, of course, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield. All that gives a new meaning to being brothers in arms. They would scrap our nuclear weapons.

It is another clue—[HON. MEMBERS: "You have missed one out."] I missed one out. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I am not sure who the hon. Gentleman is, but

[The Prime Minister]

someone will tell me. It shows that they are not only against Britain's nuclear capacity but are proud to be against Britain's nuclear capacity and would scrap it. Why did we hear so much about Rosyth from Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen if that was the case?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Yesterday's arguments.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says that they are yesterday's arguments. They do not care about Rosyth now. The hon. Gentleman should keep quiet. He is digging himself a bigger hole by the minute.

Another clue to Labour's new team is the right hon. Member for Sedgefield's choice for his shadow Treasury team—the team responsible for setting and collecting taxes.

Dr. Reid: He said something about taxes.

The Prime Minister: I shall say something on taxes in which the hon. Gentleman will be interested. Only a fortnight ago, the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) was talking about the importance of collecting tax—absolutely right, vitally responsible. But, some small thing nagged away at my memory. Was not it the hon. Lady who supported a campaign urging people not to pay their community charge? So there we have it—new Labour. The person that the right hon. Gentleman has put in charge of collecting tax was part of the campaign inciting people to break the law and refuse to pay their tax. So, there is not very much new about Labour there either.

Over the past four years, I have consistently pursued a number of long-term objectives.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Tell us then.

The Prime Minister: I am about to. They include low inflation. For the first time, we may be in a position where we have broken the inflationary psychology that has damaged this country time and again since the war. We have pursued objectives of supply side reform for lasting growth, a better quality of life for all our citizens, a higher standard of public service and a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. They remain at the centre of my objectives for this year and for the future. The programme outlined in the Gracious Speech will take those objectives forward and I warmly commend it to the House. *[Interruption.]*

4.22 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I shall wait for all hon. Members to leave.

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members leaving should do so quietly and quickly.

Mr. Ashdown: It is tradition, but pleasurable on this occasion, that we pay tribute to those hon. Members who opened the debate. I agree with the comments of the Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the leader of the Labour party, about the hon. Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), neither of whom I see in the Chamber. *[Interruption.]* I beg the pardon of the hon. Member for Dartford, as he is present. Those who know him will recognise his speech as characteristic of him. I recall very well sitting opposite him—self-evidently—when we took GERBIL, the great Education Reform Bill, through Committee. I cannot say that I necessarily enjoyed the occasion, but I often enjoyed his interventions.

The hon. Gentleman is the man, as I recall from a 1970s party conference, who demanded the total commitment of the Conservative party to the selling of council houses and who said that those Conservatives who did not follow that idea would be disgraced and exposed. I do not suppose that we can necessarily hold him responsible for the fact that his hon. Friends and Westminster city council have perhaps taken his advice a little too literally.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South, a new hon. Member, rightly drew attention to the fact that his predecessor, who also seconded the Loyal Address, did that only once because he lost his Scottish seat and now represents a seat in England. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South is more interesting because of his predictions, three of which were drawn to my attention recently.

In May 1987, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South predicted that Thatcherism and Mrs. Thatcher were here to stay and would capture the hearts and minds of the people of Scotland. I do not think that that prediction was borne out by subsequent elections in Scotland. In October 1990, still supporting Mrs. Thatcher, he predicted that the poll tax would work if only we kept it in place long enough. However, when the Prime Minister's predecessor was bundled out of office, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South declared:

"I've been telling them all for a year. Give me a new leader and I'll give you a majority of 5,000."

The hon. Gentleman was wrong again: his majority was 1,154. If I were the Prime Minister and I heard the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South committing himself to undying loyalty to the Prime Minister's cause, I would run for cover immediately on the basis of his predictions and his sense of consistency in those matters.

The start of a new parliamentary year provides the House with an opportunity to review what the Government have done and to look forward to what they will do. I am not sure which makes the bleaker prospect. Behind us lies a period of almost unparalleled weakness and bad government. Ahead of us, based on the Gracious Speech, lies a programme of timid measures and uncertain commitments.

Only in Northern Ireland can the Prime Minister and the Government claim a success. As the House will agree, the Prime Minister is entitled to feel satisfied with what he has achieved for peace in Northern Ireland. It would be fair to say that much of that has been a personal achievement in respect of his personal patience and commitment. With the Irish Prime Minister, the right hon. Gentleman has opened a way to peace and reconciliation which many of us—I speak as an Irishman and as someone who served on the streets in Northern Ireland as a soldier—did not believe that we would see again. My party and I have supported the Prime Minister fully and we will continue to do so as long as he holds, as we believe he will, to his present policies.

However, the Government go further in claiming successes, as we heard from the Prime Minister. They would have us believe that their second claim to success lies in the economy. I am told that, in private, the Prime Minister is much given to bewildered complaint about

why the British public do not recognise that success and begin to like him all over again. The reason for that is very simple: the public are not that easily fooled.

The recovery may now be under way. As some have argued, we may be seeing the start of the fabled virtuous circle, but there is a long way to go before that is clear and proven. However, everyone knows who is responsible for what has happened to the British economy over the past few years. Of course, there has been a world recession, but everyone knows that, thanks to this Government, Britain went into that recession first, stayed in it longest, went down deepest and has suffered more harm and damage than any of our major competitors. Everyone knows that our present recovery has taken place not because of the Government, but despite the Government.

Of course, an economy will become more competitive if its Government devalue its currency by 20 per cent. To be forced to devalue the currency because of economic incompetence and then to claim a triumph because our goods are cheaper is something of a cheek.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make a little progress and then I will happily give way to him.

The ordinary person in Britain has taken a severe battering from the Government over the past five years: lost jobs, threatened homes, cut services, burgeoning crime and swingeing taxes. If now the economy is improving, people can be expected to feel relieved, but it is a bit much for the Prime Minister to ask them to feel grateful.

Mr. Aitken: Before the right hon. Gentleman gets away with that typical Liberal Democrat catalogue of exaggerated incompetence on the part of the Government, would he please explain, first, why unemployment has been coming down steadily for 20 months, with the fall now exceeding 406,000, and, secondly, why Britain's share of world trade is increasing and why exports are rising at record levels of 10 per cent? That is not a picture of a Government doing anything but enjoying success.

Mr. Ashdown: The answer to both the right hon. Gentleman's questions is that, because unemployment in this country peaked so high, only now are other countries coming to that point. Also, our economy went so low that it is hardly difficult to make progress from the position in which the Government put it. I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to one of the underlying figures for our economy. Investment per head per annum in Britain is £2,800. In France the relevant figure is £3,800, in Germany £4,500, in the United States £5,500 and in Japan £6,500. One of the facts of Britain today is that, although our wages are lower, our unit costs are higher. That is because this country has not made the investments in capital machinery and improved techniques that it should have made. That is what will beset the economy as we go into the next phase of the recovery.

It is already the case—surely the right hon. Gentleman will accept this if he will not accept the other point—that, with more than 2.5 million unemployed, British firms are hitting a skill gap and, therefore, cannot make use of the recovery that is now in place. We could not have a bigger indictment to lay against the Government.

The question now is this: what happens next? The Chancellor tells us—he has done so several times—that there will be no tax cuts this year. Everyone knows that that is because he wants to save them until closer to the election. That, incidentally, is not just my view, a cynic's view or the view of an opposition Member of the House of Commons. Long-term interest rates make it clear that that is the view of the markets as well. They think that, by next year, Chancellor Clarke will be preparing to make the same mistake as Chancellor Lawson made in 1987—tax cuts, a pre-election consumer boom, once again leaving Britain to pay the price in higher mortgages, lost jobs, higher interest rates and tax rises after the next election. As the Chancellor plays the miser this year, to make merry with tax cuts next year, the country would be well advised to remember the old Russian proverb: free cheese comes only in mousetraps. That is what is now being prepared.

We believe that, where the Chancellor has room for manoeuvre, it should be used not to boost consumption for the next election but to invest in Britain for the next century. That is why the right economic policy and the economic policy for which we will press this year and next year must be to restrain consumption, to keep unit costs down and to increase investment.

Over the past few years, and especially over the past few months, we have seen more than just damage to our economy. Against the background of a widening gap between government and governed and falling respect for politics, we now have a Government who seem to believe that they can operate below acceptable standards and beyond the law, and do so with impunity. Does the Prime Minister really believe that, when it comes to answering legitimate questions about the activities of Ministers, those Ministers should treat the truth as something that has to be dragged out of them like a rotten tooth? Does he find it acceptable that the answers, when they come, are at best incomplete and at worst unconvincing?

In a Government more careful of their honour and less desperate to cling to power, the kind of things that have been tolerated in the past few months would have been simply unacceptable. Always, the Prime Minister reacts behind events, never ahead of them, driven to action by a small group of Back Benchers here or a collection of newspaper reports there. It seems that the Prime Minister's chief calculation is not what is right or what is wrong, but what he can get past his divided and warring party.

Is not it a comment on the Government, on Conservative Back Benchers and, I am bound to say, on the House as a whole that, when it comes to stopping the Government doing something wrong, something stupid or something illegal, it is not this Chamber that stops them but, more frequently, the other place or, indeed, the courts? In the past week, the present Home Secretary, a former Prime Minister, a former Defence Secretary, a former Foreign Secretary and the present Foreign Secretary have all been judged to have acted either illegally or beyond their powers, or both. Perhaps that is what the Prime Minister means by conviction politics.

I do not much care what damage the Prime Minister does to the Government or to the Conservative party. Frankly, I do not think that there is much that his

[Mr. Ashdown]

Government could do that would surprise the British people. But I care very greatly about the severe damage that all this is doing to our political system. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has established the Nolan committee. I just wish that he had done it earlier when it was first proposed by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). Whatever the outcome of Nolan, its work will be deficient unless it includes not only the conduct of those in public office but the funding of political parties. Whatever the Prime Minister's personal sincerity on this matter—I do not doubt it—he will not set new standards in public life so long as he ducks that issue in the interests of the Conservative party as a whole.

Looking ahead to the forthcoming year, it is clear—indeed, it has already been the subject of some debates on both sides—that the issue of Europe and foreign affairs will play a large part in our business. I have some brief points to make on those subjects. First, on overseas aid, I can only assume that the commitment in the Queen's Speech to use aid

"to promote sustainable development and good government"

has been left in because the speech went to the printers before the Foreign Secretary was hauled over the coals by the High Court last week. More appropriate would have been clear proposals to separate the disgraceful—what was it?—"entanglement" of arms and aid.

Secondly, Hong Kong is now within three years of being handed over to the Chinese, yet we have not even debated Hong Kong in the Chamber during this Parliament. I wonder whether in all our history there has ever been a similar occasion on which the House has had such responsibility for the future of 5 million people to be handed over to another nation and so comprehensively ignored it. The Government must bring the matter to the Floor of the House for debate. I hope that they will do so soon, preferably before the end of the year.

Thirdly, Europe is the battleground where the Prime Minister has now allowed open warfare to develop within his party and his Cabinet. That is his affair. It has been brought about in large measure by his weakness. What is Britain's affair is our future in Europe. We have no confidence in the Government or their policies on Europe. If this Government fell, it would be of their own making, and it would result in a Government who were bound to have more constructive European policies and more unity than this Government. We want to see, and we will vote for, a more competitive, decentralised, democratic Europe. We will support measures to improve efficiency, give better value for money and fund the Union effectively. We will continue to support measures which lead to closer co-operation where it is in Britain's interests.

One area in which such measures will prove increasingly important is defence co-operation. Once again, as on the issue of petrol taxation and so much else, the Government are doing in secret what only months ago they criticised us for proposing in public. They are pursuing closer European defence co-operation, in this case with France. The United States' unilateral lifting of the arms embargo in Bosnia is a grave development for the long-term future of that country and of security in Europe. Its practical and immediate effects on the ground may not be great, but its long-term political effects could be very serious.

First, that lifting of the arms embargo will accelerate the breakdown of the fragile ceasefire in Bosnia. Secondly, it will make a wider, and much more dangerous, war in the Balkans more likely. Thirdly, it will make the position of UN troops, including many British troops, more dangerous, and the likelihood of a UN withdrawal more certain. Fourthly—in the long term, this is perhaps the most important—it will open the way to a weakening of the Atlantic alliance and the withdrawal of the United States once again into isolationism. That is not what we seek, but we must confront the fact that it is likely to happen. We do not welcome that, and we must respond to it. We in this party recognise that that makes closer military co-operation among European nations necessary for Britain's defence and Europe's security.

There are provisions in the Queen's Speech which we shall support, including measures to provide greater competition in the gas industry and a Bill to protect the rights of disabled people, provided that it is effective and not, as we fear, a fob-off. The sadness of the programme is not what is in it, but what could have been in it.

We could have had a commitment to an independent Bank of England; nothing would do more to assure the markets that the Chancellor does not intend to risk the economy next year for Conservative tax bribes before the next election. We could have had legislation on the late payment of bills, for small businesses. We could have had a commitment that the Government will put their money where their mouth is, and begin to invest now in the education and skills which are lacking and which are holding back British industry. However, education was not even mentioned in the Gracious Speech.

We could have had a commitment that followed the Prime Minister's own words and made certain that we provided the resources necessary to give early learning opportunities to every three and four-year-old, but there was nothing on that. We could have a commitment to reform the discredited Child Support Agency legislation or a commitment to an energy conservation Bill to begin to build a clean economy in this country and to shift resources away from road building towards investment in our railway infrastructure. We could have had a commitment to build the integrated information super-highway which this country so badly needs.

We could have had a commitment to create a framework for a broader public-private partnership, now that the death of Post Office privatisation has marked the end of ideologically driven privatisations. We could have had a commitment to reform our antiquated constitution, to decentralise power and to open up the system. The Government could have provided for a Bill of Rights, and made sure that there were Parliaments in Scotland and Wales so that real trust could be rebuilt between politics and the people of this country. But we have had none of those.

This is probably the halfway point of this Parliament, but, judging by their timid programme, it is the beginning of the end of the road for the Government. We have seen in this Queen's Speech the last splutterings of an ideology that has run out of ideas, energy and steam. When Governments lose their nerve, they lose their purpose. The next thing that happens is that they lose office.

The programme illustrates clearly that this Administration are not the master of events but are at the mercy of them. They are led by a Prime Minister to whom things happen, rather than by one who makes things happen. He is a weak Prime Minister, who cannot command a wilful Cabinet or reunite a divided party. The Government have lost both the trust of the nation and confidence in themselves. They cannot go too soon.

4.43 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): Before my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister leaves, may I congratulate him warmly on his speech and on the way in which he pointed out the successes of the economy over which he has personally presided for so many years? I am delighted to be able to congratulate him on those and other matters to which I shall refer later.

Thirty years ago this month, I made my maiden speech in the House. The Labour Government of 1964 had just been elected, and there was talk of national plans. Ministers patrolled what they deemed to be the commanding heights of the economy and there was a belief that somehow a new socialist crusade had started. Having listened to the speech by the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon, I can see that all the crusading zeal of the Labour party has now totally evaporated.

Not only is it not concerned with the commanding heights, but the Labour party does not even want to rediscover them, and certainly does not want to reoccupy them. The Leader of the Opposition is, I have no doubt, a charming and articulate person, and one could be forgiven for believing that he came from an eccentric wing of the young Conservative movement. But he is certainly not the sort of socialist who I confronted here 30 years ago when that Government were elected. The Labour party go on repeating the old mantra of criticism, but it clearly has nothing to put in place of what was in the excellent speech today.

I was delighted by many of the proposals. The Prime Minister has been praised for it already, but he should be praised again for his initiative in Northern Ireland. This time last year, many were saying that he had embarked upon the impossible, that he had taken on a poisoned chalice and that he could never make it succeed. We have come a long way since then and, regardless of whether the policies outlined in the Gracious Speech regarding Northern Ireland come to fruition, the fact is that the argument has been moved to a totally different place. There is no question of going back to where we were before.

I was delighted also to see the proposal for legislation dealing with discrimination against the disabled. As a trustee of Flying for the Disabled—the aviation group for tetraplegics and paraplegics—I know how keen disabled people are to play a very real and full part in ordinary communities, and to be able to enjoy as near as possible the facilities which everybody else takes for granted. I regard that as an important milestone, and those who have complained about what has happened in the past should realise that we were then talking about a private Member's Bill. We are now dealing with Government legislation, and that is extremely welcome.

I also welcome the section dealing with the delivery and strengthening of environmental policies. I represent an area which is perhaps as environmentally sensitive as any. Although the Government were good enough to give us national park status on planning matters just before the recess, my area is surrounded by sites of special scientific interest which do not always enjoy the protection that that title might imply. I very much hope that legislation will strengthen SSSIs in this country.

Finally, I come to points on which I should like to dwell for a moment. Like everyone on this side of the House and—I would guess—in the country at large, I wish the Government to continue their firm financial policies. We have seen booms disappear into inflation in the past, but this time we appear to be on course for something very different; sustained growth with low inflation. That is a prize which I have not seen any Government achieve for any length of time in the 30 years which I have been in this place. That prize is certainly worth the effort which it inevitably will require.

The juxtaposition of that section in the Gracious Speech and the preceding paragraph jars somewhat. I listened with care to what the Prime Minister said about the Bill dealing with the European budget that is likely to be put before us. I recognise that the agreement at Edinburgh had, more or less, the support of the whole House. But we were not as aware then as we are now of the level of extravagance, fraud and waste inside the Community. We should not merely rely on discussions among ourselves in this Chamber or elsewhere in Parliament, or allow those discussions to detract from the fact that the ordinary people of this country find it impossible to understand how we can contemplate spending more money on Europe, given the amount of waste that seems to take place.

The Audit Commission's report on fraud does not merely identify individual accounting errors or a slip of the pen in some small office. It identifies institutionalised fraud, which means that British Steel must compete against nations that still subsidise their steel industries. Until that fraud is stopped, we will never persuade the ordinary people of this country to become Euro-enthusiasts.

Mr. Wolfson: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely essential for the Community to develop teeth by imposing substantial fines on the countries and people responsible for perpetrating such fraud? I could not agree more with his view that the ordinary people of Britain will not buy the concept unless that is done.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I agree. My hon. Friend is correct. I go further and draw his attention to page 2 of the Gracious Speech, which tells us that the Government "will promote budgetary discipline in the Union and combat fraud." Would it not be better if we could have a taste of that before we commit ourselves to paying even more money to that organisation?

Mr. Beith: Is not the problem for Euro-sceptics the fact that dealing with fraud—much of it carried out with the connivance of national Governments—needs stronger, not weaker, European institutions?

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: As one who believes in the "Europe des Patries" that President de Gaulle promoted so well when he was alive, I would never have got to that point in the first place.

The sort of Euro-lunacy that worries my constituents is exemplified by the reports that appeared in most newspapers today—the story that British acorns are no

[Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson]

longer any good. The British oak tree provided the ships in Nelson's navy—many were built at Bucklers Hard in my constituency. The New Forest has just had almost the biggest acorn crop on record, but we are now told that the acorns are no good and that we must import them from eastern Europe. That is absolute lunacy and it must be fought beak and claw. Hopefully, we shall do so under the section of the Gracious Speech that deals with promoting the principle of subsidiarity. The pigs are having a wonderful time in the forest and the bumper acorn crop means that the pannage season has never been better. No one in my constituency can understand why we are being told that there is something wrong and that we must import acorns from eastern Europe.

Mr. Enright: I know nought of pigs and acorns and will leave that specialty to the hon. Gentleman. Does he agree that national Governments and institutions were supposed to detect fraud? I totally agree that they have failed lamentably. Therefore, it behoves us to create a fairer system to dig out fraud. Surely that must be done, as the Prime Minister suggested, by appointing more people to the Court of Auditors who can get a grip on fraud and eliminate it. Perhaps they could also eliminate the common agricultural policy, which would get rid of fraud at one stroke.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I agree. I am concerned about the fact that fraud is institutionalised and not accidental. As hon. Members may know, I have a home in France. I have a good relationship with my neighbours. I do not know how French people think, but I know of my neighbours' concerns about the European Community and they are almost the same as mine. No one will persuade a French wine producer to cut back on production. No one in the French Government would try to do so, for all sorts of good political reasons.

The situation cannot be controlled by a group of detectives looking for fraud. We know where it is. We know about the 19 billion bottles of wine that no one wants and the steel subsidies that the managing director and chief executives of British Steel mentioned the other day. We know that those things are happening. I do not want pious words from the Government or anyone else. I want real action. Let us tell those organisations, "Change your ways. If you don't, you won't get our money." It has to be as simple as that.

Ultimately, we must be prepared to withhold our funds until the problem is sorted out. Otherwise, I am convinced that it will continue and that, as we widen the Community by bringing in new eastern European countries, it will increase. I am concerned about the proposals for widening the Community because, sadly, they may well mean bringing in countries that will dump their agricultural produce on this and the other developed countries of Europe. That would ruin farmers here, in France and elsewhere. We must be careful.

As the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) said, we want teeth. If there is fraud and malpractice, they must be matched by a national Government refusing to keep upping the ante to pay for it. If we do not do so we will create the greediest monster that the world has seen. It will dwarf anything that the Marshall aid people produced for Europe after the war.

The facts are simple. The Prime Minister is reported to have said that he is the greatest Euro-sceptic of them all. There is nothing wrong with being sceptical about Europe. Nine tenths of our population are sceptical and so are at least 50 per cent. of the Swedish people, as was proved the other day. Euro-scepticism is common sense.

We must back up the provisions in the Gracious Speech and ensure that they are not merely a form of words to keep us quiet, but result in real action to stop the hole in the boat that will ultimately sink our economy as well as everyone else's.

Otherwise, the Gracious Speech has much to commend it and I hope that it will receive a speedy passage.

4.57 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson). My experience of the House goes back as far as his. We probably both entered at the same time. Since then, my experience of political developments has been a little different from his, but I think that we would both agree that the Bill to increase the United Kingdom's contribution to the European Union is the most controversial in the Gracious Speech. On principle alone, it is difficult to justify any increase in our contributions while the scandal of frauds that run into so many billions of pounds continues. In such circumstances, it is sheer impertinence to ask for additional contributions. I also agree with the remarks that the hon. Member for New Forest made about the steel industry.

Much interest will centre on an important omission from the Gracious Speech—the vainglorious attempt by the President of the Board of Trade to privatise the Post Office. Those 20 or so Tory Members who said that, in all conscience, they could not support such a measure deserve the grateful thanks of the nation.

That incident also shows what a lame duck Administration this Conservative Government have now become. There was every indication that people of all political persuasions throughout the country opposed privatisation of the Post Office. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition pointed out this afternoon, commercial freedom is one thing, but the Post Office has served the nation well for many years and it should be left in the public sector.

It would not be unfair to say that the country is becoming heartily sick with the word "privatisation". That applies particularly to people employed in Government establishments. They are constantly threatened with such a proposal, which is bound to affect morale. Those who work in numerous establishments in south Wales are being made to feel uneasy, as I know from personal experience. The Patent Office in Newport should, for commercial reasons alone, be left in the public sector, but it is not mentioned in the Queen's Speech and is therefore left in limbo. A clear and categorical statement should have been made that it was to be left in the public sector.

The proposals to privatise the Crown Agents and the commercial activities of the Atomic Energy Authority are part of the same pattern. There have been rumblings of discontent, too, about the future of the Passport Office, Companies House and the Business Statistics Office. The

gas industry, which is no longer in the public sector, was brought out of the Victorian era and, while in public ownership, developed into a highly successful enterprise.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Roy Hughes: What have I said to contradict?

Mr. Nigel Evans: The hon. Gentleman has said many things. Does he agree that, had his party won the 1979 election, it would not have gone down the route of privatisation, as this Government have successfully done, including privatising companies such as British Telecom? Had his party won that election, the telecom industry, for instance, would have been allowed to trundle on in its own sweet way, becoming ever more inefficient, expensive and uncompetitive with telecom companies abroad.

Mr. Hughes: I find it difficult to understand what British Telecom has to do with British Gas, to which I referred.

As I was saying, even a privatised British Gas cannot be left alone and a fresh attack is made on the industry in the Queen's Speech. It is as though the Government have a manufacturing competition in the gas industry. We know, however, that ultimately the consumer will pay, especially less fortunate members of the community.

This Parliament is well into its third year and it is time for the Government to realise that dogma must be put to one side. That is also the view of the former Conservative Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who is quoted in Monday's *Western Mail* as saying that ordinary people had "had enough" of sell-offs. How right he is. By contrast with his remarks, the Secretary of State for Wales declared:

"It's certainly not the end of privatisation."

He said that the Government would continue to sell off publicly owned industries. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is the Secretary of State for Wales, but I can say without fear of contradiction that he is completely unrepresentative of the people of Wales. The Prime Minister bears a heavy responsibility for his appointment and for allowing him to run riot in Wales.

In recent weeks, there has been a good deal of interest in the report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Protection. I was surprised that it was not directly mentioned in the Gracious Speech. I welcome the proposal, however, to establish environment agencies in England and Wales and in Scotland. During the long recess, I had the privilege of visiting the United States with the transport group of the House. We had a long session with the director of the American environment agency, which seemed to be doing useful work in monitoring various activities that adversely affect the environment. It involves a bureaucracy of several thousand people, however, so I suppose that one could say, "Governments beware".

I wonder why the Government are being coy about the Royal Commission. The jackpot question which any Government must face, whether they be the present Administration or—I hope before too long—an incoming Labour Government, is, what will the proposals cost? The cost implications may be Government's reason for shying away from the matter and not mentioning it in the Gracious Speech. I applaud the Royal Commission's principle that the money saved from cutting back on road building should be spent on public transport. I agree that massive investment is now required in public transport. The worst nightmare would be if the money saved from cuts in road building were not spent on public transport. The Treasury would then laugh all the way to the bank.

The class issue must also be addressed because all manner of proposals have been made to place much heavier taxation on motorists. In economic jargon, we must consider the "elasticity of demand", for the poorest sections of the community would be taken off the road. Top executives would still cruise along in their Jags and Mercs, yet ordinary people who use their cars to go to work, busy housewives who use their cars for shopping purposes, and people in rural communities where public transport is often almost non-existent will be hardest hit. Surely the disabled should be a major consideration. We should all remember that private transport was once the prerogative of the rich.

During the past decade, south Wales has suffered many thousands of redundancies. A friend who is a second-hand car dealer in Newport told me about the length to which ordinary people would go to keep their cars on the road having been made redundant or having suffered some other misfortune. Individuals value the car for the independence and mobility that it gives.

On the issue of jobs in Wales—charity begins at home—the automobile industry is now the largest manufacturing sector in Wales. On 22 July, a perceptive article by Robin Roberts appeared in the *Western Mail*. He pointed out that Wales had emerged as a major player in the automobile industry. That is self-evident when we think of Ford engines in Bridgend, Bosch in the Vale of Glamorgan, Lucas Girling in Cwmbran. Many other firms may be less eye-catching, but are nevertheless important to the local economy. In what predicament would our steel industry be without the automobile industry?

Likewise, as Professor Garel Rhys of the Cardiff business school recently pointed out, wages in the automotive sector are greater than the Welsh manufacturing average. Those arguments illustrate that Wales has derived substantial economic benefit from that sector of industry.

To return to my recent American visit, the United States is the wealthiest country in the world, and I was vividly reminded, out there, of the fact that that prosperity is essentially based on the automobile.

I believe in an integrated transport system, which has long been the policy of the Labour party. I have tried to draw attention to the snags and difficulties that will be encountered in trying to implement such a policy. My mind goes back to the mammoth Transport Act 1968, steered through Parliament by Barbara—now Lady—Castle, at the height of her powers. In the event, that major Act did little to change transport policy in this country.

The proposals in the Gracious Speech are irrelevant to the problems confronting Britain. A few months ago, the Prime Minister talked avidly about getting "back to basics". As I understand it, there was no reference in the Gracious Speech to that issue. It has been ditched, like so many other things. Nevertheless, there is something in those words that I appreciate, although the Prime Minister's basics might be a little different from my own.

[Mr. Hughes]

I was brought up in the mining valleys of south Wales, where there was a moral foundation in family values. People worked hard and were law-abiding, and I feel that we need to return to similar values. People should be able to leave their homes without fear of being attacked, or of their homes being burgled while they are away.

That the devil finds work for idle hands is as true as ever it was. We need jobs for our people, especially the youngsters who have no stake in society. They should be helping to create the wealth of the nation, not being increasingly sucked into the dependency culture.

Millions of people throughout the country are calling for a sound education for their children, better training and more apprenticeships. They are also crying out for an efficient national health service to cater for all. They want decent homes to live in and an adequate pension when they retire.

In wealthy Britain, as we approach the turn of the century, those objectives should be well within our reach. They form the core of my basics, and I feel sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition shares many of those values and beliefs. I feel sure that he will lead us to victory at the next general election, to bring to power that long overdue Labour Government.

5.14 pm

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes); I agreed with him especially when he emphasised the importance of the motor industry. He will know what it means to my constituency and to Bedfordshire. Given that we have completely lost truck production in Dunstable, it is critical that Vauxhall Cars and ACD Components, to name but two local firms, do well. I could not agree more with what he said about how vital that is to our economic future.

I welcome in the Gracious Speech the references to the progress that has been made in Ireland, the widening of the European Union and our commitment to close co-operation with our partners. I naturally hope that Norway will follow Sweden and vote itself into the European Union when it has its referendum.

I think that the Gracious Speech shows that less legislation will be passed, which will be of a better quality. I hope that, by having fewer Bills, we will achieve the aim of better legislation. I am delighted that there is no education Bill. We have had 13 in 15 years, and I hope that we have laid the foundations for educational stability. However, given that stability, which I think is welcome throughout the teaching and education profession, boycotts of tests must end now, so that all the trade unions in the teaching profession co-operate in those vital tests.

I also welcome the fact that there is no trade union Bill. We have had plenty of trade union legislation. However, the Government need to keep an eye on one thing, given the legislation that we have passed. When an industrial dispute has occurred and remains unresolved, and a noticeably improved wage and salary offer is made to the work force, there should be a ballot on the fresh offer, and industrial action should be suspended while that ballot takes place. I believe that the long signalmen's dispute in the summer could have been brought to an end earlier if there had been a ballot when the employers made a fresh offer.

If the Royal Mail is to be reconsidered—I think that it will have to be because of the business changing; the Royal Mail is, after all, confronted by international competition—it is up to management to persuade the work force that changes are needed, and it is essential that there is a joint management/work force approach to the Government on the need for new legislation.

It is not our job, as politicians, to persuade the work force of the benefits of the proposals—that is the management's job. However, I have no hesitation in saying that, if the work force can be persuaded that a change is good for them, their families and the business, public opposition and anxiety about the Royal Mail will vanish rapidly.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I have followed my hon. Friend's remarks with great interest. I agree very much with the thrust of what he has just said, but surely one takes into account not only the work force but the customer.

Sir David Madel: I agree, but one of the problems for the Government was that it was obvious that the work force did not support the idea, and there was no management/work force agreement. Everyone in the Royal Mail should be thinking about ways to take the business forward. Taking the business forward successfully includes the customer, but the work force are a vital part.

One sentence that is always included in the Gracious Speech is:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

We can all draw up a batting order as to what we like. I have no hesitation in saying that we must have changes in the Child Support Agency.

The Social Security Select Committee report into the workings of the Child Support Agency was extremely thorough and helpful. The Government could act on two recommendations quickly. In paragraph 51, the report says:

"As part of any review of the retrospective nature of the Act, we suggest the Government takes into account past property and capital settlements."

In other words, the problem of clean breaks is being considered.

In paragraph 65, the Committee says:

"We recommend that travel to work costs are included in the calculation of exempt income."

You can say that again in a constituency such as mine, where some people have to travel out of Bedfordshire to seek work.

I believe that the Budget will be the centrepiece of this year's legislative programme.

The Budget that will come in a fortnight includes not only taxation but what we might expect in the way of Government expenditure. There is currently a good deal of loose talk about slashing the roads programme and switching to public transport, but I ask the Government to remember that some bypasses are environmentally essential.

I am backed in that regard by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. In my view, it is a priority to give Dunstable its bypass, rather than merrily starting

to widen the M1 between Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire. Loose talk about cutting the roads programme does nothing for the environment, or for villages and towns such as Dunstable that are clogged with vehicles. It undermines the debate we need to have about how we will improve the road infrastructure.

A local matter is causing enormous concern in my constituency: the Local Government Commission, and the point that it has reached. In Bedfordshire, the commission originally recommended a north-south split, but then said that it wanted a three-way split—in other words, a complete change. Inevitably, that has prompted an intense further debate.

The commission's first mistake was not to present the status quo as an option in its first report. Although the report contained a chapter on the status quo, it did not state that that was an option. The commission also made some administrative mistakes. It sent leaflets about local government reform concerning Buckinghamshire to my constituency in Bedfordshire: hon. Members can imagine what that did for local morale.

In a speech on 27 February 1993, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"In the 1990s I want to agree a new pattern—one that lasts, in its turn, well into the next century to come."

There is therefore no need to rush into what should be done about Bedfordshire. First, the Audit Commission must be sent back into the county to examine the cost implications of change. Bedfordshire county council says that the three-way split will cost £36 million extra over 10 years; South and Mid-Bedfordshire district councils say that they could save £5 million a year. We must have impartial, accurate financial advice and guidance on the true costs.

The county council and the district councils are at loggerheads on the matter. In the county, however, opinion is solidifying, favouring either a three-way split or the status quo. The north-south split, the commission's original recommendation, seems to have gone out for good. But there are now bitter disputes and complaints about opinion research polls, market research and what people really want. None of that is doing local government in Bedfordshire any good.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if there is no consensus about what should happen in Bedfordshire, it would be very dangerous to go ahead with reform? Reform that has not been made with consensus never works in the long run.

Sir David Madel: The hon. Gentleman's intervention was a bit premature: I shall be dealing with that shortly.

We do not need, and should not have, shadow elections next May; we should have normal local government elections. In May, nearly all Bedfordshire will vote in local elections. Moreover, the county and district authorities will note from sections 137 and 141 of the Local Government Act 1972 that they have the power to hold an advisory plebiscite. It would therefore be possible next May, on the day when nearly everyone in Bedfordshire will vote, also to ask whether those people want a three-way split or the status quo. Of course, arrangements would have to be made for the few villages that are not voting to be able to answer that question.

Because the advisory plebiscite would take place on the same day as the local elections, additional costs would be small. Schools and village halls would already be open for voting purposes. If a plebiscite takes place, the county and district councils must immediately stop spending council tax payers' money on putting out propaganda. The local press and local radio are perfectly capable of conducting in-depth interviews enabling various people to put their views across, and it would be entirely possible to include explanatory leaflets about the two options with council tax bills when they go out in late March and early April, thus keeping costs to a minimum.

There are precedents. As the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) probably knows, the borough of Tower Hamlets has conducted an advisory consultative postal plebiscite ballot on whether the people in the borough wanted a high, low or medium spending budget. In May 1979, people in various parts of the country had two votes, one in the general election and one in the council elections. There is nothing new about being asked two questions on voting day; parish and local elections often coincide.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, kindly answered my Adjournment debate on local government in Bedfordshire on 18 October, before the commission's final recommendations. He said:

"We want structures to be based on local consensus, and that can be achieved only if all those involved have taken part in shaping their local government for the future."—[*Official Report*, 18 October 1994; Vol. 248, c. 256.]

I stress the words "all those involved". That points to using the 1972 Act to conduct an advisory plebiscite. The three-way split remains my preferred option, but, in an attempt to end our difficulties in Bedfordshire, I advance my proposal in good faith. I hope that it will be met with good will.

5.26 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I agree with the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Sir D. Madel) about the Child Support Agency. I am on record as saying that all parents—fathers and mothers—should support their children if they can do so, and that there should be legislation to ensure that they do. I do not think that the CSA is finding the parents who are not carrying out their responsibilities, however; I think that it is taking the easy option, and finding the parents who are easily traceable.

I have described one case to the Minister. It involves a mother whose husband was given custody of the children when the marriage broke down, because of family circumstances. The father is unemployed and the mother is working. It turns out, however, that the children are in the mother's home nearly every evening, where she feeds them. At night, she sends them home to their father, because the school is near where he lives and she starts work early. Every weekend she looks after the children, and she takes them on holiday.

Because the CSA has a certain way of calculating, no consideration is given to that mother. No one would dispute that she is fully meeting her responsibilities to her children, but she is being expected to hand over a large part of her earnings to her ex-husband.

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

That is unfair, and I hope that the Minister will take on board the complaints being made about the CSA. In many instances, its methods are hitting people who are trying to bring up their children in difficult circumstances and to get on with their lives; it is unfortunate that their homes have been broken up, but the Government's methods of calculation do not help.

There is no one to whom the parents can go. There are no officials with whom to talk over their problem. Officials send out circulars saying that a parent must pay a certain amount and if they can do that, there is no reason why, in a caring society, those parents cannot discuss the matter with those officials face to face, so that they can obtain advice and be listened to.

I am disappointed that more has not been done about employment. I come from a community with a long tradition of railway engineering. Great emphasis has been placed on the technology required to create the channel tunnel link between here and Europe. That technology and the necessary training and skills are built up over generations. We had generations of skilled people in Springburn. We had a railway workshop that employed 3,000 people, but it now employs about 300.

Those left do not want to know about redundancy payments, but want to get on with serving the railway industry and doing a good and decent job. They are still worried, because there is talk of cutting the existing work force by more than a third. I am going with my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) and for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) to visit that factory on Friday to see what we can do.

If the Government can exert any influence over British Rail Engineering Maintenance, I hope that they will do so. The Government argue that there will be an upturn in the economy, but it would be terrible if that upturn took place and we did not have the skilled labour to cope with it. Work forces and factories may have to turn away orders, which would then go to Europe. That will happen if we have any more redundancies in the railway workshops.

The Government should look at the so-called employment agencies that have been set up. They have been set up with good intentions, but there is not enough scrutiny of them. There is one in my constituency that is in difficulties. The Prime Minister mentioned scrutiny of spending in Europe. There is no point in having that scrutiny when hundreds of thousands of pounds is being put into some of these employment agencies without any scrutiny. Those agencies are supposed to create work.

I can highlight my point by referring to a company known as Glasgow North Ltd. It was set up with money left as a legacy for the people of Springburn by the railway industry. When there were huge cuts in the railway industry, it left about £500,000 for the community as a pump primer. Glasgow district council, Strathclyde regional council and the Glasgow Development Agency have put money into the organisation, which is being run by well-meaning and reputable people, but there has not been enough scrutiny.

The chief executive has been suspended. I do not want to say anything about him now, because he is entitled to his say. I do not want to use the Chamber as a way of getting at him. That is not what I am about. However, a deficit of £300,000 has been discovered in that organisation, and one does not need to be a mathematician to work out that most of the legacy left by British Rail when it pulled out of Springburn has been used up. If it was not for the legacy, the company would be bankrupt.

In the past, I have told Ministers that it is no good simply saying that they are bringing employment to an area because they are setting up these organisations that will look after things. Some of the officials in these organisations have had no experience in the business world. They cannot be left to handle big budgets.

My community has been let down. In some pockets of my constituency, adult unemployment is as high as 50 per cent. The organisation is supposed to be creating jobs, but instead we have lost £300,000. I hope that there will be a thorough investigation of the company, because it is not the only company in Glasgow or in the United Kingdom. I hope that there will be more monitoring and more public accountability.

Ministers talk about local government, and say that it should be more open. They must set the same standards for the employment agencies, so that elected representatives or any member of the public can scrutinise what is going on.

The Gracious Speech mentions health, and specifically the disabled. I make a plea for consideration to be given to the carers in our society. A few weeks ago, I lost someone very close to me. The carer in that case was 80 years old. She wanted to look after her husband to whom she had been married for 61 years. They brought up their family together. When the war began, her husband, who was exempt because of his job, decided to go and serve his country. He never had a day's idleness. He carried out hard and heavy work from the age of 14.

Her husband's illness meant that he needed constant care, but his wife was treated despicably. She was lucky if she got four hours' sleep a night, and if she asked for help from social services, it was given grudgingly. Sometimes it took social workers four or five months to come and see her, and when they did come they did not let her know that she was entitled to certain allowances.

I know that everyone can say that carers receive disability allowance, carers allowance and so on. However, we must remember that, when a loved one becomes ill, people cannot always obtain the necessary forms from the post office, because they are too busy looking after their loved one. Doctors, social workers and those coming into contact with carers should be more interested in finding out how they are coping.

The lady of whom I am talking thought that she was going to be visited by a social worker. In fact, it was someone from the social work department doing a survey about how her husband had contracted his disabling illness. The survey lasted one and a half hours. An old woman who was not getting much rest had to sit and listen to someone from the social work department asking probing questions, which obviously must have been hurtful to her. We are not doing well by carers in our society, some of whom are in their 80s and who sometimes have illnesses themselves that they overlook to care for their loved ones.

The Government keep telling hon. Members, when we ask parliamentary questions, that they have not cut health services, yet when one considers the position at the pit face, as it were, we find that cuts are being made.

Glasgow royal infirmary is the main hospital serving my constituency. Bypass operations have been cut by 100 at that hospital.

After this speech, Ministers will probably write to me to say that, overall, another 100 such operations have taken place in another part of Glasgow. Anyone who knows anything about the hospital system, however, knows that general practitioners refer patients to a consultant at their local hospital. The patient is then put on the waiting list for heart surgery at that hospital. He does not join the waiting list for any hospital in Glasgow. If bypass operations have been cut by 100 at the local hospital, patients in its area must wait all the longer for their operations.

The worrying feature is that, if a patient waits too long for heart surgery, he or she can become inoperable. Sometimes, patients are no longer there to operate on. I hope that the Government will take that on board and that their answer will not be that numbers have risen. If we play the numbers game, we sometimes play with people's lives.

I worry about the housing sector. To my knowledge, nothing was said in the Gracious Speech about housing. The Government and even the Prime Minister attack the Labour party on the question of dogma. It is a known fact that the Government have a hang-up about local authority housing. They are obsessed with the fact that local authorities in Glasgow have houses to look after.

I am the first to accept that some of that housing is not fit for human habitation, but some of it is excellent. The answer is not to starve local authorities of the finance they need to repair housing and to carry out improvements that are needed to give people decent, quality housing, but that is what is happening.

The agency Scottish Homes is an excellent, first-class landlord. It started off as the Scottish Special Housing Association. Its aim was to help smaller local authorities that did not have a big maintenance and building team to build houses for people on the waiting list. It became a landlord, and now the Government want to unload its housing stock on to the private or voluntary sector.

I have no objection to housing going to a local housing association that has a track record. Scottish Homes, as the agent of the Government, is seeking to give the impression that that is being done democratically, but it is not. If it does not want tenants to remain with Scottish Homes, why does it not put a question on the ballot paper asking tenants whether they want their housing to go to the local authority? That would be democratic.

In a desperate attempt to unload its property, Scottish Homes is encouraging some of its management to set up housing associations, which it should not be doing. The worrying feature is that some of those housing associations have no track record in being landlords and in maintaining and looking after property. My deep concern is that Scottish Homes will cajole people and say that they have to opt for housing associations with no track record.

Those housing associations may have to go to the banks to borrow large amounts of private finance. After five or six years, when Scottish Homes and the Government pull away safety nets, the sort of financial difficulties that I explained in relation to Glasgow North Ltd. involving bad management may arise. Tenants in excellent housing all over Glasgow may have to run around looking for a landlord to take them on. That is dangerous. I hope that the Minister conveys my deep concern to his hon. Friends in the Scottish Office.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I commend my hon. Friend for raising that important point, which has not had nearly enough attention. Does he agree that Scottish Homes' tenants, of whom there are many hundreds in my constituency, have not been given a democratic choice but only one take-it-or-leave-it option? In addition, they face the prospect of Scottish Homes management telling them that the one advantage of transferring to a new housing agency is that money will be available to such an agency, but will never be available to local authorities. Why should that be the case?

Mr. Martin: That is my point. If moneys go to agencies with no track record, why should they not go to local authorities? If the Minister could show good cause and prove that some local authorities are irresponsible, I would be the first to say that they did not deserve support, but any hon. Member who knows the Scottish scene will know that no local authority in Scotland could be considered irresponsible and incapable of handling housing finances.

I know other hon. Members want to speak. I am grateful that I was able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

5.47 pm

Sir David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) who, but for the conventions of the House, I should refer to as my hon. Friend. I share the concern that he expressed about unemployment and I am conscious of the problems in his Glasgow constituency and in Glasgow generally. Unemployment has always seemed an awful economic waste, apart from its appalling social consequences.

Fortunately, the position in my constituency is much better than in Glasgow or in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Staffordshire, Moorlands has the lowest rate of unemployment in the west midlands and one of the lowest in the country. None the less, unemployment is too high in my constituency and I am glad that it is falling at quite a fast rate.

It is more than two and a half years since the last general election and we are into the second half of the present Parliament. We have just completed the second of two fairly heavy parliamentary Sessions, during which a great deal of legislation has reached the statute book. There have been some claims, in the press and elsewhere, that the Government have lost their purpose, because the legislative programme for the coming Session is not as heavy as those of the past two Sessions.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In the real world, away from the chattering classes, where people do things rather than talk about them, the public are fed up with the avalanche of legislation—often ill-considered—that has descended on them year after year and that has diverted their attention from constructive activity and from their real work. Those people are looking to the Government for a period of legislative calm and consolidation, during which the radical reforms and changes of recent years can be given a chance to settle down and made to work more efficiently and more

[Sir David Knox]

effectively. That is true not only in parts of the public sector such as the health service and education, but throughout the private sector. Continual revolution is not a recipe for good government or for national success. Whatever the media may think, the country is calling for a period of quiet, steady administration.

That is not to say that there should be no legislation in the coming Session. I welcome many of the measures in the Gracious Speech. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Sir D. Madel), I regret the fact that much-needed legislation to reform the Child Support Act 1991 has not been included—I hope that I can add the words, "at this stage", because I very much hope to see such legislation later in the Session.

I warmly welcome the proposed Bill on pensions. An increasing number of people retiring today look forward to receiving occupational pensions. It is important that they should enjoy the security of knowing that their pension rights are adequately protected against the activities of people like the late Robert Maxwell. We must ensure that the Bill provides that security. As it passes through Parliament, perhaps we can keep in mind the lesson of the Child Support Agency, because when the Child Support Act went through the House, no one realised that it would have the consequences that it has in fact had.

I also welcome the proposed legislation on the gas industry. I believe that, in general, British Gas is a highly efficient company and that that has been due to the high quality of its management—I think of people such as Sir Denis Rooke, who have held prominent positions in that industry—but continuing good management cannot be assured. If the industry is to be efficient in the future, as it has been in the past, it requires the spur of competition, and I hope that that will be the result of the proposed Bill.

The Bill dealing with discrimination against disabled people is also very welcome and will, I hope, enable hon. Members to put behind them the controversies of the past Session. Discrimination of any kind is deplorable and unacceptable. The House has a duty to reduce it wherever possible. I have always believed that the law has a part to play in the battle against discrimination, although I do not subscribe to the view that legislation alone will eliminate it. I am not, therefore, expecting utopia for disabled people to result from the Bill, but I hope that it will ease their lot and help to improve their quality of life.

I welcome also the European Communities (Finance) Bill, which implements decisions reached at the Edinburgh summit in December 1992. Although it will involve a small increase in Britain's net contribution to the European Union, the contributions from other countries will grow more quickly, thus reducing the proportion of our contributions to European Union funds. The Bill, therefore, is in the interests of Britain. It is also in the interests of the European Union, as it will facilitate future development as the Community widens and deepens.

It will be interesting to observe how the official Opposition react to the passage of the Bill. They claim to be strongly committed to the European Union. The Bill will be a test of that commitment and of the new style of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition. If they oppose the Bill, or indulge in silly parliamentary ploys to delay its passage through the House, the country will know that so-called "new Labour" is just the same old soiled and tainted Labour that we have always known. I am bound to say, given remarks that the right hon. Gentleman made this afternoon, that I feel that it will be the same old soiled and tainted Labour that we have always known.

More generally, I welcome the positive references in the Gracious Speech to the European Union. British membership of the European Union is the most important issue that has faced the country since the end of the 1939-45 war. It is one that we have not handled well. Twice this century, Europe has been torn apart by awful and dreadful wars. Between 1914 and 1918, and again between 1939 and 1945, the cream of the youth of Europe was slaughtered and immeasurable material damage was done with the destruction of industry and property throughout the continent. Both those wars could have been avoided if Europe had been united.

After the second world war, the other countries looked to Britain to take a lead in uniting Europe, but we failed to do so. Eventually, they went ahead on their own and the European Economic Community was formed in 1957. We kept aloof, but by 1960 we realised that our failure to join had been a dreadful mistake. It then took us 13 years before we were eventually admitted in 1973—a 13-year exclusion that cost the country dearly.

Since we joined, we have not been good members. Too often, we have whined about how badly we are treated in the Community. Some people refer to the other Community countries as though they should be dependent territories. Some—a small minority, admittedly—speak about the other member countries as though they were enemies. Others—a rather larger group—try to blame the Community for all our shortcomings. Every piece of European legislation is distorted and twisted and held up as an object of ridicule, no matter how beneficial it may be. Some people—I am afraid that this has included Ministers on occasions—blame Brussels bureaucrats for decisions to which British Ministers, answerable to the House, have been party. Abuse of members of the Commission is stock in trade for vulgar populists.

Such constant sniping does the country great damage: it undermines our authority and reduces our influence in the Community and it diminishes our influence in the world at large. Far from advancing British interests, that behaviour has done great harm. In many cases, it is done, so we are told, in the name of patriotism, but the sooner everyone realises that British membership of the European Union is the highest form of patriotism, the better it will be for us. Outside the European Community, we would merely be Europe's offshore island—a relatively impoverished island with little influence over our own destiny and none at all in the world at large.

More than 30 years ago, Harold Macmillan said that if we remained outside the Community, the realities of power would compel our American friends and others to attach increasing weight to the European Economic Community and to pay less attention to us. Earlier this year, the out-going American ambassador, Raymond Seitz, a very good friend of this country, emphasised, in a valedictory speech to the Pilgrims, that the influence in America of any member state of the European Union depended on the degree to which that country was effectively engaged in the European Union.

The possibility that Harold Macmillan foresaw so clearly in the early 1960s is now reality. That shows clearly that the patriotic line in Britain today is full-hearted support for membership of the European Union. It is in Britain's interests to be at the heart of Europe and it is against Britain's interests to be outside the European Union or to be a semi-detached, uncommitted member.

One of the great successes of the European Community in recent years has been the Single European Act, which has freed the flow of trade in goods and services within the Community. We must now build on that, and the next step is a single currency. It is both desirable and inevitable. There is no single market in the world without a single currency. If we had one it would further free the movement of people, goods and services, and eliminate the costs of exchanging currencies.

More than that, a single currency would ensure the continuation of the single market. If there is more than one currency in a single market, those who manage the currencies will begin to cheat and play one currency off against another to try to gain benefits for themselves. Protection would inevitably follow, and when that happened the single market would be dead. Therefore, I hope that, as the European Union moves towards a positive decision on a single currency—as I believe that it will sooner rather than later—the Government will adopt a positive attitude towards the issue.

My worry is that this country will opt out of the single currency at the beginning, but that within a comparatively short period we shall find that that decision has been damaging to Britain. We shall then have to join an arrangement and accept conditions that we have played no part in drawing up, and that consequently do not take into consideration special British interests and circumstances peculiar to Britain.

Once again, in the interests of an illusory sovereignty we shall have given up the chance to influence the framework in which our country operates. In my view, that would not be very wise.

6.1 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I should have liked to hear in the Queen's Speech proposals to make more accountable the health service, especially trusts, which are basically local hospitals serving local populations. In April two trusts were formed in Stockport—the health care trust, which is responsible for community services, and the acute services trust, which is responsible for hospital services.

Since then, several local issues have arisen that demonstrate the serious problems caused by the trusts' lack of accountability locally and by the way in which they are operated. The trusts are run by boards consisting of executive and non-executive directors, all appointed by the region. The model is from the private sector.

Meetings are not open to the public. When I asked why not, I was told that there were three reasons. The first, apparently, is that closed meetings help trust members to focus on decision making. The second is that they are supposed to be more efficient. The third is that apparently in closed sessions members can be more robust in their dealings with each other than they would be if they were exposed to the public.

However, when meetings are closed, information about how decisions are being made, and about the problems facing the health service, is not available to the public. Private-sector models cannot be transferred wholesale to the public sector, especially to the health service, because health involves numerous issues concerning resources and their use—especially as the money being discussed and dispensed is public money.

In the health service there is also a moral dimension. Our society has a strong belief in the value and intrinsic worth of the individual. It does not believe that one person's worth should be measured against that of another. When people cast their votes for political parties they take into account the moral values that we as politicians hold. Health is that kind of moral issue.

People have strong beliefs and values concerning entitlement to treatment and what the health service should provide. Yet elected representatives, the guardians of public opinion at both national and local level, are not represented on the boards that make those crucial decisions. Ours is a representative democracy, and that is something that we consider valuable. We are not supposed to be experts, but we are supposed to be the voice of the people.

Important decisions are being made about health care—such as who should have what care, and the level of treatment that people should have. Those are not only resource issues but moral issues, and the public have strong opinions on them. The trusts have the job of making decisions about how to manage their budgets and meet their targets. Various options are open to them. They use the phrase "increased efficiency", but where does increasing efficiency end and making moral judgments about how worth while various people are begin? Only elected representatives can say when that line has been crossed. Over the years, doctors have made many decisions about treatment, and I have had reservations about the powerful position that they held, but transferring that power to unelected boards will not necessarily help.

The trust boards are pleased about the change in the relationship between the service and the public. A trust chairman, Mr. Lilley, has said that doctors' first duty is to the organisation, not to their patients. The idea of organisations being paramount and becoming the arbiters is chilling. Indeed, a senior health service officer in Stockport told me that the best thing about the reforms was that the trusts now employ the doctors. I do not share his enthusiasm.

While we were talking about efficiency and resources, the same person told me that a recent study had shown that most of the cost to the nation of an individual's health care is incurred during the final year of someone's life, and that a large proportion of that is spent during the final month of that person's life. It will not be long before a board, working within limited resources, begins to say that it is not an efficient use of resources to spend money on someone who has not long to live.

This summer, the Department of Health issued a statement saying that although medical care of the elderly continues to be a national health service responsibility, nursing care does not. How long will it be before the trusts decide that it is not efficient to use resources on older people at all? Indeed, are they already making those decisions? We do not know, because they are made privately, in secret.

[Ms Ann Coffey]

It may be decided that it is not efficient to prescribe a more expensive treatment that could afford somebody a better quality of life. It may be decided that efficient use of resources means treatment designed to keep people out of hospital beds, such as day care and day surgery. There is nothing wrong with those as such, but rational, logical efficient allocation of resources can lead to decisions that the people who elect us would and do find unacceptable. Yet those people's voices are not there on the trust boards to say no. The trust boards are unlikely to say no, because they are all appointed. Chief executives will not say no because they will want to make their trust boards seem efficient and effective. Indeed, their jobs depend on doing so.

Several health issues have arisen in Stockport in recent months. One concerned the appalling conditions in long-stay psychiatric wards. The second involved a proposal to train new staff to take on duties performed by nurses. Thirdly, there was a £500,000 overspend by the acute services trust. Fourthly, there were the salary costs of the new boards, and fifthly the sum spent on a logo and set-up costs. The sixth issue was a proposal that in future the staff providing laundry and catering should be re-named "hotel services".

Those issues became public knowledge not because of open meetings but because information was leaked by staff and the issues were taken up by the local paper. Of course, the trusts' initial response was that the rumours were a load of rubbish and the local press were scaremongering. Yet that turned out not to be true. Every one of those stories was factually correct. People from the health commission read about the problem in the local press, and its chairman visited the psychiatric wards and ordered them to be closed.

The only information that the public are getting from the trusts is the information that the trusts wish to impart. I suspect that important discussions about the health needs of my constituents, and those of all hon. Members, are going on behind closed doors. Why cannot that discussion take place in public? Why cannot local people see what is happening? Why cannot there be a representative on the board? Is the reason that millions of pounds have been cut out of the health service and that the decisions that are being made would be unacceptable to the public and are therefore being kept away from the public? Such decisions might involve care of the elderly, for example.

Under the new system, we all have a price tag on our heads for treatment. For some of us, the local health commission sees that price as not worth paying. What is happening is not being made clear. It may be easy for Conservative Members to allow decisions about our worth to be made in private and to welcome the new efficiency which, they claim, will develop quality of services. Quality of services for whom? Moral issues are marginalised in the new efficiency cult.

Conservative Members should be worried because in accepting secrecy, they are depriving the political system and its representatives of any teeth and they are making us an ineffective and irrelevant part of the system. It all comes down to making accountability only an issue of a balance sheet. We are here not to be experts, but to represent views and to say that if efficiency means that my constituents will not be treated, let us have some inefficiency.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): I understand the important point made by my hon. Friend about the play-off between efficiency and accountability. That is often the case. My hon. Friend has adequately described the secrecy within hospitals. How do we know that we are getting efficiency from the trusts? We would know if we had an accountable system.

In the Walsgrave hospital trust in Coventry, a large capital bid has been made to move an inner-city hospital to an out-of-town location—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We are at the beginning of a Session. I think that we should start as we mean to go on. Interventions should be brief.

Ms Coffey: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am talking about the balance between accountability and decision making. His point is that it is difficult to understand the criteria for those decisions because the information is simply not available. Facts and statistics can be used to present cases as the organisation wishes them to be seen and not to give impartial information to the public so that they can make a decision.

There is no point in having ultimate accountability. Whenever they are challenged over the lack of accountability at every level in our society, the Government say that accountability comes at a general election. Accountability must exist at every level of decision making because small decisions, which may seem trivial to the Government, often have great consequences for local people.

I have been unable to get figures from the chief executive of our local health care trust about where he spent the £215,000 set-up costs. Before the trust was set up, when there was an elected representative on the health authority, I would have got that information. Now, the chief executive decides whether he gives me the information and when he gives me the information. I could, of course, write to the Secretary of State for Health. I would, no doubt, get a letter referring me back to the chief executive of the trust. Many of us go round and round that circle in sheer frustration, not for ourselves, but for our constituents. The political system is no longer the method of accountability. We have to beg for information that the people who have elected us believe we should be given. That is very damaging.

Having elected representatives on trust boards might take away some of their efficiency. We may irritate the professionals, but the professional system and the political system, side by side, provide a check and balance. That is the only way in which to ensure that the professionals do not pursue an internal agenda which is unacceptable to the public. I am very afraid that that is what is happening within the health service in terms of the decisions made daily, weekly and monthly. As Members of Parliament, we hear about such decisions only when our constituents come to see us.

An example is a constituent whose mother is in a Tameside trust hospital. The mother, who is not elderly, had a stroke and is in a coma. My constituent was instructed by the hospital staff to remove her mother from that hospital and to find alternative private nursing care. I

have no doubt that the trust hospital was acting within its rights. To my constituent, who was on the receiving end, the hospital's decision was the ultimate brutality. I have little doubt that a thousand similar incidents are happening as a result of using the criterion of the efficient use of resources throughout the health service. To be honest, that is not good enough. Indeed, it is frightening.

6.15 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): At the end of the Gracious Speech, one sees the words:

"My Government will promote further measures of law reform."

It so happens that at 2 pm today, just before the debate, I was talking to two constituents with whom I had been in touch before. Their stepdaughter was run over by a hit-and-run driver in a stolen car some months ago. The offender was apprehended and given four years, which did not seem an awful lot to my constituents given that their girl had been killed. They came to see me in some emotion because they had just heard that, after roughly 14 months, their girl's killer was about to be released from prison. They did not come to me in a vindictive spirit and I do not put this point to the House in a vindictive spirit. I give this example as a simple and stark reminder of the things that victims in our society simply do not understand about the law, and I share their incomprehension.

Mr. Wolfson: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend making this point, based on his constituents' recent experience. Does he agree that the law will fall into greater and greater disrepute unless, in the public's mind, sentences reflect the seriousness of crimes?

Mr. Walden: That is precisely my point, which my hon. Friend has put rather better than I have.

The point is on my mind because there has been an upsurge of concern in my constituency—such concern was not there 10 years ago, when I was elected—about a series of crimes which, admittedly, are fairly petty but are often brutal. I am sure that all hon. Members know what I am talking about because I suspect that it is happening all over the country. I highlight the point because it concerns my constituents far more than it did and because I am talking not about some god-forsaken inner-city area but about a quiet market town. Of course, when such things happen, it makes no difference whether one lives in a god-forsaken inner-city area or a quiet market town, but I make the point to show that it is not purely a city affair and that it is beginning to arouse concern in small and previously rather quiet areas.

When I go to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary about this matter, I get the sort of answer which I might expect and with which I sympathise, in the sense that he can demonstrate to me that he has given more police officers to the Thames Valley police. When I go to the chief constable, he tells me that he has to give preference to places such as Milton Keynes and to the city areas where crime is even more rife than it is in my small town. However, something has to be done.

I am not suggesting the spending of any more money, because I do not think that we have that money. In fact, I know that we do not have that money as a nation because we are some £35 billion in debt. So, there is not much point in asking for more money. But something will have to be done to intensify the existing programmes to get policemen out from behind their desks and to continue cutting, where possible, the red tape with which they have been inundated, partly as a result, I am sorry to say, of some of our legislation.

I shall say little about Europe because I do not think that it deserves much more than that. We and the world outside—the press—will spend much time getting extremely excited about the issue surrounding Europe in the next few months. I do not think that it is important at all in the real scale of concerns in this country. Unfortunately, it will be used in the House by some of my hon. Friends, and certainly by the Opposition and the media, in the way in which Europe is often used in this country—as a form of escape from the fundamental problems that face us, problems which are of our own manufacture and have nothing to do with foreigners.

For those very reasons, the issue will be built into a huge bubble. My hunch is that the Government will win the day, despite all the intrigues and combinations on both sides of the House and all the speculation in the press. In other words, we can look forward to two or three months of wasted time and energy in the House on a subject on which it seems the Government are taking a perfectly reasonable line and which the Opposition know in their heart is reasonable and sensible. That is how we are working. I put it like that because we are increasingly working in such a style. There is a series of phoney wars in which we, as a Parliament, are engaged, often with the press. No doubt I shall contribute a little to that myself at some stage.

It is worth asking ourselves in all honesty just exactly what we think we are evading when some of us try to blow up issues beyond their natural proportions. Many things are wrong with Europe. I do not want to go into that. It is perfectly obvious that for years and years we shall have to battle against corruption. We all know that we cannot do anything very quickly in certain parts of southern Europe. To pretend that such issues are of major importance in relation to the fundamental problems facing this country seems to be an act of national evasion. No doubt, we shall be able to evade those issues over the next few months all the more enjoyably because of that not very important and, in my view, rather mechanistic Bill.

One of my hon. Friends said that he was glad that there was no mention of education in the Gracious Speech. I do not share that view. I should have liked the Gracious Speech to refer to a Bill on that subject because the absence of any mention of education either means that we have the right system now or that we have given up trying to get it right. The Bill that I would like would be called the Public Schools (Voluntary Purchase) Bill. I am perfectly serious about it, as I shall explain.

One of our favourite forms of evasion is when, for various reasons, Opposition and Conservative Members evade what seems to be an absolutely central and obvious truth—there will never be high-quality state education while the public school system remains as it is. That has nothing to do with ideology. I ask hon. Members to wipe their minds clean for a moment of all the old arguments about public schools and join me in agreeing on one simple, obvious and undeniable fact. Six or 7 per cent. of the most influential, most powerful and often, although not always, richest people have no personal experience of, or stake or interest in, the state education system; in other words, they are the governing elite. Let us be frank, we are talking about big business men, doctors, journalists and Members of Parliament. They have the most influence in our society. When all those people virtually unanimously get out of the

[Mr. Walden]

state system, that governing elite, however it is defined, will never put its heart and soul into ensuring the quality of that system.

I am glad to see that one Opposition Member is nodding. That truth seems self-evident. If we try to evade it, we shall never get to what I consider to be close to the heart of the educational problems which concern hon. Members on both sides of the House. We should not simply continue with our traditional attitudes towards public schools. Conservative Members sometimes defend them on the totally spurious ground that they are a manifestation of choice. Of course they are not. Only people who have enough money can attend public schools and even people with quite a lot of money are beginning to find it rather expensive nowadays. So, when Conservative Members adopt that attitude, it is totally spurious.

Opposition Members sometimes seem to gain more pleasure from their resentment of those institutions than from thinking more positively about what might be done to bring some of the benefits derived by people who attend our best public schools to people who do not have the money to go to them.

That wound should not be left to fester—that is not too strong a word, because the current position has an extremely damaging effect on our society. I know of no other western country that has such a primitive form of educational apartheid. It will not go away. Rather than leave it to fester, we should think about it. I am glad to say that the Government have done a little thinking—I have always supported it—in the sense that they have set up grant-maintained schools. I believe that they have done that partly in the hope that, over time, those schools will become centres of excellence, their reputations will be high, they will attract people away from private schools and, at the same time, they will be open to people who, of course, do not pay fees.

Again, let us be honest rather than talk in tedious slogans as we do sometimes. Grant-maintained schools will be good only if they concentrate the powers rightly given to them by the Government on the improvement of teaching. I know from experience that those schools sometimes think that, since they are receiving 10 or 15 per cent. above the average rate of funding, they will provide new facilities. New facilities do not necessarily produce higher-quality education. They may be desirable, but they are not often necessary to improve education. Instead, dedicated teams are needed and grant-maintained schools have powers to recruit such teams. We may hope that grant-maintained schools will grow up to challenge public schools and open a frontier, as it were, but we cannot be sure of that because in British education there is a tradition of too much talk about facilities and not enough talk about intellectual quality.

What are we to do? I have suggested a Public Schools (Voluntary Purchase) Bill. It is nonsense to talk about abolishing public schools. That is part of the old debate. Also, we would find ourselves abolishing institutions of extremely high quality, quite apart from the question of personal choice. So abolition is not worth a moment's serious discussion. What is worth discussing, however, is the Government's provision, which already exists, for public schools to opt into the state sector. The other day I saw a report of one independent school—I cannot remember exactly where the school was—doing just that. It was not a famous independent school.

One of the reasons why private schools may hesitate to opt into the state sector is, of course, cost. If they entered the state sector, they would receive the same funding as everyone else; yet, as we all know, private schools tend to spend rather more to achieve smaller class sizes, and so on. That is one of the reasons—not the only one—for the relatively high quality of their results. We must be honest about that. Few private schools would take advantage of such a provision in my legislation. Indeed, few have shown such an interest so far. The Government should show a little more social imagination about the questions that I have raised and give a higher priority to tempting some schools over the line and into the state sector.

I have always had doubts about the assisted places scheme and I have expressed them frequently in the House. The scheme seems to be a very hit-and-miss affair. I suspect that we could all give examples of cases in respect of which large amounts of money have gone to completely undeserving middle-class people to allow them to send children to very expensive schools. That is indefensible.

There is also a charity flavour about the assisted places scheme which I do not like. I should like the scheme to be abandoned. The very considerable amounts of money involved should be spent on trying to tempt—there cannot be a question of force—more private schools into the state sector.

That might sound idealistic. Of course, I do not believe for a moment that Eton will come into the state sector. I have discussed this point with some private schools. With regard to what I have described, I am thinking of former direct grant schools like Manchester grammar school or Latymer Upper school, which are very good schools. When I was asked to present the prizes at my old direct grant school recently, I was forced to point out that people like me would not be allowed to attend the school now because we could not afford to do so.

Given their traditions, it is wrong that such schools should be in the private sector. They are precisely the schools that should come back into the state sector while maintaining their traditions and selectivity. All the costs should be paid for by the Government on the condition that the rule of access is by selective examination. There should be no social precedents or fees.

Imagine what it would be like for someone living in a not very happy inner-city area if an opportunity were suddenly to open up for that person's child, who possessed an unusual talent, to attend not just the local comprehensive—which might be good, although the records suggest that that might not always be the case—but, as used to happen in the slightly better old days, a much better and more demanding school and so move out of that somewhat restricted social background. That would be a step forward. Schools which returned to the state sector and which operated a completely open selective policy—I do not shun the term "elitist" policy, because they would be elite schools—would put pressure on existing public schools to show their laurels. The more high-quality schools there are in the state sector, the more difficult it will be for the private sector to attract paying students.

Over time, I would expect my policy not to produce dramatic results, in terms of weaning Eton into the state sector, but to blur the current extremely damaging apartheid divide in our very old-fashioned country between state and private. I would expect a movement gradually to a variety of schools, including former public and elitist—I use that word in a positive sense—schools, open to all the talents in the country, irrespective of background or influence.

Many people, perhaps some of those on the Conservative Benches, would be unhappy about my suggestion because they believe in the private sector. I, too, believe in the private sector. That is why I stressed that there was no question of force applying and that schools would return to the state sector on a voluntary basis.

Let us face it, in the real world some people send their children to private schools for snobbish reasons. There will still be plenty of second-rate—or even third-rate—private schools to which such people could send their children because there will always be such institutions as havens for snobs and their delusions. People could continue to send their children to bad schools and pay large amounts of money for as long as they wanted to do that.

Sir David Madel: I am sorry to interrupt my next-door neighbour. Would the examinations to obtain entrance to those schools be held at the age of 11, 12 or 13? Would they be held at a particular age? A child might develop later and be very good at 14.

Mr. Walden: My hon. Friend has made a good point. As my hopes of success for my Bill are restricted, I had not given its drafting sufficient care to give thought to my hon. Friend's point. However, movement between schools is important because people develop at different ages. That is the kind of flexibility I had in mind. I am perfectly serious about my point and about saying that this country will never get anywhere educationally until the problem is tackled positively and creatively and not in a negative or vengeful way.

The frozen educational line, with all the resentments and grotesque hypocrisies that we all see in our social lives, with well-off people—let us be frank, sometimes Conservative councillors—saying, "There are some absolutely marvellous comprehensive schools in my area, but they are not for children like mine", that dank snobbery which is rather characteristic of this country, and our obsessive classlessness, about which we hear from both sides of the House and of which I strongly approve, because classlessness, in my terminology, very often means levelling downwards, are the two sides of the coin that warp social attitudes in this country and rob many extremely intelligent young people of the opportunity to promote themselves in life.

Because of those two sides of the coin, many extremely second-rate people gain jobs to which they have no right because of their intellect or intelligence. They gain them simply because they have some facile or plausible patter which they have learnt at a school which, unlike so many state schools, at least teaches them to read and write properly.

That may all seem to be a little like a self-indulgent flight of fantasy. I sometimes become irritated, as I am sure all hon. Members do, when we in the House or people outside refuse to stare in the face problems which arise every day and which, if they are not solved, will not allow our country much of a future at all. If we have just an adequate education system, and not a superlative system, we will find the world a very competitive, ruthless and overwhelming place. Although I am not entirely serious about my Bill—if I were, I would have presented it in another way—I believe that we should think about these matters and not evade them.

6.38 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) described his proposal as a flight of fantasy. Like many others, I listened with great interest to what he had to say, and I find myself in complete agreement with his comments about the origins of what he described as educational apartheid. I would extend much of what he said to an analysis of our health service and the apartheid that all too often exists in it.

We have a spirit of bipartisan agreement at the moment, but I fear that I will lose it fairly shortly. The person who was ultimately responsible for the management of the health service for 11 long years, Baroness Thatcher—who frequently would recount what she described as her party's achievements in respect of the health service—on her own admission would not dream of using the national health service. She once famously remarked that for her it was essential to go into an hospital of her choice, at a time of her choice, with the doctor of her choice. Would that that option were available to everyone. The analysis by the hon. Member for Buckingham of the education service also applies to health.

I wish to confine myself to a few words about the operation of our democracy. I have chosen to make my remarks today because the occasion of the Queen's Speech should tell us one or two things about the strange way in which our democratic system sometimes works. I am talking about the process of the Queen's Speech. I enjoy the pageantry and ceremony of it, but, in all respects save one, we are clear about what part is pageant and what is part of the real power structure in our country.

When we traipse into the House of Lords, the pageant is that we humble commoners go along to listen to Her Majesty speak in the House of Lords, and members of the Upper House—the really important nobility—sit and wait for us to turn up and stand at the Bar. That is the pageant, and no one gets too worked up about it, whereas the reality—at least I hope that it is the reality—is that this place is a bit more important than the other place and that it is in this place where real power resides.

We keep up the fiction with every Bill that we pass. Every Act of Parliament contains the words which we all remember:

"the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled"—

again, it is as though we are the least important of the lot. Occasionally, it feels like that, I admit, but let us acknowledge that that is not part of our democratic procedure.

There is another part of the fiction of today which we all understand and which we know is a fiction, and that is calling it the Queen's Speech. We know that it is not the Queen's Speech. We know that it would be utterly intolerable if the speech were written by an hereditary monarch. I am sure that Her Majesty would subscribe to that view as well. The speech is written by the Prime

[Mr. Bruce Grocott]

Minister of the day. We understand that. We agree that it would be an utter disgrace if an hereditary ruler wrote the speech, and it would certainly be an utter disgrace if an hereditary ruler refused to give assent to a piece of legislation that had been passed by this House and by the House of Lords.

There is one crucial aspect of our democracy in which the pageant and the power have become hopelessly muddled and it needs rapidly to be disentangled. The vast majority of people in the other place are there because they have inherited their titles. Their power is not simply part of the pageant or of the ceremony; it is a real power that they are able to exercise—they have inherited the right to legislate. That is an intolerable power to exercise in a democracy. We have Walter Bagehot's phrase about the efficient part and the dignified part of the constitution all tied up. I do not mind what hereditary peers call themselves and I do not mind much what they do, but I object when they are able to legislate on the proposals that are put before the House during the year. There are 759 hereditary peers out of a total membership of 1,203. The sooner they lose their right to legislate, the sooner we can enjoy the ceremony of such occasions without confusing them with political power.

I introduced a Bill on this matter, but, sadly, like most of my attempts at legislation, it fell by the wayside earlier this year. Since then, I have made one or two inquiries. One figure which surprised me, I am pleased to say, was provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), in his capacity as Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Select Committee. I asked a parliamentary question to find out what floor space in the Palace of Westminster is occupied by the House of Lords and by the House of Commons. Rather to my surprise, 58.3 per cent. is occupied by the House of Commons and 38.7 per cent. is occupied by the House of Lords. I expected it to be far less than that, I must say. I am not sure whether those 759 hereditary peers and their various activities require all that floor space. I have a simple proposal: let us stop them inheriting the right to legislate. Without losing any sleep over what the next proposal to reform the House of Lords might be, let us reduce the area to a sensible, manageable size. It might be nice if hon. Members were allocated a little more space in which to operate.

There are two other aspects of our democracy which could have been improved in the Queen's Speech, but sadly there is no mention of them. It is incumbent on us to do something about them quickly, not least because we can be certain that, in the next 12 months, the House of Commons will send observers, possibly as part of the United Nations or as part of the European Community, to ensure that electoral systems in other countries operate properly so that the international community can validate them. That has happened time and again and I am sure that it will happen in future.

When we perform such operations, it is incumbent on us to make sure that our own House is in order and that our own democratic procedures—I have already mentioned one, which is getting rid of the hereditary element—are in order. There is one glaring respect in which they are not. It is a topical matter, because it follows last week's United States congressional and Senate elections. I refer to the expenditure of parties and individuals in general elections in this country. The Senate race in California cost $28 million—admittedly that was for the unsuccessful candidate, thank goodness, so perhaps money does not buy everything—and $18 million in Virginia. That is £11 million for one election.

Thankfully, in this country one cannot buy commercial time to fight elections, but we have one huge anomaly which needs to be sorted out. We all accept that it is absolutely right that there should be limits on election expenditure in individual constituencies. That has been acknowledged for 100 years because of the simple, blatant truth that, if one individual can spend far more than another, there can be no hope of a fair contest. We have no limit or restriction on, and no attempt to control, what parties can spend nationally in election campaigns. That is despite the fact that—even the least modest would have to acknowledge this—the outcome of a general election is determined much more by what is spent nationally on advertisements and the paraphernalia of politics than by what each individual spends in his or her constituency.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I accept that there should be limits on individual candidates. The two candidates that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—they were Huffington in California and Oliver North—lost, irrespective of the amounts that were spent on their campaigns. Money does not buy everything; it does not persuade people to vote for certain parties—policies do. The one thing that is absent from everything that we hear from the Labour party is what it genuinely believes in.

Mr. Grocott: I made precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman has made. I said that the candidate whom I mentioned happened to lose. Yet it is universally acknowledged that in the United States it is not worth thinking about standing for a Senate seat without about $10 million ready to spend up front—that is the figure most quoted. Of course money is not everything in elections, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not seriously suggest that we should get rid of controls locally. I hope that he will acknowledge—if he does not, I guess that he will be in a minority of one—that there is some sense in saying that we need controls over election expenditure. The sooner we introduce a system of control over what parties can spend nationally, the sooner we shall acknowledge that there must be a ceiling on what can be spent in a general election. The amount varies greatly between the parties. We need to have proper open accounting of the income and expenditure of political parties. I know that Conservative Members are rather reluctant to have that happen.

To take a simple example, although we cannot buy commercial television time—thank heaven—there would be nothing to stop a political party, if it had the money, distributing a free video nationally. That would almost amount to the same thing. Clearly there must be some limit on parties' expenditure. The sooner we tidy up that part of our democracy, the better.

Although Conservative Members might smile at what I am saying, if they went to observe an election in another country and discovered that one party had phenomenally more resources than another and spent phenomenally more than another, I am sure that they would report it. At least, I hope that they would. If they did not, they would not be good election observers.

My last point is also about the workings of our democracy and we regard it as fundamental when we assess democratic systems overseas: it is the need for variety and fairness in the media that cover elections and the run-up to elections. I find it deeply ironic that Conservative Members have suddenly discovered that the newspapers in Britain can be unfair. It is a pleasure to see it dawn on their faces as they discover that the newspapers do not always report Tories nicely and the Labour party as if we were all rogues; the newspapers can also be unpleasant to Tories occasionally.

Tory Members claim that some Conservatives have had to leave office because they have been hounded by the tabloid press. I remember a quotation from the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor). This is not an attack on him. I quote him as exactly as possible. He said something along the lines of, "It is very unfair if Cabinets are determined by the tabloid media." I wish that he had said at the last general election, "It is very unfair if general elections are decided by the tabloid media." If he did say that, I missed it.

The only safeguard in our democracy is diversity, different centres of power and competition within the media. I am deeply alarmed at what the Government have done in broadcasting. I hope, although I fear that it is a vain hope, that even at this stage the Government will learn by their manifest mistakes and introduce changes such as I have proposed.

The Government have changed our rules on the ownership of television companies in the past 12 months. I know that there is nothing more tedious or self-indulgent than quoting one's own speech when it is right, but other people quote our speeches frequently enough when they are wrong so I make no particular apology for doing so. We had a debate just 12 months ago on a Government order that allowed television companies to merge. Those television companies only two years previously had been delighted to bid for their franchises under the existing rules. In the debate I said:

"We already know two inevitable consequences of his"—

the Secretary of State's—

"actions: the industry will suffer further job losses, and decisions will be made in London and not in the regions."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1993; Vol. 234, c. 449.]

I quote that because it is precisely what has happened. It has certainly happened in respect of the merger between Carlton and Central Television. There have been further job losses and, in effect, a regional television company has been taken over by a London one. Certainly in Birmingham—the regional capital that I know best—what was once a thriving centre of television excellence is now reduced to a news studio and basically a regional output as opposed to a centre for making programmes for the network.

If a decision has been shown to be a mistake, surely before further decisions are made about relaxation of media controls and rules on ownership there should be at least a review of the mergers that have taken place and whether they have brought benefits to the viewer. This is not just about broadcasting. It is about our democratic process. If we have a system in which power and control in the media become more and more centralised and are in the hands of two or three individuals, it is not only bad for the industry but fundamentally bad for our democracy.

Three or four other matters could have been tackled in the Queen's Speech. We have seen in the pageant of today how they illustrate some of the strengths and failings of our democracy. In a country which is fond of lecturing others on their democratic process, it is time that we got our own house in order.

6.55 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I was interested to listen to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), but there seemed to be an inconsistency between his first and second points. He claimed that he wanted more party politics in the upper House, yet in his second breath said that he wanted to cut party politics for the lower House.

Mr. Enright: The hon. Gentleman was not paying attention.

Mr. Spicer: I was paying close attention. His first and second points seemed inconsistent.

You will not be surprised to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I welcome most of the Queen's Speech. I am sad that Post Office privatisation is not in it. I would certainly have privatised Post Office Counters as well as the Royal Mail. Privatisation of Post Office Counters would have given greater liberty to post offices. There is anxiety in rural areas about rural post offices. It would be good for rural post offices to have the freedom to develop. I suppose that I am also influenced by my experience in government, when I learnt that it is a mistake to privatise one part of an inter-related industry.

We made a mistake in privatising the electricity industry without privatising coal at the same time. I was the Minister responsible at the time and I argued for the privatisation of coal, which would have been a good thing. I would have privatised the two parts of the Post Office, but we have not done so. That is sad, but I shall move on to other measures that are good.

I certainly approve of the measures to create greater competition in gas, precisely as we did in electricity. We created a dynamic structure and moved towards a competitive industry. That has been successful, particularly on the power production side and increasingly on the distribution side. We could do the same for gas.

The principle of flexible contracts for agricultural tenancies is a good idea as it will ultimately help more people to enter the industry. The problem is that the proposal relates to the present structure, financing and policy of the agriculture industry. If the aim is to bring more new tenancies and young, new farmers into the industry, the greatest single obstacle to it is the workings of the common agricultural policy, which will not be overcome by the new legislation. The quota arrangements in particular will undoubtedly result in a disproportionate rise in the value of quota-based land and farms above the value at which new entrants can easily enter the industry.

That raises the future of the common agricultural policy. The CAP needs an absolutely radical change, and until such a radical change—preferably a repatriation—is made in the method of support for the agriculture industry we will not overcome the distortions that are at the root of the problem, particularly for new entrants.

By abolishing the CAP, we would, in a stroke, abolish 63 per cent. of the budget that is causing anxiety among some hon. Members. Our approach must be more radical.

[Mr. Spicer]

I agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House who have said that the real issue is not so much what legislation we are to introduce but how we address the fundamental problems affecting not only this country but the entire western world. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox)—this is one of the few matters on which I agree with my hon. Friend—that unemployment will be a massive problem, not just for this country but for the whole western world into the foreseeable future.

I obviously welcome the fact that British unemployment has fallen consistently from quite high levels, and today's figures, showing a reduction of 50,000, are good news indeed, but a clear picture emerges from the long-term and secular effects of unemployment here and in other European countries. Ten years ago, unemployment throughout Europe was about 5 per cent., but now it is nearer to 10 per cent.

It is quite clear that, in the longer term, finding people jobs in the western world will be a major problem. Even if people find jobs, there is a new sense of insecurity about those jobs. Most of the current political and economic issues in the western world relate to this issue—for instance, that of protectionism versus free trade. I warned my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) that I would refer to an article that he wrote in the *Evening Standard* in which he apparently flirted with protectionism. The trend towards protectionism in the western world is a result of the growing concern about unemployment. Most of the economic concerns expressed by hon. Members relate fundamentally to unemployment. I shall return to the point.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Sir D. Madel) that a crucial element in the Government's strategy for the next year must focus on the Budget, which will be delivered in about a week. The Queen's Speech mentions fiscal probity and the need to reduce the total amount of resources as a percentage of GDP that go into public spending. That is good, because the solution to unemployment is fairly straightforward. If we are to deal with unemployment, we must create jobs, and that means investment, particularly in smaller businesses.

I argue that there are only three things that Governments can do to encourage investment: first, to ensure a low-tax regime; secondly, to have sound money so that production costs do not rise disproportionately to revenue; and, thirdly, to maintain free trade. Sadly, the latter was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech.

Ensuring sound money and reducing taxes is a difficult balancing act for any Government, particularly in the context of our large borrowing requirement. Some difficult decisions must be made. I suppose that we all have our own shopping lists of what we might do to try to get the budget into balance and to meet the objectives of sound money and fiscal probity outlined in the Queen's Speech.

My own hobby horses include housing benefit, and I speak as a former housing Minister. The enormous increase in housing benefit clearly causes concern, especially among those who believe—as I do—that, ultimately, all our housing stock must be transferred to the private sector. I would include housing associations that were genuinely in the private sector in that calculation. That means that all the financing and revenue associated with housing must come through market rents and prices.

It is well known that we have the smallest private rented sector in the entire western world at about 7 per cent. In Germany, the figure is more than 50 per cent. It is manifestly important to create a substantive rented sector, and that requires transferring our entire stock to the private sector. Part of the reason for doing so would be to focus state spending on those who really need it, rather than on bricks and mortar. That is not achieved under the present system, partly because of the way in which the housing benefit system works and partly because of the various large sums—the current figure is about £4 billion or £5 billion—that still go directly into bricks and mortar.

Since it is imperative to channel all housing support through the housing benefit system, controls must be established on the rents for which housing benefit is available. The cost of housing benefit is now tens of billions of pounds, whereas a few years ago it was £4 billion or £5 billion. It has gone up astronomically, and greater controls must be established.

Another of my hobby horses—it is controversial, of course—concerns industrial grants. The way to support industry is by having policies of low tax, free trade and sound money, and not by giving money directly to industries that would be unable to support themselves without it. That is particularly true of foreign industries. The reason why foreign industries are investing heavily in this country has, I believe, nothing to do with the grants that they are given to locate in different parts of the country. It is entirely to do with the fact that this is now a good place in which to invest from a market point of view. If we take into account transportation subsidies, we are talking about £5 billion or more being spent on industrial grants that could be better saved.

Another area in which savings are available is investment in transport, particularly road and rail. I do not understand why we should be the only country in Europe that does not fund some of that investment through the private sector—especially through tolls—paid for by the travelling public because we could thus save billions of pounds.

A clear strategy is available to the Government to enable them to carry out that aspect of the Queen's Speech which relates to returning to sound money, reducing the public sector as a percentage of gross domestic product and thereby encouraging industrial growth, which is clearly associated with the problem of unemployment.

The remaining issue is free trade. I am concerned about developments in Europe because it is becoming one of the first major protectionist trade blocs. The Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation had its final meeting yesterday and shunned the concept of protectionism and the North American Free Trade Agreement is also avoiding that concept, but that is not true of the European Union, whose very inception was based on it—in those days, it was primarily aimed at the United States. That tradition of protectionism has not only been maintained but advanced. It is outrageous that the European Union has yet to ratify the Uruguay round of GATT, having caused all sorts of obstacles to its settlement, but that is very much a part

of its tradition of developing protectionist measures—not necessarily tariffs, but anti-dumping measures and other means of restricting trade.

In recent times, the most notable protectionist measures were aimed at the one area with which trade should have developed—the eastern European countries, for which protection has been potentially disastrous. If that protectionism was removed, it is one of the reasons why the common agricultural policy would have to go.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On the difficulties of balancing the budget, does my hon. Friend accept that the Chancellor's job will be much more difficult in view of the Red Book explanation that our net contributions to the European Community will double next year, from £1,700 million to more than £3,500 million, and that they will increase more in the following year? In such circumstances, should not the House be careful about adding further to that massive extra burden?

Mr. Spicer: Certainly, and I shall develop that argument, although I shall not detain the House. It will require a radical solution to deal with protectionism, centralisation, the lack of democracy and the problems caused by destroying the institutions of law and democracy in nation states—especially a state such as ours—and replacing them with a democratic vacuum in Europe. My hon. Friend mentioned problems of accountability with respect to payments to the European Union, which we now hear are often fraudulent. I agree with him.

The intergovernmental conference in 1996 will be our great opportunity for change, but I do not underestimate the difficulties that we will face. Laws are coming out of Brussels so fast. We must consider the fact of the acquis communautaire and the moves towards a single currency, for which some of my hon. Friends pressed—notably my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands. Mr. Kohl is firmly entrenched and is a man in a great hurry.

We are moving so fast towards a federal state of Europe, with the resultant consequences for protectionism and a lack of democracy, that two things must take place if we are to be effective in 1996. First, we must develop a firm idea of how the wheel of misfortune is to be reversed. It will certainly entail a radical change in the way in which the European Court—a legislature that is not accountable to anyone—can create its own laws and the way in which the Commission operates by initiating its own directives. The Commission, too, is accountable to no electorate. It will require radical changes in the way in which the common agricultural policy and budgeting processes work.

The Government will have to insist on radical changes. That means that the Conservative party must unite. It is difficult to see how any progress can be made without a united Conservative party. The party will have to unite rapidly around specific radical proposals to amend the treaty of Rome and it must unite with other European centre-right parties, which will be an enormous challenge. Any other problems are mere distractions. We do not want divisive discussions about consequential matters or issues relating to the past. Given the challenge that lies ahead, the issue is what will be the Government's core strategy during the next year or two. Great willpower and unity behind a clear, radical programme will be required.

7.15 pm

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the newest Member of the House, I looked forward to the Gracious Speech. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) referred to the ceremony that attaches to it. With many other hon. Members, I moved from this Chamber to the other place and was surprised to discover on my arrival that the Gracious Speech was in its closing stages. The hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) may have been disappointed that Post Office privatisation was not contained in it, but it is clear that the Government have run out of things with which to replace it.

I was happy to see that a number of pointers had been included, although I noted them with some trepidation as, in the past 15 years, even when the Government dealt with important issues, they sometimes had an unfailing knack of making the lives of those who were miserable even more miserable.

My general conclusion about the Gracious Speech is that it was a missed opportunity. As a new Member of Parliament I had hoped—perhaps naively—that the period of legislative calm would provide an opportunity to introduce many measures that would greatly benefit my constituents. Indeed, I had hoped that it would provide the opportunity to introduce legislation that would create jobs and tackle the current scenario, in which people who are already disadvantaged find themselves further disadvantaged because of their inability to find employment in, for example, the west of Scotland, where I live and where successive Government policies have resulted in the run-down of industries.

I was interested in the Prime Minister's opening remarks, in which he spoke of the democratic opportunities for Northern Ireland. With my colleagues, I welcome the moves for peace and for changing the democratic structure in Northern Ireland, but because of where I come from I have an interest in the development of democracy. I would have liked the Gracious Speech to propose legislation to allow legislative devolution in Scotland and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, rather than the present system under which powers are devolved to the civil service and we do not have an opportunity to debate issues of great significance to the Scottish people in the way that the House usually debates them.

I was reassured when the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) said that children's legislation is likely to be introduced this Session. It is a sad reflection on the Government that they did not see fit to include in the Gracious Speech references to a children Bill for Scotland as it is rare for such legislation to have cross-party support. Its inclusion would have been a pointer to the people of Scotland that the House was listening.

I was grateful to hear the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South refer to that matter in his witty speech. I noticed that he referred to my constituency, which showed tremendous bravery on his part as the Conservative party lost its deposit in the by-election at which I was elected to the House. I am greatly reassured that, in the hon. Gentleman's quest for four hamburgers, he did not sample

[Mrs. Helen Liddell]

the brew occasionally enjoyed by some of my constituents, which has caused me some anxiety in recent days.

I said that I welcome certain aspects of the Queen's Speech, one of which is the reference to pensions. I have a unique interest in that matter as I am probably the only hon. Member who is a Maxwell pensioner, having had the misfortune to transfer my pension funds into a Maxwell scheme. Those of us who have lived through those traumatic days realise that it is now almost three years since the discovery of misappropriation of funds both from Robert Maxwell's companies and pension funds associated with those companies. Considerable stress has been caused to people throughout that period. I look forward to seeing the terms of the legislation to protect the security of pensions, referred to in the Gracious Speech. I only regret that, over that three-year period, other companies have been able to exploit the loopholes in pensions legislation and many people tonight are as insecure as I am in thinking of their futures.

I look forward to the forthcoming legislative Session not just because it is my first opportunity to contribute fully in the debates of the House but because the "legislative calm" referred to by a Conservative Member will allow people to see the extent to which the Government have run out of steam after 15 years in office. That became obvious today when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition outlined the radical opportunities that the Labour party can provide for the future.

In my constituency tonight there will be no great rejoicing at the Queen's Speech because of the missed opportunities within it. During the forthcoming Session I hope to see more compassion for those who have been disadvantaged over the past 15 years. I hope that in Scotland, as in other parts of the United Kingdom, more emphasis will be placed on discussion of the constitution that governs this country, not least in relation to the operation of the House. As a lady Member from a constituency that is some 450 miles away, I am conscious of the fact that there are few lady Members on either side of the House and that the organisation of our business is sometimes a disincentive to participating in it.

The Queen's Speech was a missed opportunity to legislate for a Scottish Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin referred to the opportunity to change the constitutional operations of this House. The establishment of a Scottish Parliament would give us an opportunity to set an example and show how the operation of this House and the other place can move forward into the closing days of the century and, indeed, into the next.

7.25 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): On these occasions one is always tempted to discuss what is not in the Gracious Speech rather than simply concentrate on what is in it. I noticed that it contained no reference to matters such as aircraft, airports or airlines, so I hope that the House will forgive me if I raise a parochial point that needs to be established at this early stage of the Session.

Under the other measures that will be laid before us, the Government may be persuaded that the time has come to invite us to raise the air transport movement limit at Stansted airport, which was imposed as a result of the decision to allow the development of that airport. I hope that the Government will approach that matter with caution because, while the 78,000 figure that has been allowed clearly does not equate in practice to the 8 million passengers per annum throughput to which it was intended to relate, and some adjustment must be made to allow the airport to handle 8 million passengers in due course, the airport owners will obviously be tempted to approach Parliament only once to have the limit adjusted. They would like to see the limit taken away altogether so that they could provide unimpeded for up to 15 million passengers per annum. That option would not be well received in my constituency and I hope that the Government will not be persuaded that the time is opportune, during this Session, to make such a large concession to the airport owners. I fully accept that, at some stage, an adjustment will have to be made to the current figure.

Although it may not require a legislative move, we shall also expect to hear a Government response to the report of RUCATSE, the working party set up to look at runway capacity in the south east. We must face up to that question at some stage. We hope to hear from the Government soon whether and when we need further runway capacity.

We also expect a report from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on the air services agreement with the United States, which is of great commercial concern to this country. The generous offer which he made a few weeks ago to allow American carriers free access to our regional airports and Stansted airport appears to have received no response yet from the other side of the Atlantic and we hope that he can report some progress on that matter as it is crucial to not only our airports but our airlines.

We have reached the time when a Parliament starts to slow the pace, not because the Government are running out of ideas but because that is the right attitude to adopt in order deliberately to allow the measures taken earlier in the Parliament to take effect. We are seeking to do no more than reinforce or bolster what we have already set in hand. I find myself on the side of the consolidators as opposed to those who now want to make radical departures. The people whom I represent are not looking for great radical departures at this juncture. The most important subjects to the British people at this time include education, and the Government recognise that neither the professionals in education nor the parents whose children are in the system want more upheaval. They want a period of consolidation in education.

I welcomed the experiment of grant-maintained schools and I want it to work. I want it to have time to work. I want parents to be increasingly satisfied.

Talking to parents of children at schools that have become grant-maintained, I find that they are extremely pleased, and none of them would wish to revert to the previous position. Opposition Members may have a hard task, at the time of the next general election, to persuade the electorate that they should vote in such a way as to have their grant-maintained schools taken away. However, let us discover the results of that development. A clear advantage is already being demonstrated, and I wish that advantage to continue to be developed.

I would be happy with developments into more nursery education, but I do not want them to take place in such a way that we upset the pre-school playgroup movement,

which plays a very important part in pre-school education. I hope that we shall take a distinctly conservative approach to what is obviously an important area of education. Generally, I believe that stability should be stamped on our education policy.

Health is another cause of concern to our constituents. Following the reforms that we initiated in the health service, we are in transition. I do not think that we need too many more reforms on top of reforms, although it is reasonable to tighten up administration.

The Opposition should not suppose, mistakenly, that the only opinion among professionals in the national health service is that the Government have got it wrong. Many people would strongly argue that the trend of the Government reforms is correct, and is working, but that it will require more time for it to be demonstrated to work. People simply want assurance at present that what we have set our hand to is correct, that it will benefit them in the form of treatment that is available faster and as near to home as possible, and that they are in safe hands. I think that we can demonstrate that, given more time.

People are worried about law and order. We have made tremendous strides in legislation. We have taken actions, many of which are controversial and many of which are unacceptable to the Opposition, but we must allow them time to work.

People are worried about their safety. It will help the Conservative party if people begin to realise that there is a continuing downward trend in crime as a result of the measures that have already been taken—not additional measures. That trend has begun to appear at last in the past year. We want that to develop. It is the best thing that we can deliver to our constituents.

I am prepared to acknowledge the modest further privatisation measures in the Gracious Speech. However, Conservative Members should acknowledge that the public have been slow to recognise the benefits of privatisation. One has to drag it out of people that steps that we took to put British Airways into the private sector have been enormously successful, transforming what had been a crippled airline in the public sector, costing us thousands of pounds, into one of the most profitable airlines in the world. When one challenges people on British Telecom, one can cause them to say, "Ah yes, perhaps it has improved rather dramatically". However, at the time of the privatisations there was no great enthusiasm for them, and we know that there has not been any enthusiasm in the Labour party. We should own up to the fact that railway privatisation has yet to be proved.

I am not distressed that the Royal Mail privatisation is the absent course in the banquet of the Gracious Speech. There was a perfectly good commercial case for the privatisation of the Royal Mail, but most of our constituents found it difficult to go along with that. I think, therefore, that a wise pragmatic step has been taken. Let us take the rest of the time in this Parliament to demonstrate that what we have done is working and showing benefits. That will help to prove the credentials of our philosophy against the credentials of the Labour party. We need to demonstrate results.

One of the important subjects that will be discussed in the rest of this Parliament will be the Government's fiscal performance. Undoubtedly, the present unpopularity of the Conservative Government is associated with the fact that taxes have increased, contrary to the expectation at the time of the 1992 general election. In so far as the Opposition wish to be gleeful about that, they are recognising that higher taxes are not popular. They have tried to capitalise on the unpopularity of the Government in that respect, but it will be interesting to see where they end up with their policies, because every word of policy that they breathe has a large expenditure tag attached. It is hard to see the Opposition being on the low tax side of the equation when it comes to the test.

I feel that the electorate wants to return to a low tax regime, and that is what we must deliver. The Labour party is in no position to say that it can deliver a low tax regime. In the Finance Bill presented in this Session, there will not be radical moves towards cuts in the burden of taxation, but if we are sensible—if we consolidate on the progress that we are making—I think that we and the electorate can expect benefits in the rest of the current Parliament.

We should place our greatest emphasis on ensuring that British industry is able to capture a larger market share for its goods in the world. I do not believe that it is possible to achieve the continuing economic growth and increasing employment to which the Gracious Speech refers unless British industry performs more and more effectively. Therefore, it is crucial that the initiatives taken by the Department of Trade and Industry are allowed to develop and take effect in helping all sectors of British industry, small and large, to improve their performance overseas. We must again ensure steady improvement in our training and education policies to help on the supply side and—I hope that this will be included in the Finance Bill—there must be further help for small businesses, which play such an important part in our export effort.

However, we are entitled to recognise that output is up, productivity is up and expenditure on research and development—which is crucial—is up 9 per cent. compared with last year. That is where the success of Government will be measured, and we must try to ensure that that measurement gets bigger and bigger in the remaining years of the current Parliament.

Finally, I refer to the European Communities (Finance) Bill. It seems to me, I say to my hon. Friends, that we are involved in that case with a treaty commitment. If members of the Conservative party believe in the rule of law, what greater demonstration can there be of our adherence to that philosophy than if we are able to deliver on a commitment that we have made in the name of the country?

Of course it is right—and I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister laid such emphasis on it—that we must attack the mismanagement, and the scandalous fraud, that takes place in the Community, and we may need greater powers to do so effectively. However, we have to tackle fraud in our social security system in this country, and our answer to that is not to tell people who ask for more help in social security, "I am sorry, you cannot have any because there is so much fraud going on. You must try to get it back from the money that has been wasted on fraud"—of course not. We have to fulfil our social security obligation while we continue to attack the fraud and waste in the social security system. That seems to me the right parallel for us to adopt in terms of the financing of the European Community.

It worries me that people use the arguments about fraud to disguise thinly their opposition to our being in the Community. When we are trying to help British

[Mr. Alan Haselhurst]

business—because it is on the performance of British business that we depend—it is nonsense to be flirting with the idea that we might not be members of the Community, or that we might be in some second rank of the Community. It creates consternation among our partners in the Community, and confusion among the business people of this country.

We should recognise that there are enormous opportunities for British business in Europe. It should be our priority, during the current Session of Parliament, to ensure that business has the opportunity to maximise those opportunities and thereby obtain progressively better results.

The Government have a clear agenda. That agenda has been set in previous Sessions. Today's Gracious Speech is a supplement to what we have already embarked on. In the speech by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, I heard nothing of an alternative to the agenda that we have set. His was a kind of staccato manifesto-style speech: he tried to include every buzz word from motherhood to apple pie, but he had no coherent strategy to put before the British people.

It is hard to find an issue, theme or principle on which the Opposition will base their objection to the measures in the Queen's Speech. I fear that they will descend into opportunism, simply trying to pick off points where they can—hoping, perhaps, that the economic recovery will fail and they will be able to cash in. It should be the Government's business to ensure that the economic recovery does not fail, and to do all in their power to help British business and industry to produce that result.

7.39 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I welcome the Queen's Speech. Its approach to Government policy for the coming Session strikes me as clear and sensible. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), I support the provision of an opportunity for consolidation for both Government and nation. The speech contained measures that will help to strengthen the work that the Government have already done.

Let me begin by commenting on the requests for a change in the approach adopted by the Child Support Agency. A large number of my constituents have a legitimate case against the way in which the CSA has treated them, and there is no doubt that administrative changes are needed; however, changes are also needed in the criteria that are being applied in a number of instances. I am particularly concerned about the way in which the agency overturns—sometimes in the most draconian way—clean-break agreements on the basis of which people have planned the lives of not only their previous families, but the families that they may have in the future. Surely it is not constructive to cause difficulties for both families. I call for considerable changes, on the lines suggested by the Select Committee report.

I also feel strongly that staff and pensioners in pension schemes should be fully represented on pension fund boards. It is vital for legislation to provide that opportunity for full and effective representation. It is interesting to note that the first thing that Robert Maxwell did when he embarked on his nefarious activity of misusing his companies' pension funds was to get rid of the employee representatives on the boards of those funds. We must put that right, and give pensioners the security that they seek, if we are to progress with what I consider to be a very positive result of the Government's approach over the past 15 years—the increase in the number of people who take out pensions for themselves, and in the number of companies that provide additional pension schemes. The proof of the pudding must be in the eating, and people will feel secure only if they are presented with evidence of success.

I welcome the enlargement of the European Community, which has always struck me as right. I am delighted that the Government are pressing forward; we have already seen the result of this country's leadership in that regard, and the leadership of the Prime Minister. I also think, however, that enlargement can work only if we build flexibility into the Europe that Britain wants. We need to be sovereign states working in partnership.

A counter-argument has been advanced; it was mentioned today in an intervention by a Liberal Democrat, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). That argument is that stronger structures will be needed if an enlarged Europe is to work properly. There may be some truth in part of it, but if we try to tie arrangements too tightly through Brussels, we shall not help individual member states whose nationalism remains strong—as, indeed, it should; and it will surely never be stronger than it is in Britain. We must respond to the idea of national sovereignty and patriotism: it is not possible to throw that away and retain the people's support. The closeness of the vote in Sweden demonstrates that. I support the opinion expressed today that it is common sense to view European developments sceptically, but that does not mean—certainly in my case—that one is opposed in any way to the European ideal or the European intention.

So far, we have not seen enough evidence of where the concept of subsidiarity is actually working. I hoped that by now—following Maastricht—we would have seen a raft of examples, produced by our Government, of changes in legislation that had been in the pipeline, but would not now be introduced, as a result of the acceptance of the subsidiarity concept. There is not enough of that yet, but I believe that only such examples will enable us to carry the electorate with the argument for the European Community in the long term.

I was pleased to hear the assurance that, for example, the recent concern all over the country about herbal medicines will not turn out to be justified. As Member of Parliament for Sevenoaks, however, I cannot let the debate pass without airing the concern first expressed today by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) about the fact that British acorns from British oak trees are now being targeted as being unsuitable for commercial sales within the European Community because our acorns grow trees that are less straight than those elsewhere.

If such controls were imposed, they could have a major effect on Britain's landscape. It is a complete turnround: in the past, because of the curves in their structure, British oaks were ideal for the building of beams and timbers for houses, ships and wagons.

I am not saying that present needs are the same as they were when we built a fleet to defeat Napoleon, but surely this is a matter for free choice in Britain by British people, rather than for interference by Brussels. Unless the

position is changed, it is unrealistic for any of us—from the Prime Minister down—to accept that the European Community will benefit our country, and that it is not trying to impose legislation that we could well do without. Subsidiarity—yes: let us have much more of it.

As for the issue of the EC budget, I agree with those who have argued that it is a treaty obligation. Surely, having basically supported the Prime Minister's actions at Maastricht—and Conservative Members certainly did—the House has no option other than to support the agreement; nor should we do otherwise. We should, however, argue strongly for heavy penalties to be imposed both on countries that do not police fraudulent activity properly, and on companies that are found to have carried out such activity. That must be the quid pro quo for Britain to feel that the European Community is beneficial to us.

The Queen's Speech refers to continuing with

"firm financial policies designed to support continuing economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation."

Other hon. Members have mentioned the importance of lowering taxation overall. The Conservative party believes in that and will carry it out when it is prudent to do so.

I should like to air what I accept is not always the current philosophy among Conservatives. I do not feel that it is inevitable that a Conservative Government should take income tax only one way. Income tax is a tried and proven method of raising public finance. It is generally regarded as fair because it is a progressive tax and it is effective and flexible. I would be uneasy if my party felt that the extension or deepening of VAT was the only way to raise taxes rather than being prepared to raise income tax if that became necessary.

If we are to win back support in Britain, we will need to lower tax overall before the next general election. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on his approach so far. As a result of the Government's sensible financial policies and with the recession ending, production in British industry increasing and an excellent export record, I believe that by cutting public spending and building up the tax base with a revived British industry, we shall be able to bring tax down before the next general election. I am confident of that.

I am talking in the longer term, when Conservatives are in power yet again as I hope and intend that we shall be. There is nothing historic in Conservative philosophy or practice which ties us to look only for lower and lower levels of income tax, irrespective of the position of the economy. Income tax is a flexible tool that can be raised or lowered sensibly. That flexibility is not necessarily present in the application of VAT.

I do not back off from the fact that I was a supporter of the imposition of VAT on fuel. However, when one imposes a tax that requires the provision of relief for a large proportion of the population on whom that tax will bear unreasonably heavily, it raises the question of whether that tax method is the most sensible one available.

I welcome the move to establish new arrangements for reforming the agricultural tenancy laws in England and Wales. That has been on the agenda for a long time. I represent a constituency with a considerable rural element and I know that there have been discussions between the Government, the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and many other interested parties. Those discussions have produced a reasonably agreed way forward. That is an example of the Government taking trouble with their legislation before introducing it and I welcome that positive step forward.

Part of the Queen's Speech deals with lessening the levels of management in the national health service and with the provisions for mentally ill patients. I share the concern of many at the increase in the number of managers in the health service. I accept that we started with a service in which there was very little idea about how much it cost to deliver services to patients. That had to change. In order to achieve that we needed people with financial and administrative expertise and with the authority to make the necessary changes in the way in which the health service was run and in the provision of information on which management could make informed decisions. All that requires increased numbers of management. However, that must not be allowed to get out of hand. There is no doubt that there is some public concern about this.

General practitioners are burdened by the amount of information that they have to produce. They accept that some of it may be necessary and, in many cases, they are even prepared to accept that most of it may be necessary. However, they ask for increased feedback. They want to know what the information is used for and whether it is of real value because its collection takes up a lot of time. It is important that the steps that the Government take should lessen the layers of management. I hope that the changes will focus on the need to ensure that all the information that is being collected is shown to be useful. That knowledge must be fed back to the people involved in its collection.

I am concerned about the operation of the health service for the mentally ill. There will be new legislation to deal with the help given to people with a serious mental disorder who have been discharged from hospital. The new legislation will ensure that they are cared for under supervision. My plea is that my Government ensure that the proposals are practical. However good the system of supervision may be on paper, it is no good if it cannot be delivered in practice. The professionals in the mental health service wanted to get patients out into the community wherever that was possible. However, perhaps nobody appreciated how difficult it would be for the most seriously ill to be supervised effectively. The legislation will be aimed at plugging those holes to ensure that supervision is more effective than it has been, but it must be practical.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My hon. Friend is making a number of points with which I agree warmly. Provision for the mentally ill is particularly important and I hope that my hon. Friend and the Government will realise that practices vary across the country. In some areas, including my area of Somerset, the health and social services authorities have done well in coping with the opportunities that they have. In other areas, particularly nearer the home counties, things have not been so satisfactory. I hope that when implementing the legislation the Government will listen to those who deal with these matters, particularly organisations such as the National Schizophrenia Fellowship.

Mr. Wolfson: I agree that there is a variety of provision and that is to be expected at this stage in a new

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development. That does not suggest that the policy is wrong. There is a recent example in my constituency where a mentally unwell patient has been strongly supported by his local community. There could hardly be a community in a small area that is better able to offer support and the people are positive about wishing to provide that support. Nevertheless, there is great unease and uncertainty among local people about what sort of supervision is available for that individual and how it is being carried out. If that is a difficulty in the situation that I have described, how very much greater the difficulty will be in inner cities, where resources are stretched in a major way and where large numbers of people require the services. I ask for that argument to be given careful attention when the legislation is introduced. One is looking for practical, not theoretical answers.

I welcome the commitment to involve the private sector to build the high-speed rail link between London and the channel tunnel, for which I have argued in the House for a long time. At the beginning, I said that the project would require public money if it were to be achieved. I proved to be right on that. There will be a partnership between the private sector and the Government to achieve that link, which is proper. We need to achieve that as rapidly as possible.

A number of hon. Members have referred to the lack of a measure to privatise the Post Office. I supported privatisation and I regret that it is not being introduced, but I am not getting hugely fussed about the matter. Conservative Members exercised a proper role in arguing against privatisation. The point was made earlier in the debate that we should demonstrate the effectiveness of our privatisation policy—perhaps British Telecom is the best example of all—when we consider people's common concerns about privatisation of the Post Office. Similar concerns were aired at the time of privatisation of British Telecom, which has been hugely effective. I hope that we shall return to the issue.

I welcome greatly the policy in Northern Ireland. I pay great tribute to the achievement of the Prime Minister and of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in making the opportunity for the peace process. The benefit from achieving peace not only to the Province, but to the British taxpayer, will be enormous.

We have all been affected by concerns about terrorism close to home and further away. The way in which the people of the Province have continued their lives, business life, education and day-to-day living, despite terrorism, is remarkable. They have demonstrated, as I hope the House has and will continue to do, that terrorism will not triumph. All hon. Members knew that there would never be a military solution in Northern Ireland. It required a political solution and we are moving effectively towards achieving that. Long may the process continue positively.

On crime, I note that, despite a number of measures mentioned to promote law and order reform, no mention is made of what I consider to be one of the major drawbacks to achieving public confidence in the law process: delays in bringing cases to court and in bringing them to completion and sentence. Often, completion takes place so long after the crime has been committed that it is even more difficult for the public to appreciate the connection. If attention were paid to gearing the courts and our criminal justice system to deal with prosecutions with far greater dispatch, that would act as an increased deterrent.

The legal profession does this country no service when it makes too much use of delaying tactics. Obviously, that should be balanced with the desire for fairness and for the opportunity to prepare a just and proper case and to argue it in court. All too often, however, delays are sought and, in the end, they do not do the name of British justice any good.

I strongly support the measures outlined in the Queen's Speech and I shall look forward to supporting the Government.

8.4 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): As a member of the Opposition Whips Office, I had not expected to speak tonight, but I am not one to let an opportunity pass. Opposition Whips are less restricted than Government Whips in their capacity to speak in the Chamber. There is a good reason for that, and it can be summed up simply: Government Whips are paid and Opposition Whips work voluntarily. I do not apologise for taking this opportunity to comment on the Gracious Speech.

I disagreed with much of the speech made by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson), but I agreed with two points: first, that involving the English oak. The fact that European Community legislation was due to affect it was news to me. Before I came to the House, I was a lecturer in horticulture, and one of the characteristics of the English oak, whose botanical name is Quercus robur, is its distinctive shape. No amount of EC legislation will change that; only prolonged and extensive genetic engineering over many years could do so.

Secondly, I agreed with the hon. Gentleman when he said that hon. Members on both sides of the House support the moves to achieve peace in Northern Ireland. We watch that matter with great interest.

The Gracious Speech was sparse. Perhaps of necessity, I shall concentrate on some of the things that should have been included. It is amazing that the Government have run short of legislation after 15 years in office. That has happened largely, perhaps, because they have become so enshrined in their own dogma that they do not have the capacity for new or original thought.

It is sad that the Government have run short of steam at this stage. Largely because of their having been in office for 15 years, the need for a progressive legislative programme has never been greater. It is clear that they do not have the capacity to deliver such a programme. I regard the Prime Minister's threat of an early general election more as a promise. I hope that the Government will move aside and let the Opposition implement a progressive programme of legislation.

The Gracious Speech has all the signs that the Government have run out of steam. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), who hopes to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) are at the vanguard of the push for a Scottish Children Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) is a great specialist in that sector.

In Scotland, there has been great all-party demand for a Scottish Children Bill. All sides have agreed that it is necessary. I understand that suggestions have been made to the Government through the usual channels that the new procedures in the Scottish Grand Committee might allow much of the discussion on such a legislative programme to be kept off the Floor of the House so that we could make progress. We all know how much a Scottish Bill is needed.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for referring to that Bill. He will know that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) sat on the Committee that considered the Children Act 1989. The Government promised at the time that it would be extended to Scotland. We are still waiting for that promise to be kept. Anything that my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) could do to expedite the measure would be most helpful.

Mr. McMaster: As I have told my hon. Friend before, I have read his excellent and harrowing book on the Cleveland case. It exemplified the need for a Children Act in England and Wales. Following the Orkney case, I believe that we very much need such an Act in Scotland.

It is sad that that has been referred to today only by nods and winks. It is not in the Gracious Speech itself, but we had a nod and a wink from the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), who seconded the motion and said that it was hoped that something would be done. But that will not be taken as a guarantee by anyone on the Opposition benches or anyone outside the House, because we want to see exactly what a Scottish Children Bill might contain.

All Scottish Members should note that a draft Bill is, in fact, lying on the Table and is ready to be picked up and debated, because the whole of the movement, which encompasses all the political parties in Scotland, has been working on this for some time.

Since entering the House, and indeed before, I have always taken a particular interest in the rights of disabled people, and until recently I was secretary of the all-party disablement group. I give a very cautious welcome to the fact that discrimination against disabled people is at last mentioned in a Gracious Speech. However, I am a bit suspicious about exactly what the Government propose.

The Prime Minister said today that the Bill would include legislation to outlaw discrimination in employment. I must tell the Prime Minister and Conservative Members that one cannot outlaw discrimination in a piecemeal fashion. One either believes that disabled people are full and equal citizens or one does not. There are no halfway houses.

We must try to get across to the Government—after the disgraceful debacle earlier this year on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—that disability should no longer be a health issue. It should no longer be an employment issue. It is, quite simply, a rights issue. It is an issue of disabled people having the right to be full and equal citizens.

I can tell the Prime Minister that anything less will not be welcomed by the disability lobby in the United Kingdom. Some 6.5 million people in this country are disabled. There are 651 parliamentary constituencies. Simple arithmetic tells us that all of us represent about 10,000 disabled people. That is perhaps something that Conservative Members would be wise to take into account as they consider what form a disabled persons Bill should take.

I recall that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill failed not because the Government argued against its substance, but because it ran out of time. It was talked out. We all remember what happened, and it was a disgrace to this place. I could not help thinking about it during the summer recess. The Bill needed only one and a half minutes to get through. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry) said that he would accept the Government's amendments, yet the Bill ran out of time immediately before the House rose for its 13-week recess.

Those arguments will not wash again with disabled people. If the Government are opposed to civil rights for disabled people, they should have the guts to say so, and to vote that way.

The only reason of any substance given for opposition to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was its costs. It should be noted that its costs, as portrayed by the Government, were calculated on a cost analysis, not a cost benefit analysis. The way in which those figures were calculated was very dubious: there was double accounting, and the cost analysis assumed a time scale that was never assumed by the Bill. Has the cost of the proposed Bill been assessed? Will it be assessed more accurately and more fairly than the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was last year?

The House could do a lot better for disabled people. Today I had the pleasure of bringing my mother and father to the state opening of Parliament. My father, a fairly fit and agile man, who nevertheless occasionally needs the use of a walking stick, came through the Norman porch and was asked by the attendant whether his walking stick was absolutely essential. My father said that he thought that he could manage the stairs without it, so they took it from him. He managed to climb the stairs.

Later, after we came out of the Royal Gallery, by the route suggested on his ticket, we had to go downstairs to collect his stick and were told that it had been moved upstairs. Staff at the Houses of Parliament are taking walking sticks away from people and telling them to go upstairs to collect them. If that is our attitude towards disabled people, discrimination legislation is necessary.

A better example than that, perhaps, was the massive lobby earlier this year in Westminster Hall. The Hall was packed with disabled people. It was the biggest lobby, perhaps, that the House has seen for some years. An announcement portrayed the Government's attitude towards disabled people to me. It said, "Any disabled person needing to use the toilet should do so now, because the disabled toilets are about to be removed." If that is not an exact sign of the Government's attitude towards disabled people, I do not know what is.

I shall also mention, in relation to disabled people, the forgotten army of carers, who we all have in our constituencies. Often—not by choice, but because a loved one becomes ill with a physical or mental disability, or both—they are forced to spend 24 hours a day caring for their loved one. There is obviously a need for resources, and we know that they must be examined closely.

There is a need for all the Government agencies, and the local government agencies and voluntary organisations, to adopt a flexible approach to care, but

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they cannot do that unless they have a framework in which to provide that care. There is so often a need for respite care for the carers. Sometimes, a week or a fortnight's break could make all the difference.

I shall mention another glaring absence from the Gracious Speech. Many hon. Members, on both sides of the House, participated last Sunday in the armistice services throughout the country. I was hoping to participate in the three services in my constituency, as I have done for the past 20 years, but unfortunately was on a plane returning from America that was diverted to Gatwick airport, and so did not arrive in Paisley in time.

Many of us would have participated in those services. It is not good enough for any of us to remember those veterans once a year. What is urgently needed—the British Legion tells us this, as do organisations such as the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association—is a Department of Veterans' Affairs, not at Cabinet level, but at one removed; a sub-department of the Ministry of Defence.

At the moment, veterans of the armed services have to find their way through a maze, dealing with many Government Departments and sub-departments to try to sort out pensions, or disability allowances, perhaps to claim a medal, or whatever. There is a glaring need for such a Department to be set up as a one-stop shop.

America has met the need for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation for the disabled and a Department of Veterans' Affairs ahead of us. Not only that, but America did so under President Bush, who was hardly noted for his left-wing credentials. He thought that those things were important enough to be done. I urge the Government to take a similar attitude.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) spoke about the housing situation in Scotland, which has become worse and worse over the past 15 or 20 years. I see that the Minister responsible for housing in Scotland is in his place, and I acknowledge that many good things have happened, too. I especially welcome his recent announcement concerning investment in my constituency.

I want to draw the attention of the House to what is happening to Scottish Homes tenants throughout Scotland. Scottish Homes is a large housing provider, and provides investment for the private and voluntary sectors. It has now decided that it no longer wishes to be a landlord. The members of its board are all appointees of the Secretary of State, and although the Government claim that there is a degree of independence, I find that rather difficult to believe.

I am not entirely happy with the decision, but I could live with it if Scottish Homes intended to give tenants a real choice as to who their new landlord would be. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Springburn said, tenants have been told that they will certainly not be allowed to opt in to local authority control, even if that is their desire. They will not be given more than one take-it-or-leave-it choice. Scottish Homes local management will decide which option to put to the tenants in an area, and the tenants will be able to decide whether to accept it.

That is reminiscent of some of the elections in the worst days of the Soviet Union. I do not say that those people should be forced to remain Scottish Homes tenants; I do not even say that they should be forced to move to local authority control. But if they are to be moved at all, they should at least be given a real choice. They should have not one take-it-or-leave-it, like-it-or-lump-it choice, but a genuine choice.

Furthermore, local authority housing in Scotland would not qualify for the additional resources that will be made available to the new housing associations that win ballots. That is the spectacle in the Scottish Homes areas at the moment. The management have told the tenants that they will offered a new housing association, and that, if they accept that choice, they will get the advantage of additional resources not available to local authorities. But if the choice is to be free and fair, it should include more options, and there should be a level playing field, with the extra resources being made available to local authorities, too.

One of my pet hates is hearing people tell me that they are fed up with paying council tax to subsidise council housing. I am not sure what happens in England and Wales, but for several years the housing revenue accounts in Scotland have been completely self-financing. Many of the people who make that complaint are owner-occupiers, as I am, and we get mortgage tax relief. We benefit from the Exchequer, whereas, in proportion to their income, council house tenants are perhaps the most heavily taxed people in Britain. That must be changed.

My speech would not be complete unless I mentioned the Child Support Agency. Most other hon. Members who have spoken so far have mentioned it. I shall not dwell on the subject, because many of the arguments already advanced have reflected what I wanted to say. The agency has caused genuine heartbreak to many people. There are many stories in the newspapers about people attempting suicide, sometimes successfully, and at least some of those stories are only too credible.

The Government must deal with the problem. They must examine the clean-break arrangements that many people made when they were first estranged. They must take into consideration the problems of fathers and mothers whose children live some distance away. If those people are to be caring parents, they need some resources to visit their children or to allow the children to visit them. Those are just a couple of examples of the aspects that need to be dealt with.

There is also the gross inefficiency of the administration of the Child Support Agency. I am fed up with getting standard letters in reply to the detailed accounts of cases in which I have tried to encapsulate the particular problems of a constituent. The agency's replies seem to consist of standard paragraphs in a random order, and that is not good enough.

I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) is in the Chamber. He has fought a concerted campaign about how difficult it is for hon. Members to get through to Ministers now, because we are fobbed off and our letters passed on to executive agencies. That is bad enough, but often the executive agencies do not even have the courtesy to reply to our questions. That is not good enough in a healthy democracy.

Another problem that needs an early resolution is the continuing legal battle between the Government and the European Court about women currently in receipt of invalidity benefit who now find that they are not entitled to it until they are 65, so they cannot pick up the benefit when they retire. I am sure that hon. Members will have received many letters on that subject. The problem desperately needs to be sorted out; there is no doubt that it is an example of discrimination against women.

Perhaps above all else, I should have liked to hear in the Gracious Speech an announcement of a measure to abandon the Government's plans to impose VAT at 17.5 per cent. on fuel. However, we live in hope—although not much hope—that there may be something in the Budget to deal with that. If VAT is imposed, it will cause genuine hardship to many people, especially pensioners, throughout the country.

I had a letter today from South End Elderly Forum, in my constituency, asking a pertinent question—when the pension increase has been assessed at 2.2 per cent., why are Members of the House of Commons getting an increase of 4.7 per cent.? The Government might find that difficult to explain to the pensioners, although we know why it is happening. It is because the Government broke the link between pensions and prices or incomes, whichever was the higher—a decision that has caused untold hardship.

I shall finish with a comment that I hope has some support on both sides of the House; it should have. It is on a subject that we mention little enough in the House. Many of us come from a local government background, and we should not forget that background when we come here. In the light of the current debate in the press about Members' interests, I do not think that any Member of the House should feel hard done by in comparison with the lot of elected local councillors.

Local councillors often work 50, 60 or 70 hours a week—the equivalent of full-time work—for an income of £60 or £70 a week. It is time that the House recognised that elected local councillors have a job to do. In many large authorities, it is an extremely responsible job, and it cannot be done on a part-time or totally voluntary basis.

I hope that, during the year, the Government will find time to examine the remuneration of councillors—a suggestion that has some support among councillors of all political parties. Too often, councillors are at the sharp end. They get all the criticism and quite often they are blamed for things that are the fault of this place. Yet they do not get any recompense.

I remember when I was leader of a local authority and was working as a lecturer in a Glasgow college. One day, as I left the college, the principal said to me, "Is that you going away already?" I got to the council buildings and met the provost, who said, "Is that you just here?" That is the pressure on many elected local representatives.

The Gracious Speech refers to a Bill to introduce a job seeker's allowance. I wonder whether some Conservative Members should declare an interest in the matter. I very much suspect that, after the next general election, many of them will be the first to benefit from the allowance.

8.30 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): A number of the points made by the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) will be echoed in my speech. However, I point out to him that the Labour party has, I believe, now receded from its original pledge to restore the pensions-earnings link, for good spending policy reasons. All pensioners should be aware of that.

I am not one who believes that a programme packed full of legislation necessarily means a better-administered country. Debating, and passing, new legislation is not the only task of this House. This year gives us a considerable opportunity, through Question Time, through set-piece debates and especially through the work of the Select Committees, to play an important part in improving the administration of the country and in improving the performance of existing legislation by ensuring that it is implemented properly.

It is fair to say that Bills needed to be amended heavily, either in their later stages in this Chamber or in the other place. Some legislation has passed on to the statute book in a not entirely satisfactory state. A number of speakers have referred to the Child Support Act 1991, which was passed just before the general election. The Opposition had every reason to spot the deficiencies in that Act and to make much of them. They fell down on their job just as, I am sorry to say, some of my right hon. and hon. Friends fell down on their job in terms of not spotting the deficiencies, especially those relating to the financial formula, which have now become all too clear.

I hope that an effort will be made early this Session to implement the recommendations of the Select Committee on Social Security. I hope that that can be done without legislation because it will mean that it can be done speedily. Whether or not the recommendations require legislation, they need to be carried out. That is an important objective for which I and a number of my hon. Friends shall look this year.

Having expressed a caveat about legislation, I stress that I welcome a number of measures in the Gracious Speech. Two especially will be welcomed in my constituency and in the south-west generally. They are the proposed legislation on agricultural tenancies and—I understand that this will be included in the legislation on the environment agency—the measure to establish national parks as free-standing agencies. Exmoor national park is in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), who has been promoted, made a vigorous attempt in the previous Session to ensure the passage of the National Parks Bill, which originated in another place and which would have achieved that effect. Such legislation is Government legislation and that is why it is right to go down that route.

Another item that will be welcomed in my constituency is the intention to legislate for disabled people. I was one of the Members who came to the House on a Friday prepared to support my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) if his motion came to the vote. It did not. I wanted to see progress made in the previous Session on this important issue. I hope that we shall see significant but realistic progress in the current Session. The work and the eventual report of the Select Committee on Employment, of which I am a member, will be helpful and relevant to that legislation.

I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, on the Front Bench because I want to enter a caveat about a matter related to disablement. I see in the press reports that the Government are considering, perhaps as a sop to some of

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the dissidents in this party—although I cannot imagine any mentality that would regard it as an attractive sop—doing something rather drastic to the industrial injuries arrangements.

I should welcome clarification and great care on the matter from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. I would not necessarily object to taking the provision of compensation for industrial injuries away from the taxpayer. However, various questions are begged. If, for example, responsibility fell entirely on an employer, it is possible that a small business, hard pressed financially, could go bankrupt as a result of a significant compensation claim. I do not find acceptable the suggestion that I have seen in the press that employees who are injured should get compensation only if they are prepared to sue their employer. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) made the point earlier about the delays and difficulties in getting litigation into the courts and we are all aware of the difficulties in getting legal aid in such matters. We must be careful about that matter and I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary listening to that point.

I also welcome the proposed legislation to promote increased competition in the gas industry. That will help to reduce costs to consumers, which is extremely relevant at present as we are moving towards, probably, a further increase in VAT on gas and electricity, as the hon. Member for Paisley, South mentioned. We need to be vigilant to ensure that small-scale users of gas benefit from the legislation. I do not mean only poor people who, for various reasons, use little gas. Let us consider, for example, a household that has only recently been connected to gas. A number of its implements may run on electricity or oil, so it will not use much gas. We must also be careful about the possibility, which has been rumoured, of increasing standing charges. There is much argument about standing charges. I believe that, at a modest level, they are understandable and justifiable, but I would not want to see a hike in standing charges as part of the process.

I also welcome the proposed legislation on the national health service. The measure on NHS management will give us the opportunity to bear down on the cost of administration and on the numbers involved at all levels, not only at regional level. It will also give us the opportunity to explain why, on the face of it, there has been an increase in managers. I believe that it is a way in which to ensure that this huge service, which costs so much money, continues to work efficiently—indeed, more efficiently.

I also welcome, as I said during an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks, the proposed legislation to ensure proper care for people with mental disorders who are discharged from hospital. There is enormous concern and sensitivity about the issue in my constituency and elsewhere. The Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration has considered one or two cases in which things have gone wrong, in that people with mental disabilities have not been cared for properly. The proposed legislation provides an important opportunity which we shall want to pursue.

One other point on the NHS relates to what I want to say later on privatisation. It is occasionally suggested, as it was with regard to the railways or the Post Office, that the only way in which to get significant efficiency improvements in public services or public utilities is to transfer ownership—to privatise. It may, regrettably, be true that that is the only way in which to get improvements. My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) mentioned significant improvements in British Airways and British Telecom.

However, if that were true, it would be a damning indictment on those responsible for managing those services. The national health service, we must remember, is a clear example of a public service which will remain in the public sector. The Prime Minister gave a very passionate personal pledge, based on his own experience, to that effect at Bournemouth last month. Yet, while remaining in the public sector, the national health service is improving its efficiency and the reforms that we are carrying through are designed to improve that efficiency. A number of us would never have backed those reforms if we had not believed that they would improve efficiency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden also made the point that, on Europe, he believed that the Prime Minister was right to treat the Bill mentioned in the Gracious Speech as an issue of confidence. The Prime Minister was right to make that clear now and not to wait until people take up positions and mess about over the coming weeks because it is not like the other legislation that will come before the House. It is legislation designed to implement an international agreement. In effect, our honour is involved, as my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden said. That does not mean to say that we all profess ourselves happy with the way in which the European Community organises its finances. Several hon. Members have referred to the appalling level of fraud in the European Community. We must make parallel progress on fraud and increasing the resources of the European Community.

There are a number of nonsensical ways in which the Community organises its finances. For example, I understand that tobacco growing receives a vast subsidy from the European Community, in the common agricultural policy, yet on the other hand, individual countries—it is a very prominent problem in this country and among the medical profession—are taxing the consumption of tobacco so as to reduce consumption. Indeed, we are constantly lobbied about the desirability of banning tobacco advertising.

Another example of nonsense in the European Community is that the system of raising money for the Community is not related to the gross domestic product of the individual nations. It is an historical anomaly. It was originally related, I believe, to the extent of trade which countries had outside Europe. That was the situation when we joined in 1973. It is now 21 years later and we need to begin to move towards a fairer and better-based system of raising resources for the EC.

While on the subject of the European Community, I shall mention another matter. The hon. Member for Paisley, South referred to ex-service men. Regrettably, over the past few days it seems that cases involving pregnant service women will come before the courts and may involve the payment of telephone-number sums of money to certain individuals. I and my constituents find it extraordinarily offensive that the taxpayer should be milked of that money, when at the same time there must be thousands of veterans who were honourably wounded and injured in their country's service, through both the

great wars and in other disputes, who on the whole have received very small sums of compensation for those injuries. It would be an extraordinary nonsense if our courts were forced by foreign legal processes to disgorge vast sums to those particular individuals.

The Minister knows that I am a positive European. I very much support progress towards an effective and progressive European Community. I would be reasonably relaxed if the House were, in due course, to take deliberate decisions on single currency, monetary union, defence community and such matters, provided that they were taken deliberately. The idea that our legislation, which we have deliberately passed, should be set aside by individuals appealing to a foreign court is offensive. The example of the pregnant service women is even more offensive and I hope that it can be averted in some way. Otherwise, it would form a thread, more than the other issues affecting Europe, which, if pulled, could bring down the whole paraphernalia, which I would regret very much. It would cause tremendous hostility to European progress in this country.

The Leader of the Opposition reinforced, I am sorry to say, the myth generated by the media and by some of my hon. Friends about Post Office privatisation. He said, and the media said at the time, that 340 Conservative Members were as keen as mustard on Post Office privatisation and that only a tiny group, the members of which could be counted on the fingers of one hand, were spoil sports and prevented the progression of that measure. I was involved in some of the meetings and discussions which took place and I must say that that is complete rubbish. Not only were the intended dissidents much more numerous, but many of those who, out of loyalty, might well have supported Post Office privatisation, would have done so reluctantly. Therefore, I welcome the omission of that measure from the Gracious Speech.

I read in *The Sunday Times*, so it must be true, that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who was one of those critical of the Government's retreat over Post Office privatisation, is about to produce a pamphlet which, among other things, will call on Conservative activists in the constituencies to play a role in electing the leadership of the party. At our leisure, we may care to reflect that the Conservative party has been in government for 15 years and the Labour party has been in opposition for 15 years. I believe that there is a causal connection between that fact and the power given to activists in the Labour party. Some power has always been there and, of course, some power just after 1979 was brought in to elect the leaders.

Whatever view we take on that, I believe that my party should certainly go down the route of consulting more closely its constituency activists. The Prime Minister has done very well in meeting them over the past 18 months and I am grateful to him for making that effort, especially in the south-west. However, if constituency activists had been consulted over Post Office privatisation, the whole thing would have been dead in the cradle. It would have fallen at the first fence. It is a tribute to his persuasive powers, and to the fact that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is a big beast of the jungle, that the measure got as far round the track as it did.

The withdrawal of that measure gives us breathing space to consider how we need to help our Post Office retain its effectiveness and its market share and also to see in a balanced way, not just as ideological propaganda, what our foreign competitors are doing. The claim being made that the Dutch post office is being privatised is rather far-stretched. The Dutch post office is still responsible for telecommunications and 30 per cent. only of the whole process is being privatised. We privatised telecommunications some 10 years ago, so we should look at the facts before we go further down that route of privatisation.

As I said in a speech earlier in the year, our constituency supporters are anxious for consolidation—for example, anxious to see the consolidation of the considerable changes that have taken place in education and health. Also, we have carried through important legislation over the past year in criminal justice, law and order and in deregulation, on which we need to build. The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 is largely only an enabling Act. The Somerset journalist Christopher Booker claims that it will not have the effect that many people want it to have. We have to work this year, if we are not busy passing contentious legislation, to ensure that those changes occur and that they produce the desired results.

If some of my hon. Friends, in this Parliament, want to go down the route of perpetual revolution, I suggest that perhaps they ought to stand not as Conservatives—I attach some meaning to the term "Conservative"—but as perpetual revolutionary candidates. They might find that they would get rather fewer votes than the Devon branch of the Literal Democrat party and, possibly, only slightly more votes than the Natural Law party.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I sense that the hon. Gentleman is coming to the end of his remarks which, in many respects, have been refreshingly frank. However, he has not given us the benefit of his views on the job seeker's allowance. Does he share the Labour party's view that we had an insured benefit, the contributions to which have increased by 40 per cent., while the benefit itself has been cut by 25 per cent. over 15 years? The Government intend to keep the contributions at 40 per cent., but will cut the benefit in half. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is not a reform? It is simply a matter of giving a fancy name to an existing benefit. It is not a reform, it is a disguised confidence trick.

Mr. Nicholson: The hon. Gentleman should not draw me into subjects on which I had not intended to comment. From what I have heard of the proposals, I am happy that they should continue to provide assistance and an incentive to job seekers.

I listened with interest to the Leader of the Opposition. He started a new device which I do not believe he will be able to continue in many of his speeches. He gave way to interventions in quick succession. To some extent, that eclipsed the fact that he did not give a considered or effective reply to any of the interventions. Perhaps he hoped that no one would notice that while he was busy giving way to another intervention.

There appeared to be very little flesh on the bones of the speech made by the Leader of the Opposition. In contrast, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was able to draw on facts, figures and definite indications, particularly of economic progress. While I have not referred to economic progress so far today, I believe that

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it is happening all the time. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be glad to know that unemployment has fallen by 400,000 over the past two years.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pointed out, we are regaining market share and obtaining investment from the United States and Japan. That investment would not come here if we were to leave the European Community. Over the next year, I hope that we will not be sidetracked by contentious issues which would upset the electorate, and that the electorate will have time to perceive the considerable progress and success that we have achieved and will continue to achieve.

8.51 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): It must be heartening for the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), who is on the Opposition Front Bench, that there are Conservative Members who are as self-disciplined as Labour Members when it comes to supporting their party on certain issues.

As I read the Gracious Speech today, I tried to find a terminology for the myth that is being perpetrated about the state of this country, what the Government have done to it and what they plan to do with the 13 Bills to which the Prime Minister referred. I had to draw on times when I had time to develop a hinterland in my reading. It came to me that it was all rather like "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest". That is a book about people in an establishment for people who are supposed to be mentally ill. Some of the people there are mentally ill, but others are just pretending. I am not sure whether the Government believe what they are talking about or whether they are just as mad as they appear to be.

I am a little younger than some and I have not seen "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty". However, I am told that this is rather like a Walter Mitty world. In my youth, I saw "Billy Liar" although I know that "liar" is a term that is unacceptable in the House. "Billy Liar" is about someone who genuinely deludes himself. We are told that the Gracious Speech is a consolidating Gracious Speech. It appears to me, when I consider what the Government have done to the economy and to the people of this country, that it consolidates on failure.

The Government talk about speeding up. From my physics studies I recall that one can drop at 32 ft per second per second. That is the speed of acceleration of gravity. The Government claim to be going faster than they were before and to be catching up. I suggest that they are plummeting and obeying the law of gravity. They are getting into a worse state at an ever-increasing rate.

The Gracious Speech refers to "continuing economic growth". In the early 1980s, the Government destroyed the manufacturing base of this economy. They called that slimming down. They did not slim down; they sacrificed the economic base of the economy. That was an irresponsible act of economic suicide.

I have a degree in economics. Anyone with a background or interest in economics should consider our colleagues in the European Union and ask which of them is as badly equipped as the United Kingdom to deal with the upturn which is likely to come when the German economy begins to pick up after swallowing east Germany and begins to get on with the business of growing.

The United Kingdom economy will not be well placed to deal with such an upturn in its free market Hayekian model followed by Chancellor after Chancellor. Although we called the previous Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, a monetarist, there is no evidence that she was one. She was simply a free market neo-liberal who was willing to allow the market to take whatever revenge on the economy it required for its own profit.

Let us consider some of the facts. Reference has been made to rising employment. The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) showed that he was living in the world of Walter Mitty or Billy Liar when he referred to 400,000 fewer unemployed people. Recent statistics about people receiving income support show that the number receiving category E income support—income support for disability, sickness or single parenthood—is now 2 million. This year, 500,000 more people than last year were receiving income support for that category alone.

The recession is still biting hardest in the south-east of England, although the Conservatives are sadly trying to delude themselves that there has been a turnround there. There has been a 63 per cent. increase in registration for income support in the category to which I referred because the Government are disguising the true number of unemployed people. Those people cannot find employment. They are on income support and are not registered as unemployed.

Just before the recess, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that we should not consider such statistics. He said that we should not consider the number of people receiving benefits as that would give a figure of 5 million. He said that we should consider the work force count. I have examined the work force count in the United Kingdom and in Scotland. A comparison of the statistics in May 1990 and May 1994 show that there are 1,996,000 fewer people registered as employed in the United Kingdom economy.

The relevant figures for Scotland, in which I obviously have a special interest, show that there are 55,000 fewer employed people in the work force count in 1994 than in 1991, which was the last peak of employment in Scotland. It is strange that there were only 900 new registrations as unemployed in Scotland last year, but 23,000 new registrations for income support under section E.

That is the reality of the supposed rise in employment. Employment is not rising in this country. There are now 25 million people—*[Interruption.]* As usual, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) shouts out an expletive rather than something sensible. If he were to go to the Library and examine the statistics and economic trends produced by the Government's researchers, he would find that only 25 million people are employed in this economy. Six million of those are part-time employees. There are 19 million people supporting the economy out of 56 million people. That is what the Conservatives have done to our economy. That is what their fiction of rising employment and economic growth really amounts to.

The Gracious Speech mentions fiscal policy. One thing that the Government refuse to face is manufacturing industry's demand for a decent tax allowance system to allow it to invest in machinery. The capital formation of

our economy must grow at least at 3 per cent. per annum if we are to have growth in the economy. It is about 1.5 per cent. at this moment because we are not receiving the capital investment support for our manufacturing industry that the Engineering Employers Federation and even the Confederation of British Industry are demanding so that we can deal with the supply side of the economy. If the German and other European Union economies turn up, we will have to obtain our supplies from other members of the European Union, because we are not prepared and committed at this moment to supplying our own manufacturing industry with the equipment and support that it requires to take on that challenge.

One measure which I should like to see but which is not mentioned in the Gracious Speech relates to insolvency and the protection of subcontractors and suppliers. One of the biggest dodges in the economy at the moment is to hold payments to the point at which one's company goes bust and debts can be shipped on to someone else. The banks then claim any money that is left. Those who supply the labour—it tends to be small firms—and the materials to construct many buildings receive no recompense when the big man becomes insolvent. The Government talked about that matter in the previous Session, but they have failed to bring forward any proposals.

The Gracious Speech mentions improving "the working of the labour market".

When the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) was an Employment Minister, he asked me to open the Grangemouth jobcentre. I was happy to do so. Taking his invitation at face value, I read up on what was happening in jobcentres. I found that jobcentres fill only 10 per cent. of 10 per cent. of available jobs. They are not reaching the heart of the need for employment and filling jobs with people who need employment. The problem with jobcentres is that they are not equipped or staffed well enough to seek employment as it comes on to the market.

The Gracious Speech mentions promoting "increased competition in the gas industry."

I must comment on the way in which the Government's Post Office privatisation aspirations have been silently dumped. We are still waiting for a commitment to give the Post Office commercial freedom. There is no point leaving the Post Office as it is, when it cannot go into the market to borrow capital and equip itself to take on the challenge of the Belgians, French or Dutch who would take bulk mail from Britain and redirect it through their channels back into Britain. It is not enough for the Government to say, "We will not privatise post." We must free the Post Office. We are looking for the conclusion of our argument—that is, the Post Office in the public sector, with commercial freedom.

We hear people talk about the success of British Telecom. By the end of this year, its "success" will be 96,000 redundancies among highly skilled people who worked for British Telecom when it was a public enterprise. It is never good enough to look at the profits; we must look at the economic consequences for the people of our country—the people who require to be fed and to be housed and the people who require an income—not just companies which require profits.

Mr. Nigel Evans: The hon. Gentleman fails to recognise that thousands more people are now employed in the telecommunications industry, with Mercury and all the cable operators throughout the country. Thousands more people are involved in telecommunications as a whole. Does the hon. Gentleman argue that BT should have sustained the number of people who were employed in that industry, irrespective of demand for its product?

Mr. Connarty: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who often sits in Committee with me, for that intervention. Of course, I do not say that. There are more jobs, but there are not 96,000 more jobs. We have not faced the challenge that BT has made to the Government—to give it freedom to fight off the cable companies and overseas companies that are taking markets that it should have. The Government have brought forward no proposals to provide such commercial freedom.

It is interesting that the Government have made such proposals for the gas industry. The problem is that the Government are not privatising and creating a market. There is no doubt that they have privatised and created regional monopolies in water, electricity, and so on. Just before the summer recess, there was a report from an electricity company that it was going to give the £187 million accumulated excess profits—its words—not to the consumer or to the people who paid for electricity at what has been a 10 per cent. increase in price, but to the shareholder. That is because of the Government's philosophy of profit first. It is not consumer first, it is profit first. That is the philosophy behind their legislation.

The Gracious Speech also refers to the job seeker's allowance. As one of my hon. Friends succinctly said, the job seeker's allowance is an insurable benefit for which people pay which will be cut. It is not that one seeks unemployment. We are told, given the Conservative party's arguments, that after six months people become dependent on a handout—they receive not an insurable unemployment benefit but a handout.

I can draw on a great deal of experience from my constituency. In Grangemouth, where 40 per cent. of North sea oil comes on shore, a constant stream of men are involved in construction and refitting in the chemical industry. There is a constant round of jobseeking. People might get a 14-week contract here or a three-month contract there. If they are lucky, they might get six months in a major contract in one trade; then they are off seeking work again. Because of the number of people in the various trades, such as pipe-fitting, it is not unusual for someone to try for three, four or five of the shutdowns before getting on one.

Such people will be told after six months that they have to go on to income support. Then they will be seen not as unemployed people seeking work but as social security dependants. That is what the job seeker's allowance will do. The idea that it will be an incentive to seek work is wrong. I believe that, in the main, unemployed people seek work all the time. They do not seek to be unemployed. It is an insult to suggest that they do, and the Government should know it.

As for the function of benefits for unemployed people, I have been asked by the Scottish Front Bench to look at skills and training in Scotland. The facts and figures show that the Government do not know how successful their training programmes for young people are. Only 10 per cent. of young people are followed up because of the way in which the Department of Employment seeks the

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statistics. Ninety per cent. of young people are not followed up, so we do not know what is happening to them.

I hoped that a word might be said in the Queen's Speech about what the Government intend to do in Scotland about youth training. The new apprenticeship scheme, which sounds excellent, turns out to be a scheme which will work in particular against engineering organisations involved in training in Scotland. It might be the same in England and Wales. The Government intend to target more capital to colleges. The colleges will be the providers. Organisations such as the one that I visited in central Lanarkshire on Friday—a charitable organisation set up by employers in the manufacturing industry—will not receive any money from the Government. In that training agency a machine costs £30,000-plus. The agency will never be able to afford to keep up, yet it trains the skilled manufacturing engineers for the future, such as process operators. They will not receive assistance from the Government because of the way in which the Government have structured their support for the new apprenticeship scheme. Nothing was said about that in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: That is all very well, but how does the hon. Gentleman respond to the fact that Britain has one of the lowest levels of youth unemployment of all the countries in the European Union?

Mr. Connarty: If one took all the 16 and 17-year-olds off the register, it would improve the level of unemployment registration in all European Union countries. Which country does that? Only the United Kingdom. People are not allowed to register; they are therefore not unemployed. That is the reality of the way in which we count our figures. So it is a bogus question. It is not a fact.

Talk of equalising the state pension is attractive to many Opposition Members, as I am sure it is to many Conservative Members. However, in the Opposition we do not talk about women not receiving the pension until they are 65. When the Government talked about equalisation a few years ago, the age was to be perhaps 63. That sounded like a good scheme. There would have been slight changes. It could have been supported by all. To make the retirement age for women 65 is just to make women worse off.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) spoke about disabled persons. He knows much more about the needs of disabled persons than I do. For 15 years, I taught people with learning difficulties. Many of them had physical difficulties. I know that one cannot legislate for equality just by saying that it will happen. One has to provide resources to achieve equality. One change that I should like to see may be simply a change of language, but it is important. I notice that the Scottish Sports Council has started to talk about people with disabilities or with special needs. When I taught, we did not talk about mentally handicapped children. Thank goodness, one day we may not talk about people who are disabled. People have disabilities. If we give them the resources, they will show again and again that they can overcome those difficulties.

I now turn to what is planned for Scotland. The only mention of Scotland in the Queen's Speech is:

> "Legislation will be introduced to reform the Scottish Criminal Justice system."

The idea that the Government can introduce legislation to impose spot fines on people as a contribution to solving a major problem in Scotland is wrong. The problem is that police force numbers in Scotland are inadequate. I was speaking to the chief constable of Central Scotland last week, and he said that what he needed from the Government was more resources for manpower. I was speaking to him about the problem of drugs in our communities and neighbourhoods. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South wishes to intervene or is just waving his hands about.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for intervening again. He is talking about police complement numbers. Why has Labour-controlled Strathclyde refused during the past 15 years to bring its police complement up to the numbers agreed by the Secretary of State?

Mr. Connarty: The chief constable of Strathclyde has said that the problem is that the matching funding from the Government is not available. The hon. Gentleman attempts to mislead the House with such a question because he does not accept that the Secretary of State has any control. I am sure that he will accept that 50 per cent. of all police funding comes from the Government and 50 per cent. from the local authority. The money is not there. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South is shouting in the Chamber—I do not know if he has had a good lunch.

It is very important for the Government to talk to the police, and the chief constable of Central Scotland is a member of the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland). He clearly said to me that if the Secretary of State—not his council—funded his force properly, he would have the complement to deal with the problems which I asked him about.

The problem that I mentioned in particular was drug use, and it is clear that that is an increasing problem in our communities. The only way to tackle it is by strong and adequate policing and by adequate education. There is a good drugs initiative in central Scotland, with a Central police officer who has just been seconded in charge for the Scottish Office. I hope that the Secretary of State will seriously bring forward decent resources for that.

We could have done without the proposal for aggravated trespass. I do not know whether hon. Members have received the letters which I have had from many people saying that the measure on aggravated trespass was not required. Many people in Scotland did not abuse the freedom to roam and the Scottish Landowners Federation did not require that provision, but the Government have brought it in.

One thing which I should liked to see in the Queen's Speech, but which, unfortunately, was not, was a proposal banning drinking in the streets. I do not mean sitting out in cafeterias and sidewalks as one would find in most of Europe. Drinking in the streets is one of the biggest threats to and banes of the people of Scotland that I have come across. Elderly people feel trapped in their homes because the street corner has become a place not just for congregating, but for drinking.

I believe that certain types of wine which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) are causing problems, but I do not think that we can blame one type of drink. The fact is that young people—even under-age youths—can stand on corners and drink. The buying of drink is illegal if one is under-age, but not the drinking of it. In towns in Scotland I have seen people congregating and passing around vodka, whisky and other strong drinks. The Government should think seriously about banning that. They would clear up a lot of problems and pressures on our communities if they had the ccurage to do so.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that local authorities can submit draft byelaws for approval from the Scottish Office? Those will be looked at sympathetically, with a view to taking forward the very point which he mentioned.

Mr. Connarty: I am aware that there are a number of pilot schemes running in Scotland and that they are well thought of. The point that I am trying to make—I was a member of a licensing board for a number of years—is that if legislation were available, local authorities could ban drinking in the streets without having to make special considerations. If legislation became available to all local authorities, I am sure that they would take it up. The pressure from the public would be for them not to go to the Secretary of State, but to do it themselves. I am sure that authorities would respond at the local level, where they should be responding.

Another aspect of the Scottish system which I have found most disturbing during my two years as an hon. Member is where people carry out heinous acts and then, for some reason, judges give them a light sentence. I know that we are not supposed to murmur judges, but I have been drawn to suggest that certain judges are not really living in the same world as the victims of crime and the people in our communities.

I shall not go into the details, but one such case involved someone who got 200 hours community service for abusing a daughter for 10 years. Recently in my constituency, someone caused the death of a young woman by driving a lorry over the central reservation. The lorry might have been going too fast, but it was impossible to prove because the tachograph was broken. The driver's sentence was reduced to 200 hours of community service. Such cases make people wonder whether the criminal justice system has been turned on its head and whether they can get justice because judges are allowed to pass sentences that are far too light.

Yesterday, in a case in England it was admitted that a much greater sentence would have been imposed under new laws passed for England and Wales. I hope that the same sentences will be available in Scotland and that the Government will let judges know that they are there to serve the public and not some idea of what they consider to be adequate justice.

There was mention of Northern Ireland in the Gracious Speech. Everyone wants peace. When the Downing street announcement was made, I told the House that I had lost a relative in a pub bombing in 1973, at the beginning of the troubles. The relative was not of my generation and was not close, so I did not know him well enough to understand the loss that his family felt. Many other people have been scarred by the experiences of the past 20 years and we all want the peace process to come to a speedy but final conclusion, rather than a rushed conclusion that will later be regretted.

The passage on Northern Ireland is appropriate to other parts of the United Kingdom and I do not say that as a pan-nationalist of any kind. Why is the provision of

"a comprehensive political accommodation founded on the principles of democracy and consent"

not considered adequate and necessary for Scotland? Why should a Government who raised only 25 per cent. of the votes of the other political parties not bow to the wishes of the majority of people and legislate as they wish? The Government should take some advice from those who are winning the votes and winning people's support. It is important for those principles to be found throughout the United Kingdom. We are a sham of democracy. Unfortunately, the relationship between the Government, Scottish Office Ministers and the people of Scotland is a shameful sham of democracy.

I respect the fact that the determination of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South is a result of his deep-felt need to support the Union. He feels that the only way to do so is by not giving an inch, but he and people like him are seriously deluded. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—a well-known anti-devolutionist for many years—said recently in print and on radio and television that what the Government have done to local government structures in Scotland, without the consent or support of the people, has made him accept that a Scottish Parliament is necessary. That is what has happened because of the Government's lack of understanding of what they are doing to democracy. I remain committed to a united kingdom, but one in which there is subsidiarity in some sense rather than the stupidity that we have at the moment.

I am reminded of what the Government have done on the quango front. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) described it well when he said that we should look back in our history books. When I learned about history in school and about why democracy and the 1832 Reform Act were necessary, I found that it was because of rotten boroughs. Powerful people in government could place other people in charge of certain boroughs, which would get them to Parliament where they could legislate and run people's lives. We have seen the Government do the same time and again, to the point where there are 10 times more people in quangos running our world than people in democratically elected positions. The Scottish people find that deeply offensive.

A children Bill was one piece of Scottish legislation which was not mentioned in the Gracious Speech but to which the Prime Minister referred. Scotland has been waiting some time for a children Bill. England and Wales have the Children Act 1989, which is perhaps not as perfect as it was made out to be in the beginning. Today, I read an article which said that the Act has not been used to provide accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds, although that provision was contained in it, because it has not always been used correctly. In Scotland, however, we have no law that enshrines the United Nations declaration on the rights of the child.

The meetings that my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and I had with the Minister responsible—sadly, he is in another place and no Minister in this House deals directly with social legislation for

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Scotland—led us to believe that the Government were committed to putting that matter in the Queen's Speech. Documents inadvertently leaked just before the recess, however, showed that the Secretary of State was unwilling to raise the matter in the Cabinet and had received no such commitment.

Many Scottish legislative matters are outstanding, including the conclusions of the Orkney and Fife inquiries into abuse of children in care, the need to upgrade and modernise the adoption service and the legislation required to remove the abuser rather than the child from the home. Children are often doubly traumatised by being first abused and then removed to a place of safety, whereas the abuser is allowed to remain in the accommodation where the abuse took place. The Scottish Law Commission report No. 135 on children and divorce in Scotland was published two years ago last March. I took a large birthday cake to the Scottish Office last March to remind the appropriate Minister that two years ago he published a report saying that we needed to upgrade and modernise Scottish divorce laws. In Scotland, "custody" means possession of the child, and a person who loses custody loses possession of the child. It does not mean that the child has any rights.

Another promise was that it might be appropriate to take that measure to the Scottish Grand Committee. The measure would not be controversial in the sense that it might radicalise the position in Scotland. Indeed, there would be unity across the parties for it. I am now told that the Secretary of State is dragging his heels and we cannot get a commitment that he will take the matter to the Scottish Grand Committee. Is he the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Secretary of State in Scotland? We are hearing that question from people who want that legislation brought forward. It is time for the Government to look seriously at using the Scottish Grand Committee. They should take their courage in both hands and let the people elected for Scotland, the majority of whom are not Conservative Members, sculpt that legislation for Scotland's needs.

The Gracious Speech delayed rather than consolidated. It is a sign of democracy in decay rather than as it was envisaged when we set up the parliamentary system. The Government are in the doldrums and I have a suggestion for a little pep-up: let us have a general election so that the people can choose another Government.

9.21 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): First, may I pay tribute to a young man called Nigel Hunter? Nigel is a member of my team who has suffered from muscular dystrophy since birth. He has been my mentor in all matters relating to the House and the disabled. He and thousands of people like him who have been looking not for politically correct fairy tales but for practical and affordable assistance to enable them to live richer and fuller lives will welcome the part of the Gracious Speech that refers specifically to their needs. I hope and believe that, when we come to the legislation, they will welcome it as much.

I entirely support the measures connected with the European budget because we made a commitment which we must honour. The House endorsed by an overwhelming majority the agreement reached by the Prime Minister and if the Opposition choose to oppose that in any form, it will simply be regarded, not only by my hon. Friends but by millions of people outside this House, as an act of crass political cynicism.

As a Kent Member, I would be expected to welcome the legislation that will lead to the building of a rail link. My constituents in Thanet look forward to the day when our local line will be linked to the fast line from Ashford to London and we can enjoy the benefits of a faster and better service. As I represent an agricultural constituency, hon. Members would also expect me to welcome the proposals in the Gracious Speech relating to agricultural tenancy laws, and I do.

Finally, in relation to the printed part of the Gracious Speech, I endorse all the comments that have been made from both sides of the House in support of the determined and courageous efforts of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to bring about peace in Northern Ireland. I am sure that we all wish him well.

That brings me to the section of the Gracious Speech that says:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

I should like to spend a few moments that are left at the end of several rather long speeches, in commenting on some of the measures that I believe should be laid before us.

I join many hon. Friends and Opposition Members in saying that there must be changes to the legislation relating to the Child Support Agency. It is easy to be a politician on either side of this, or indeed any, legislative forum and have 20:20 hindsight. It behoves us all to consider legislation and find out how it works, and then, without shame to say, if it needs fine tuning, that we must change it. That is certainly so.

I support entirely the fundamental principle behind the Child Support Agency—the concept that people with children should pay for those children. However, reading the representations that have been made to me by my constituents who have been affected, I realise that we have committed a cardinal legislative sin in introducing what effectively has been retrospective legislation—and that is almost always bad news.

It seems to me that all previously and reasonably entered-into agreements—commitments not only in terms of what have been known as clean-break settlements, but, for example, hire purchase arrangements, for the purchase of a car which are legally binding on the people concerned—must be taken into account in any formula.

It is not surprising that the agency is in danger of becoming totally discredited, not as the Child Support Agency, but as the ex-spouse support agency. How much of that money goes to the children who are supposed to be supported?

Payments should be needs-related, not means-related. If they are going to be in any way means-related, if the child is supposed to benefit from the enhanced prospects of an absent parent, surely that money should be placed in trust for the child, not simply become part of a family budget to pay for beer and skittles for an ex-partner.

There must be a right of appeal against the assessments, and the assessment of income must include such essential ingredients as the costs of travel to work, which, from my constituency to London, can be £1,500 to £2,000 a year of unavoidable costs. If the people on whom we are placing the burden of support are to be able to work to

pay that money, surely those costs must be included in the assessment; and so must the costs of a second family. It is no good saying that we have moved from one family to another partner who has children. Members on both sides of the House know of cases where the absent parent finds himself—or, in one or two cases, herself—confronted with a demand for dramatically increased payments, while receiving nothing in support for someone else's children that they have taken on board. That problem must be tackled; and so must the burden of lump sum payments.

It is pointless telling people with no money in the bank, "By the way, you owe us £1,500 in arrears." I accept the hazards, but we must consider a position in which no payment is due until the appeal has been heard and the proper amount has been determined. Some people argue that, in those circumstances, some people will try to play the system and appeal repeatedly with a view to putting off the evil day before they pay anything—and that is true. I cannot deny it. However, even that is preferable to placing an intolerable burden on people who do not have the money to pay, and who, therefore, are driven to distraction by the new burden that is placed on them at a time when, in most cases, as most of us know—and some of us have suffered broken marriages—one suffers enough stress and trauma with the break-up of a relationship.

There are few relationships whose break-up is solely the result of the behaviour of one partner. It takes two to make a marriage, and most often it takes two to make a break-up. At the moment, when people are suffering those traumas, we are adding, and have added, to those problems. I hope that that will be tackled.

Also on the subject of other measures that may be laid before us, it will not surprise you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to know that I want changes to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. You would expect me to say that, given that I chair the all-party animal welfare group. We legislated in haste and have repented at leisure. The Act was introduced for the right reasons: we had a problem, and we sought to solve it. It had all-party support and the backing of the RSPCA, the British Veterinary Association and many other eminent bodies. In practice, however, it has not worked as we intended it to, and the time has come to change it.

The Act has been misused by the authorities—by the police, and particularly by the Crown Prosecution Service; cases have been brought under that Act when they should have been brought under the Dogs Acts. Convictions under the Dangerous Dogs Act can lead to only one sentence—the death of the dog concerned. We therefore see cases like that of Otis, a not-pit bull terrier who will end his days—I believe that he is now 11 years old—in kennels and in distress, because the case will go to the European Court of Human Rights and the dog will be dead before the case is heard.

Then there is Saaba, whose case is subject to an appeal on a legal technicality. Saaba is a German shepherd which escaped from its home. The police did not want the dog to be destroyed; they were horrified, having advised its owner to plead guilty—which the owner did—and asked for costs and a caution against the owner, when the magistrate's clerk was forced to say, "I am sorry, but we cannot do that; the charge was brought under the wrong Act and the dog must be destroyed."

As I have said, in too many cases the Act is not working as it was intended to do. Today, in another place, Lord Houghton tabled a Bill seeking to amend the Act and to give the magistrates court the power of discretion. That is the simplest, easiest amendment that we can make. I know that the Bill will be given a fair wind in another place, and I hope that Her Majesty's Government will give it a fair wind here.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary recently mentioned identity cards. He concluded that further consultation was necessary, and seems minded to introduce, initially, a voluntary identity card scheme. I must tell him that I expect such a scheme to be not worse than useless, but largely ineffective. I am certain from conversations that I have had with police officers of every rank that within the police force—in the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Superintendents Association and the Police Federation—that there is now overwhelming support for the introduction of a "must produce" card: not a card that must be carried, but a card that must be produced in the same way as a driving licence.

I also believe that there is strong support for such a card throughout the Community. It will not be simply an identity card; it can and should be, in my view, a European Union travel document, a document that carries medical records, or, if the carrier wishes, a driving licence and a social security passport. It should even be able to carry banking information. Discussion about the future of the identity card has gone on for too long. I believe that it is another of the "other measures" that the Home Secretary—in this case—should lay before us this year.

The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, when we passed it, was going to be reviewed within six months. I believe that that review is now overdue. I have spoken to the Home Office Minister responsible—my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department—and I understand that the review is about to take place. In Kent, which has channel ports, we see the effect of third-country entrance. Inevitably, because of the routes that they have taken to the United Kingdom, people have had to come from third and, in some cases, fourth and fifth countries. They are not genuine asylum seekers. We used to return them immediately to the third country from which they came, and I feel that we have made a mistake in allowing a right of appeal in all cases. We should revert to the previous practice.

I am concerned at the concession that we have afforded to the channel tunnel operators. Unlike ferry and airline operators they have no carrier liability. The ferry operators and the airlines have to take responsibility for those coming into this country without the current documentation. It will be possible for an illegal entrant into the European Union, arriving perhaps in northern Italy through Genoa, travelling across Italy and through France, to buy a ticket from Paris on the channel tunnel for £200—that will be better than paying £2,000 to travel in acute discomfort in the back of a container lorry—and to arrive in the United Kingdom unchecked. I do not know why we have given that concession to the tunnel operators. It is a mistake and it should be changed.

I should like to see the appeals process speeded up so that those who warrant genuine political asylum should be granted it humanely and swiftly and those who are not asylum seekers, but economic migrants, should be returned to their country of origin as swiftly as possible.

[Mr. Roger Gale]

I would like to think that under "Other measures" the Department of National Heritage may find time to address cross-media ownership. Earlier in the debate the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott)—I am sorry that he had to leave—expressed concern about relaxation of the takeover rules. I believe that he was referring to the commercial terrestrial television channels. Having afforded to Mr. Murdoch the opportunity to own a satellite channel and a plethora of newspaper titles, we have created one organisation with distinct advantages over all others. Mr. Murdoch's henchmen will say that if the other organisations wanted to buy satellites, they could do so. That is not entirely realistic.

I should like to think that far from tightening the regulations, the Government will free up the takeover rules for cross-media ownership to allow television stations to take over each other, to allow newspapers to take over television stations or television stations to take over newspapers, and to allow telecommunications organisations such as British Telecom or Mercury to take over both. Unless and until we create the economies of scale in this country that are needed for a modern communications industry, I believe that Europe will miss out. If we are to have a European communications industry to meet the needs of the 21st century, it will be United Kingdom led because we are the leaders in this field.

If we do not relax the rules, the Americans and the Japanese will become the major players and once again we will be left to pick up the dog ends after the international companies have taken the lion's share of the business.

It is vital that we address immediately—that means this year—the matter of conditional access or encryption. At the moment there is what we are not allowed to call a cartel, so let us call it a complex monopoly, within the European Union. Mr. Murdoch, Bertelsman and Canal Plus effectively control the gateways to encrypted satellite for analogue systems. That is a horse that we cannot put back in the stable and we should not try to do so. Within a short time the technology will move to fully digital transmission. That is the moment when we, together with our European partners, can and should introduce an open access single standard so that all players—all broadcasters and cable operators—may have access to encrypted satellite transmission on fair terms. I am not suggesting that those who supply and create the technology should not be able to benefit from their hard work, but we cannot afford to allow relatively few players to slice up the cake throughout Europe and then deny other people access. That is precisely what is happening now through the Murdoch organisation.

The time has come when the House must introduce a privacy Bill. Having taken a lead in the matter, I have been surprised in the past couple of weeks to discover the strength of support for such a measure from Opposition Members and from my hon. Friends. The time has come to introduce such a measure for the sake of democracy in this country. That does not mean that it should protect the high, the mighty or even Members of Parliament. It means that it should protect the people.

We must make electronic eavesdropping a criminal offence. We must control media intrusion by telephoto lenses and trespass to a greater extent than is currently the case. If hon. Members ask people, "Should there be a privacy Bill?", they say, "No, you are just trying to protect yourselves." If they then ask those people, "If it is your phone that is being tapped or your wife who is being photographed in her bikini, with the pictures appearing in a tabloid newspaper, how do you feel about it?", they receive a different response. The introduction of a privacy Bill is in the public interest.

We need an independent press tribunal with statutory powers to act in the public interest. The Press Complaints Commission has failed this country dismally. It is time for it to go and for us to have a proper and statutory independent regulator.

I have mentioned a few omissions from the Gracious Speech, but I am confident that they will all be introduced under other measures to be laid before hon. Members.

9.41 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale). We sympathise and empathise with the point that he made on behalf of the individual, who will benefit from and be satisfied with a Bill to tackle discrimination against disabled people. Many hon. Members would go along with his view on privacy, provided that there was also a freedom of information Act on the statute book. The linking of a privacy Bill with a freedom of information Bill would show that we support the principle of having some privacy and opening up the books, figures and secret information that are not available to the public. If we had that balance, we would have a better society and a better press.

I am aware that I am ending the debate on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) opened it on their behalf. The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) referred to the fact that a number of questions were put to my right hon. Friend and that he did not receive the answers that he thought he should receive.

It was interesting to see shoals of Tory Members ready to leap to their feet to tackle my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield when they saw the Chief Whip, the Deputy Chief Whip or a Treasury Minister make a little movement of the hand. We saw my right hon. Friend dispatch them quickly and effectively with answers that they did not like. That is one of the difficulties that Opposition Members recognise in relation to the Government and to Conservative Members, who are not in touch with what the people of our country feel or think on a variety of issues, from employment, investment and job security to the nature of the society in which they live. That failure to understand the feelings of the country is transmitted in the House through foolish, mediocre and banal questions that are swiftly dispatched by my right hon. Friend.

The hon. Member for Taunton talked about the Prime Minister's facts and figures. The Prime Minister gave us the same myths and the same shibboleths as we have heard time and again from the Government. Such selective facts or simple quotations are not supported by evidence, which I shall discuss.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), who I am glad to see in his place, referred to the 400,000 drop in unemployment. He got the background to that right. He spoke about the reason for

it and he compared youth unemployment in this country with that in other European nation states. He also threw in Billy Liar. I am not able, because of the generation gap, to know too much about Billy Liar. I do know, however, about Walter Mitty. We know all about mental health. One of the most interesting speeches of the CBI conference this year was made by the Secretary of State for Health, at a gathering of a thousand members. All the captains of industry were there on a very dark and murky morning in Birmingham. All were eating high-cholesterol food for breakfast, and the Secretary of State chose mental health as her subject. I thought that it was very apt to come to a CBI conference and talk about mental health. Again it shows just how much the Government are out of touch.

I welcome the fact, as mentioned in the Gracious Speech, that the Government

"will work for early implementation of the Agreement concluding the GATT trade negotiations, and for early establishment of the World Trade Organisation."

The Labour party has consistently supported GATT and its opening up of world trade. We were the original signatories way back in 1948. We criticised the Government for not going far enough in bringing financial services into GATT. We hope that they will work on that when the new World Trade Organisation is set up.

We have also insisted that the Government make appropriate provision, as part of the GATT, for social legislation in other countries, social rights—a veritable social chapter for GATT throughout the world. It is interesting to note that the Government, under pressure from the United States Administration, have agreed to look at those aspects under an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development investigation. So we shall follow that with great interest.

It was also of interest to see in the Gracious Speech support for

"continuing economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation."

We particularly like the phrase:

"My Government will reduce the share of national income taken by the public sector."

I thought it very rich of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) to intervene on my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames left the present incumbent of the position of Chancellor of the Exchequer with a public sector borrowing requirement of £51,000 million, which even the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to and said, "Well, he did leave me that, didn't he?" Conservatives talk about our nationalised industries, the PSBR and the money that was put into them. That money was for investment. What we see now is money for consumption, having to pay thousands of millions of pounds in unemployment benefit, pushing up the PSBR. That is where the right hon. Gentleman went very badly wrong. He is the man who gave us Black Wednesday.

The Prime Minister talks of falling unemployment in this country, but this happened because of the 11 per cent. devaluation of the pound. Our trade picked up. It is a classic case of trade picking up after a devaluation. Trade picks up and unemployment falls, but one does not have stability. The Government talk about permanently reducing inflation, but they do not have the stability that exists in Europe, within the exchange rate mechanism, with currencies that are stable one against the other.

We saw yesterday, in the United States, how interest rates have risen. We will shortly see interest rates rise again in this country. The Government cannot within the context of their economic policy deliver low inflation, with productivity and growth rising, and at the same time keep interest rates down. It is beyond them; we see that it is beyond them, as do the public.

The Prime Minister said in his speech that Labour Members should stop knocking industry. He might have dipped into the CBI conference in Birmingham last week. There were nine Labour Members of Parliament to two Conservative. Last year at the conference, John Smith made a speech that received more applause than that of any Conservative Member. This year my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) spoke. He received greater applause than any Conservative Minister. Again, it shows how out of touch the Government are with the feelings in industry, and throughout the world of commerce. Industry and commerce are listening to the Labour party. They are listening to its ideas and finding an echo back. As I said earlier, that lack of understanding of how the people out there feel is bringing the Government to grief.

The Prime Minister spoke about inward investment—Black and Decker in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, NEC in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and Samsung in the north-east of England. Of course, he gave no credit to the Labour local authorities that helped to bring the investment into those areas. Certainly Samsung would not have come to my area without the help and support of the Labour council. The Government have never properly accepted that fact.

The Government are totally divided. They are divided on Europe. We hear Ministers speak and then we see Conservative Members of Parliament queuing up on College green to give television interviews saying that they might not support the Queen's Speech. Whoever heard of a Tory Back-Bench Member telling the public, on the day of the Queen's Speech, that he might not support it?

There is a great rift on Europe, and the same rift exists on regional selective grants and inward investment. The Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Trade both talk about inward investment, but the Secretary of State for Employment says that he does not believe in regional selective grants. At least the Prime Minister had the grace not to say that inward investment would not come to our country if we had a social chapter and a national minimum wage. He was careful and sensible enough not to say that those would be bars to inward investment, so that, if nothing else, was an honest statement.

Considering the Queen's Speech overall, we accept and support some of the measures, such as that on disability. However, we heard what could best be described not as an unexciting Queen's Speech, but as a Queen's Speech with nothing to it. The Government are prepared to try to administer for two and a half years with no ideological backing, simply trying to steer a course between two different shoals in the Tory party, veering first one way and then the other.

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

The public are entitled to a Government who have the support of their Back Benchers, a Government who know where they are going and will give leadership to the people so that they feel a sense of security in their lives, their jobs, their homes and their families. They have none of that from a Conservative Government whose time has passed. Their ideas have passed, too, and soon they should accept that they have no future, go to the country and let the people choose.

9.51 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): The Gracious Speech gives us an opportunity to reflect on our great institutions—the Church, the monarchy, the judiciary and Parliament. Other than God, of course, everything is transitory: the sovereign, the Lord Chancellor and the Prime Minister. I believe that they are doing a magnificent job and that those institutions are fundamental to society. I support them, and there is little that I want changed in the way in which they work.

It is the institution itself that is all-important. There can be little doubt that in recent times what I regard as the tendency to dwell on the behaviour of certain players has damaged the institutions in the eyes of everyone, especially in the eyes of our constituents. I hope that those people who are engaged in dwelling on individuals' behaviour fully understand the damage that is being done in our country today. I also hope that the members of those institutions realise the responsibility, not only to themselves but to others, that they carry.

I know that many people say that the Government should consolidate, and should not move forward with a radical programme. I do not support that view. It is a little like riding a bicycle: consolidating rather than moving forward is a recipe for stagnation. We can all think of previous Governments who did that, at their peril.

I have never minded the Conservative party, or myself, being unpopular, so long as the policies are right for this country and we are prepared to argue for and explain them to the British people. I do not want this or any other Government whom I support to suffer an attack of nerves or a loss of confidence. Although I accept that our majority is smaller than it has been in previous Parliaments, I very much believe that my colleagues will respond to strong, determined and courageous leadership, of which the Prime Minister has shown himself to be more than capable. I am thinking especially of Northern Ireland.

It would be a great mistake for the Conservative party to try to ape one of the present socialist parties—Labour—by doing nothing and saying nothing other than "yah boo." After all, it is only too clear what a mess that gets us into with the media when they find precious little news to occupy their time. I am delighted that the Government have decided to continue with their radical programme.

I refer first to the economy. There can be little doubt that the economy is in good shape, with the lowest inflation for 27 years, strong growth and a sharp fall in unemployment. Unemployment in my constituency fell today by 101, a drop of 2 per cent. Incidentally, unemployment has dropped by 21 per cent. since the general election. I pay tribute to all the people who have made that possible.

There should be no mystery about why there is no feel-good factor at the moment. The reason is the loss of value in people's properties and especially the use of people's properties to raise money on their businesses. I hope that, as we continue our economic policy, that situation will change.

As a Conservative, I have always believed in reducing direct taxation while putting the burden on indirect taxation. That is why I believe that it is necessary to continue to shrink public sector spending. I confess to the House, however, that I do not underestimate the enormous challenge that my party faces in combating the Labour party's economic policy, which it revealed some weeks ago. I quote the words of the shadow Chancellor, who said:

"Our new economic approach is rooted in ideas, which stress the importance of macro economics, neo-classical endogenous growth theory and the symbiotic relationships between growth and investment in people and infrastructure."

My constituents in Basildon have been talking of nothing else since.

The Gracious Speech also gives us an opportunity to show our patriotism. I refer in particular to the measure on the channel tunnel. How often have I heard it said that transport is better in France, that the streets are cleaner in Germany and that people work harder in Japan, none of which is true. When I travelled on Eurostar last Monday, I had in my mind the propaganda that claimed that Britain had failed miserably in terms of its rail infrastructure compared to the continentals. I felt enormously proud that it was a Conservative Government who had the vision to fulfil a 100-year-old dream by building the channel tunnel. We left a magnificent facility at Waterloo, travelled at 186 mph and arrived in a dump of a station called Brussels Midi.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) said earlier today that the good thing about the River Thames was that it separated Essex from Kent. I know that he meant that in a friendly fashion. Likewise, I look forward to the debates ahead on the rail link through the garden of England. I hope that my old home ground of Stratford in east London will eventually be allowed to develop its site as a link station in the whole project.

I entirely understand the reference to Europe in the Gracious Speech. I recall well the time when a Conservative Government took us into Europe and I also recall that it was a socialist Government who held a referendum. I have no natural liking for referendums because I believe that general elections are the mechanism for political momentum and change. However, I believe in referendums where there is a clear issue of sovereignty.

It is said that the Conservative party is split on Europe. The record shows that the Conservative Government took us into Europe and have made all the running since, whereas the Labour party has changed its mind practically every other year. I do not think that it is right that year in and year out the Conservative party continues to take the flak on that matter, so I hope that when a united states of Europe, with one Government and one currency, is proposed the issue will be put to the British people, not in a general election but in a referendum.

I end my speech by referring to other measures that I hope will be laid before the House. Crime is caused by poor example and lack of individual responsibility. We

should all be concerned at the level of crime because our constituents certainly are. I successfully introduced a ten-minute Bill—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Maternity Services (Dunfermline)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I wish that I was here tonight to praise the new obstetric unit at the Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline and the service that it was providing to the men and women of West Fife. Unfortunately, I am not able to do so.

I am not able to do so because, a year ago, the Government closed Dunfermline maternity hospital. I am not able to do so because, for months, the £1.5 million new obstetric unit at the Queen Margaret hospital was allowed to gather dust. It was allowed to gather dust because, until recently, it was occupied by elderly patients who were forced out of the wards built for them by dampness and by the incompetence of the Scottish Office, the health board and the contractors.

I am not able to praise the maternity service at the Queen Margaret hospital because, despite massive opposition, the Government decided to centralise the service in Kirkcaldy. A year may have gone past, but the Minister will be aware that not only am I still angry, but my constituents are still angry, too.

I want to outline once again the strong arguments for establishing a maternity service in Dunfermline, and establishing it now. However, I shall begin by praising the majority of the health service staff in Fife who deliver the obstetrics service.

There have been a number of complaints during the past 12 months which have revolved particularly around the distance that many of my constituents now have to travel to reach the maternity service in Kirkcaldy. That has led, as we predicted, to a number of women literally giving birth at roundabouts on the road to Kirkcaldy, or getting to the hospital with only minutes to spare. Such events have highlighted the reasons why a maternity service should be restored to Dunfermline for safety purposes.

However, we are not criticising the majority of health service staff: we are criticising three distinctive groups. First, a small but clearly powerful group of medical personnel decided that it suited them, not my constituents, to centralise the service. Secondly, criticisms are directed at the health board for giving in to the medics and for not providing the public with the service they want and for which they have paid. Last but not least, our criticisms are directed at the Government, who blatantly went against the commitment they gave to provide locally based maternity services.

I shall briefly go over some of the key arguments which have been used in this continuing debate. The Minister and the Government have argued that the safe care of a mother and child can be provided only by a centralised service in Kirkcaldy. It is clear that many consultant paediatricians and obstetricians feel that only they can prevent a return to the days of high infant and maternal mortality.

However, the Government should be aware that there is little or no evidence for such a claim, and that the improvements in the obstetrics service and in the health of mothers and babies have been due to several significant factors, such as the decline in fertility, the use of antibiotics, health education and nutrition.

[Ms Rachel Squire]

There is growing evidence that a midwife-led service is at least as safe as that under the direction of an obstetrician. There is no doubt about the kind of service that mothers prefer. They prefer a service which is midwife-led and which provides continuity of care and allows them to get to know two or three individuals well who are with them throughout the pregnancy, and a service in which a woman feels that she is being treated as a individual and not as a battery hen.

The second report of the Select Committee on Health states in volume I, paragraph 33:

"On the basis of what we have heard, this Committee must draw the conclusion that the policy of encouraging all women to give birth in hospitals cannot be justified on grounds of safety . . . Given the absence of conclusive evidence, it is no longer acceptable that the pattern of maternity care provision should be driven by presumptions about the applicability of a medical model of care based on unproven assertions."

There is no reason why a safe service could not now be provided in Dunfermline.

Unfortunately, a few births lead to complications and require specialist facilities. I agree that they occur in Kirkcaldy, but they were present in Kirkcaldy when we had a service in Dunfermline. Apart from one occasion, I know of no complaint about that mixture of care.

There is no reason now why a good emergency service for unanticipated difficult pregnancies cannot be proved at Dunfermline. Dunfermline has a flying squad, which has visited at least one of my constituents because she could not get to Kirkcaldy in time. There are also facilities at the new district general hospital, which is a trauma hospital with theatre cover, an intensive care unit, an anaesthetist on site and appropriate medical staff immediately available.

Will the Minister tell me why, in the case of a last-minute, unexpected complication, it is considered more suitable for a woman in that state to be required to move to Kirkcaldy than to ask a consultant to get in his car and travel to Dunfermline? As my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) will testify, other health boards, such as Forth Valley and Tayside, provide out-of-hours cover on a rotation basis. Why cannot that be done in Fife?

There has been talk about training for junior doctors being used as an excuse. Frankly, I am surprised that the Government have not told the doctors that they have a responsibility to sort out a service which meets the public need and in respect of which the needs of the many prevail over the wishes of the few.

I have mentioned travel, and I want to highlight some of the problems that my constituents face in travelling to Kirkcaldy. I have received comments made in the last month by women who have had to travel to Kirkcaldy. I want to read some of them out without any editing on my part—

"Distance to Kirkcaldy too great.

Far too great a distance.

We're going back to the 19th century

Putting mother an baby at risk with distance to travel in car.

I had my baby in 40 minutes 3 pm wouldn't have made it to the hospital. Very uncomfortable during journey.

Far too great a distance.

Too far to travel.

Too far to travel."

The comments go on and on in that vein. That is what members of the public are saying.

As well as distance, we must consider the cost not only for the mother, who might be reimbursed but who does not necessarily have the money available at the time, but for the father and the immediate family. Just one return bus journey from Blairhall to Kirkcaldy costs £5.70. Many of my constituents do not have one £5.70 to spare, let alone several such amounts. The bus journey from Blairhall, just one west Fife village, to Kirkcaldy takes one and a half hours each way.

There is no evidence that many people have access to a car. In fact, in High Valleyfield, another village, more than 50 per cent. of households have neither a car nor access to one. The Minister and the Government tend to forget that there are people who still do not possess or can afford to possess private motor cars. On safety grounds, there is no reason at all why the service should not be provided in Dunfermline.

I have no doubt that the Minister is preparing to assure me and my constituents that a full evaluation of a midwife-led service is being conducted in Kirkcaldy, and that, if successful, that service will be brought to Dunfermline. Frankly, that would not be good enough, because, for the reasons that I have outlined, there is no reason why a midwife-led service should not be established in Dunfermline now. It would not be good enough because there is no real commitment from the Government, there is just a woolly statement—"If the Kirkcaldy scheme is successful, we might consider placing such a service in Dunfermline."

That answer would not be good enough because, frankly, Dunfermline would have been a far better place to pilot such a service. We have had a midwife-led service in essence for years. It would not be good enough because, bluntly, some people in influential places do not wish that midwife-led service to work, because they want things run their way, not according to the wishes of the mothers.

That answer would also not be good enough because I have yet to be convinced that a fair and objective evaluation of the Kirkcaldy midwife-led pilot is being carried out. To my knowledge, the Scottish Office refused to fund a statistician to help to conduct the survey, and the position is only now being advertised by the health board.

In conclusion, I can do no better than once again quoting the Health Select Committee's second report:

"We conclude that there is a widespread demand among women for greater choice in the type of maternity care they receive, and that the present structure of the maternity services frustrates, rather than facilitates, those who wish to exercise this choice."

That is a good description of how my constituents feel about the maternity service at the moment.

It has often been said, but it is worth repeating, that giving birth is a normal part of life, not an illness which requires the constant presence of consultants. I now call upon the Minister to demonstrate his and the Government's commitment to providing a maternity service in Dunfermline by doing several things.

First, I ask the Minister to name the people who have strongly advised centralisation in Kirkcaldy. I challenge them to come to public meetings that I will happily arrange in my constituency and debate the issue with the public whom their decision has affected.

Secondly, I ask the Minister urgently to intervene in the dampness problem at the new Queen Margaret hospital and deal with the muddle and incompetence that has led to elderly people being moved out of the rehabilitation assessment wards that were built for them and being put in the obstetrics unit, leaving the obstetrics unit unavailable for the purpose for which it was designed.

Thirdly, will the Minister let me know exactly how an objective evaluation of the Kirkcaldy service will be conducted? Lastly, will he accept an invitation to come to Dunfermline next year and join me in opening the maternity service in the Queen Margaret hospital, which I hope he is about to announce this evening?

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on her success in the ballot, and on initiating the debate tonight. I am aware of her deep interest in the subject over a considerable time. I should also mention that my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State approved the decision to centralise Fife's obstetric delivery services at Forth Park hospital in Kirkcaldy, and he has continued to take a close interest in the development of maternity services there. Last June, he met members of the Fife Maternity Action Group.

The hon. Member raised some relevant and important matters. One was accessibility. Fife health board recognised the increased inconvenience that was caused to women in Dunfermline when the delivery services were centralised, but that had to be weighed against the importance of ensuring safety. A full range of ante-natal and post-natal services is available in Dunfermline. For the delivery itself, the journey to Kirkcaldy is about a 15-minute drive. Families without cars and on income support can claim assistance for public transport fares.

The hon. Lady will be aware of the Domino scheme. It is a form of midwifery care in which the community midwife who has cared for the woman ante-natally escorts her to hospital at the appropriate stage of labour, attends her at delivery and escorts her back home, usually within six hours. Usually, the same midwife continues the post-natal care for 10 days. Any woman who wants Domino care and is assessed as appropriate for such care will receive it.

The hon. Lady also raised the pressing matter of babies who are born before arrival at hospital. Happily, this does not occur very often, but in the year to October 1994, 12 babies were born in such a way to women living in Dunfermline and west Fife. The figure for other parts of Fife was 14.

If a woman is in transit when the baby is born, she is taken to the nearest hospital, where the help of midwives or GPs can quickly be called upon. In an emergency, the Forth Park flying squad will be called out. The squad exists to provide back-up where mothers cannot get to Forth Park. It responds to requests from midwives, GPs, relatives and the ambulance service. The Kirkcaldy acute trust is seeking to improve the information given to mothers to ensure that they do not leave it too late to get to hospital.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: May I respond to another question which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West asked, about the existing services for women in Dunfermline?

There is well-developed ante-natal and post-natal care for women in Dunfermline. Out-patient clinic and day care facilities are provided at Queen Margaret hospital. Ante-natal clinics are also available in the community. They have expanded since delivery services moved to Kirkcaldy.

The health board is also piloting a new project to allow mothers to return to the care of community midwives shortly after giving birth. The board is committed to offering real choice to mothers. Its maternity liaison forum is currently developing an information leaflet to inform women of their choices for delivery. They include home delivery, Domino, and midwife-led and consultant-led delivery.

Mr. Connarty: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have a lot to reply to. If the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West, who initiated the debate, wishes to ask me a question, I shall be happy to give way.

I should explain the background to the development of maternity services in Dunfermline and the decision to centralise delivery services. Scotland enjoys an excellent level of maternity services, and has seen considerable improvements in maternal and infant health in recent years.

All the indicators of safety have improved dramatically. Scotland in general, and Fife in particular, now enjoy outcomes in childbirth comparing favourably with levels anywhere in the developed world.

In parallel with those improvements in the quality and safety of medical care has come a growing realisation of the importance of giving mothers a service that is responsive and sensitive to their needs, which ensures continuity of care, which avoids unnecessary medicalisation, and which gives greater scope for midwives to exercise their skills. It is a fact that most babies are delivered by midwives in the course of uncomplicated births.

Increasingly over recent years, health boards have been trying to move towards more sensitive maternity services. I have mentioned the Domino schemes, which will be of considerable assistance to an enormous number of mothers. There are also a number of midwife-led units at early stages of development throughout Scotland, including one that has just been evaluated in Aberdeen, and the new midwife unit at Forth Park hospital itself.

All these changes came in to improve women's satisfaction and enhance the quality of care. The hon. Lady is, of course, aware of the 1993 Scottish Office policy review on the provision of maternity services in Scotland. This has set the policy framework, and health boards have been asked to review their maternity services in the light of this policy review and to move towards improving choice, encouraging the greater provision and

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uptake of Domino and community-based modes of maternity care and bringing about a shift from specialised to less-specialised care.

We have also set up a CRAG/SCOTMEG working group on maternity services, which has been taking forward detailed work on such issues as neonatal flying squads and the role of professionals in maternity services.

The policy review did emphasise the primacy of safety. The benefits of access have to be weighed against the need for the sufficient concentration of resources and expertise, so that obstetric units can offer the best in medical care and take advantage of the latest technology.

Ms Rachel Squire: I have been listening carefully to what the Minister has said. Is there any evidence that, since the closure of the maternity services in Dunfermline, the service has improved? Is it not the case that a very good service was provided beforehand, and that there was no reason why that service should have been removed from the Dunfermline area?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The specialists would take the view that the service would now be regarded as safer, and the improvements have been steady over a period of time.

Fife health board is committed to developing maternity services along the lines that I have described. In its draft local health strategy issued for public consultation, the board committed itself to securing a range of community and hospital services from home births to low-tech and high-tech hospital services, which will offer women real choice.

The overall direction will be to promote continuity of care through a greater role for midwives and the development of team midwifery. I have mentioned the services which are currently provided, and current trends are for women to stay in hospital for less and less time after the delivery of a baby. Although short, this is of course the critically important time for delivery itself, and that must be set in the context of a period of care spreading over several months.

During this period, a full range of care is, and will be, available in Dunfermline. It is worth remembering that, of the whole range of maternity services, it is only delivery services that have been centralised in Kirkcaldy. Obstetric services, in the form of midwife-led ante-natal clinics in the community, have always been well developed in Fife and have been extended, especially in the Dunfermline area, since centralisation of delivery services.

As the hon. Lady mentioned, there is now a pilot project to enable mothers to return home to the care of community midwives shortly after birth, and two additional midwives are providing a community-based service, which also enables a midwife service to be attached to a further two general practices in the area.

Like the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West, I much regret the fact that it proved necessary to close the Dunfermline delivery unit last year. She will know that the decision to approve that closure was one that my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State took only after the closest examination of all the facts.

The key issue was ensuring that specialist care was available 24 hours a day for babies needing immediate medical treatment. As I said, the vast majority of births are uncomplicated and require no medical intervention, but in a minority of cases a newborn baby and sometimes the mother need specialist help.

The number of difficult cases has declined a lot over the years because of improvements in ante-natal care, which can prevent unpredicted problems arising in labour. When problems arise, however, specialist help is sometimes needed urgently and unpredictably in cases that had seemed straightforward.

The problem in Dunfermline was that there were too few paediatricians to guarantee the right level of such emergency cover. An increase in paediatricians could not be justified in terms of the total number of births in Fife. Furthermore, if more doctors had been taken on, there would not have been enough training experience for them, because of the unit's small caseload. The royal colleges would not have recognised the training posts.

Taking on extra trained doctors would not have worked either, because the unit at Dunfermline did not see enough of the rarer difficult cases to ensure that they could maintain and develop sufficient skills and experience in dealing with such cases and emergencies. That is because the unit was small, and simply did not generate enough difficult cases.

The independent task force, which Fife health board appointed in 1991, was clear that the only solution was centralisation of the specialist in-patient maternity services in Kirkcaldy. It concluded that it was not possible simply to increase the number of doctors there, as that would only have diluted the level of experience.

The rotation of staff between Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy was also rejected as unworkable. It was clear that the centralisation would have to take place on the Forth Park hospital site, where paediatricians and neonatal intensive care were already available, and not at Dunfermline. The conditions that held then are still valid now and were not materially affected by the advent of the new Queen Margaret hospital. The issue was one of staffing and clinical safety—not physical space.

Other small obstetric units remain in Scotland. The continued survival of each of those depends on a locally specific configuration of skills, experience, specialties, emergency arrangements and the viability of training posts. Maintaining those conditions can be difficult, and the challenge is one that health boards generally will have to grapple with in the context of their broader review of maternity services.

My right hon and learned Friend the Minister of State was, and remains, committed to the establishment of the midwife-led unit in Dunfermline if that can be safely done. He was not satisfied that the board's proposals sufficiently overcame the two main concerns—the need for midwives to gain confidence in running such a unit, and the need to ensure proper paediatric and obstetric cover. The board's public consultation also revealed mixed feelings about the proposals, including doubts among some midwives about their preparedness.

The Minister of State was aware that, at the time, there were a few other midwife-led units in the country, but all were at a very early stage of development and only one—the stand-alone unit at Bournemouth—was directly comparable with what was being proposed for Dunfermline. He therefore actively encouraged the board to work towards developing a midwife-led service in Dunfermline by asking it to develop a midwife-led unit in

Forth Park hospital on a pilot basis. That would enable the essential experience in running such a unit to be acquired, while minimising the risks to mothers and their babies.

The health board is committed to developing that model, to commissioning a full evaluation of the Forth Park pilot unit and to identifying the potential to set up a similar service at Queen Margaret hospital.

The board collected detailed information from the outset, and a full-time researcher is about to be appointed. The board hopes that the evaluation will be completed by the end of 1995. It has already opened up discussions with the division of obstetrics, gynaecology and paediatrics about the way forward.

For the time being, it remains too early to be able to set up a midwife-led unit in Dunfermline now. I acknowledge that there are other midwife-led units in the country from which lessons can be drawn. As I said, only one is directly comparable—the stand-alone unit at Bournemouth—and they are all at early stages of development.

In time, there will be important lessons to be learnt from those initiatives, including the Aberdeen unit, but it should be remembered that solutions must be directly tailored to local circumstances and needs, and that the essential issues here are local—the importance of developing skills and confidence in local midwives, and ensuring the adequacy of arrangements for medical cover.

I must congratulate the hon. Member on raising this matter. I will draw to the attention of the Minister of State the issues that she mentioned. I have given her, to the best of my ability, the up-to-date position. The matters will be borne closely in mind, especially in light of the assessment made of the pilot unit. I again thank her for raising the subject tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 17 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Business of the House

2.34 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Madam Speaker, as the House is aware, the debate on the Address in reply to the Gracious Speech will be brought to a conclusion on Wednesday 23 November and you have already kindly announced from the Chair the intended subjects of the days' debates in the intervening period.

The business for the three days following the conclusion of the debate on the humble address will be as follows:

THURSDAY 24 NOVEMBER—Motion on standing orders relating to deregulation.

Motion to take note of EC document Nos. 10904/93, 8618/94 and 8037/94 relating to two and three-wheeled vehicles. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

Motion on an order relating to the salaries of Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and Opposition Whips in each House, and the Officers of both Houses.

FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER—Debate on road safety on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

Motion to take note of documents relating to the 1995 budget of the European Communities. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

[Thursday 24 November:

Relevant European Community documents: a) 10904/93 Two and Three Wheeled Motor Vehicles, b) 8618/94 Two and Three Wheeled Motor Vehicles, c) 8037/94 Two and Three Wheeled Motor Vehicles; relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: a) HC 48-vii (1993-94) and HC 48-xvi (1993-94), b) and c) HC 48-xxvii (1993-94)

Monday 28 November:

Relevant European Community documents: a) COM(94)400 1995 Budget, b) 8782/94 1995 Budget, c) 9943/94 Adjustment of the financial perspective with a view to enlargement of the European Union, d) Unnumbered-European Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the draft general budget for 1995; relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: a) HC 48-xxiii (1993-94), b) HC 48-xxvi (1993-94), c) No report, d) No report.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for his announcement. I start by expressing concern which is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that it will soon be possible to have a debate on implementing the recommendations of the Jopling report. Can the Leader of the House tell us when such a debate might take place?

As the Leader of the House has announced that the Second Reading of the European Communities (Finance) Bill will be on Monday 28 November, will he tell us today whether that vote will be a vote of confidence in the Government? If the Prime Minister loses that vote, will there be a general election?

Mr. Newton: On the first half of the hon. Lady's comments, may I express my thanks to her for continuing to conduct our discussions about Jopling in the same positive and constructive way as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) did in his acting capacity. The hon. Lady and I share hopes about making progress. I cannot give an exact date, but I think she will agree with me—indeed, from her comments it is clear that she agrees with me—that our discussions are moving positively.

On the second issue, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear yesterday that the Second Reading of the Bill is in itself an issue of confidence. Both of us have made it clear on several occasions that the consequences of losing on an issue of confidence are clear and well known.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the decision to hold that debate on 28 November, given that the Court of Auditors report, which is relevant to the Bill, is still not available in the Vote Office, although it was published at a champagne reception on Monday and is available—in the French language only—at Heathrow airport? Will he further give us an assurance that he will reconsider the matter until such time as we have an authoritative statement on whether the statement in *The Daily Telegraph* that it had a Treasury document which said that the actual figures were four times as great as the Government's is true, untrue or a load of rubbish?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, I thought that the answer of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) yesterday afternoon was absolutely clear and straightforward. Indeed, it was so clear and straightforward that the hon. Gentleman was, for once, left nonplussed.

As for the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I will immediately inquire into what he has said.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): As there is nothing explicit in the Queen's Speech to deal with the important reforms introduced to cover community care, and as we recognise that some parts of the country, including the Isle of Wight, Devon and Gloucestershire, are experiencing serious difficulties in implementing the new reforms, will the Leader of the House undertake to have a debate in Government time so that those and other areas can confront some of their difficulties and get some answers from the Government about how they might be resolved?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has already commented on those matters in various ways. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that nothing in the Queen's Speech touches on the issues

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raised by community care. There is a clear-cut proposal for a Bill to deal with supervised discharge in the mental health field.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): When can the House expect a debate on the important report by Lord Donaldson, given recent events, especially the Estonia tragedy, and other matters of grave concern where maritime safety is involved?

Mr. Newton: I shall simply undertake to bear my hon. Friend's legitimate concern in mind. I am not in a position to give a date for a debate this afternoon.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Bearing in mind the fact that next Sunday is the 20th anniversary of the mass murder of 21 people in Birmingham, will the Leader of the House promise that we will be kept fully informed of the peace process? I tabled early-day motion No. 28 on the subject.

[*That this House notes that it is 20 years since the mass killings of 21 people in Birmingham as a result of terrorist violence; deplores that such an atrocity occurred and again extends its deepest sympathy to the relatives of those murdered and also to all those injured; and strongly hopes that the present cessation of violence by the paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland will be permanent and thus ensure that such an atrocity as took place in Birmingham as well as the killings in many other places both in Northern Ireland itself and Great Britain will never occur again.*]

Despite what may happen in Dublin, is it not absolutely necessary for the House to be kept informed of what is happening to that process? At the same time, is it not important to ensure that the process is permanent so that never again will people be murdered in any part of the United Kingdom as a result of terrorist violence coming from Northern Ireland?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows well of, and shares, the Government's determination to make progress in the peace process and to bring about the situation that he would like to see. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will report to the House as they think appropriate. I am also sure that the House will share the hope that political developments in Dublin will not affect the peace process.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate following the press conference that Gerry Adams gave in the Houses of Parliament today, in which he was extremely evasive about his willingness to co-operate with the British Government on giving up weapons? Does my right hon. Friend agree that a full debate, during which hon. Members on both sides would be very supportive of the importance of banning those weapons, is essential? Otherwise, a cruel trick will have been played on the people of Northern Ireland, who crave permanent peace.

Mr. Newton: Although I understand my hon. Friend's point, she will understand that it is not long since the House had the opportunity to debate Northern Ireland matters in the spillover period after the summer recess. I cannot promise a debate in the near future, but I will bear her legitimate request in mind.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Leader of the House make arrangements for a statement to be made next week dealing with recent developments in the study of sudden infant deaths? Will he bear in mind the fact that some of us raised the matter years ago and were told that no dangerous substance was involved, yet scientists had not been given the task of undertaking proper research and, above all, pathologists had not examined the babies' tissues?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a statement, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will study carefully what has been suggested in recent days. I shall draw her attention to his remarks.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): In view of the deep concern with which my constituents view the plans of the Liberal and Labour-controlled Essex council to sell off part of Hadleigh junior school playing fields, will my right hon. Friend consider a debate in which Government policy on the sale of school playing fields could be brought forward?

Mr. Newton: Although I cannot promise a debate, I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider carefully my hon. Friend's remarks. The Government have shown in various ways that they attach considerable importance to sport in schools and want local education authorities—of whatever colour, frankly—to study carefully such proposals against that background.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): In the light of the fact that Lord Archer—whom I am required to describe as noble—has got away with £80,000 on an insider trading deal, is not it about time that Parliament reconsidered insider trading legislation so that people who commit offences can be charged with them and prosecuted successfully?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that either you, Madam Speaker, or the House would expect me to follow the hon. Gentleman, either in the terms in which he referred to the noble Lord, or in some of the remarks and accusations which followed, and I do not propose to do so.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I am sure that my right hon. Friend would agree that the success of the national lottery depends crucially on the confidence that the British people have in the method of distribution, particularly of the Millennium Fund. Will he therefore arrange for an early debate so that we can review the progress made so far, and thereafter ensure that we have an annual debate on the national lottery?

Mr. Newton: There is some tension between the point made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor)—to some assent from the House—about making progress on Jopling, and continual demands for additional debates of one kind or another, whether annual or otherwise. I do not think that I would want to excite too many hopes in

that direction. I shall, of course, consider whether it will be possible to have a debate on the huge success of the national lottery, and associated matters.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Leader of the House confirm that the European Communities (Finance) Bill to be debated on Monday week is being promoted under article 201 of the current treaty which gives national parliaments the treaty power to say no if they wish? Is he aware that the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation on Commission proposal 9298/93—the instrument for the new financial structure—noted that the Paymaster General had stated that, in some respects, the proposal did not accord with the agreement at Edinburgh? Will the right hon. Gentleman now assure the House either that it is in the accord, or that the differences will be made clear before the debate on Monday week?

Mr. Newton: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the purpose of the Bill is to implement the Edinburgh accord on European Community finance, and I will draw his comments to the attention of the Paymaster General.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many of my constituents work for British Aerospace. He may not be surprised that I am keen to know whether there is likely to be an opportunity for an early debate to consider the competitive position of Britain's defence procurement industry, with particular reference to the two bids received for VSEL. Will there be such an opportunity?

Mr. Newton: There are certainly likely to be early opportunities to raise those matters, which is not quite what my hon. Friend asked for. First, there is a debate embracing defence matters today; secondly, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will be answering questions next Tuesday; and, thirdly, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will be answering questions next Wednesday.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Can the Leader of the House tell us exactly what the Government mean about the debate on the European Community budget a week on Monday in respect of the Government losing the vote? If the vote is lost, will he tell us that the Government will not table a motion of confidence the following day to try to save their bacon? If the Government are saying that a defeat on the European budget proposals is final, that should be the end of it. Will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear that there will not be a vote of confidence the following day?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it crystal clear yesterday that the Bill is seen as an issue of confidence. I have said elsewhere that I do not anticipate that the scenario painted by the hon. Gentleman will be followed by a vote of confidence of the kind to which he refers. I have also made clear elsewhere, as have others, that the normal and natural consequence of losing a vote on an issue of confidence—although these are matters for the Prime Minister and for the monarch—would be that the Prime Minister would ask for a dissolution, and that the Queen would grant it.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on the chaotic situation which now surrounds the export of live animals for slaughter overseas with a view to having animals properly slaughtered at home and exported on the hook, rather than on the hoof?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend, with his persistent and dedicated pursuit of the interests of animals, knows well that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and, indeed, his predecessors, have persistently fought in Europe for improvements in conditions, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Given the enthusiasm of the Leader of the House for Jopling, can he explain why did he not take the opportunity today to announce the business for the next fortnight? That would have been a good precedent to set, especially since we can almost all work it out. Which of the Bills in the Queen's Speech will be subject to the special procedure of the Select Committee so that we can exercise proper scrutiny over them, or does the right hon. Gentleman's interpretation of Jopling simply confer benefits on the Government at the expense of Back Benchers?

Mr. Newton: If the latter were the case I would not have gone to so much trouble to discuss things with the Opposition and with the minority parties—

Mr. Bennett: What about Back Benchers?

Mr. Newton:—seeking to take into account the interests of all in the House. I have repeatedly acknowledged that the interests of hon. Members must be taken into account when considering Jopling.

On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, perhaps we had better await the signing, sealing and, I hope, delivering of a complete understanding on Jopling, but I do not think that I would be giving any secrets away if I said that the day immediately following the business that I have announced, Tuesday 29 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer expects to open his Budget.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): May I, for probably the first time, endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)? I agree that, at this time of the year, it should be possible to announce the full business for the fortnight and to know the Whip on both sides, so that we know where we are.

What stage have we reached with linking ourselves to the information super-highway? That is another development on which our Parliament seems so far behind the rest of the world.

Mr. Newton: I will draw the latter part of my hon. Friend's question to the attention of the Chairman of the Information Committee—I am happy that it is not my direct responsibility—who shares my hon. Friend's enthusiasm.

On the first half of my hon. Friend's question, since I now seem to be engaged in a peculiarly helpful operation to the House in response to questions, I can say that after my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has opened his Budget on 29 November there will be a debate on the Budget on the Wednesday and Thursday.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Leader of the House will be aware that the clerk to the Select

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Committee on European Legislation has been allocated extra duties. Will the right hon. Gentleman re-examine this?

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Leader of the House. The hon. Gentleman might like to come to see me about it.

Mr. Enright: I am grateful.

Mr. Newton: I am even more grateful to have you, Madam Speaker, doing the work.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my right hon. Friend surprised that no one has yet asked him if we can have a specific debate on the colossal amount of fraud in the European Union? Far from debating whether we should pay increased sums, should we not now be debating whether all cheques to the European Union should be stopped forthwith until it puts its house in order?

Mr. Newton: The question might not have been put in that specific form, but I rather thought that that was what my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) was getting at. Of course, there will be a number of opportunities to debate such matters, which everyone in Her Majesty's Government will welcome, because the United Kingdom Government were at the forefront of instigating the report from the Court of Auditors and pursuing the issue of fraud in the Community.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Following the question from the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), I, too, demand an early debate on the report of Lord Donaldson, entitled "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas". It was published in May and the then Secretary of State for Transport promised hon. Members a debate on it this year. The Leader of the House should be aware that many unsafe and uninsured factory ships from eastern European countries, which constitute a serious danger to human life and the marine environment, operate in Scottish waters. We need that debate.

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said to my hon. Friend earlier, although I am aware of the concern about that. Perhaps I should have said earlier, however, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is due to answer questions next Monday, so the hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity then.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): May I raise the esoteric but important subject of the licensing of herbal medicines, about which I have had a great deal of correspondence recently? Is my right hon. Friend aware that people are concerned that the Government will seek to amend by regulation the Medicines Act 1968 in response to a somewhat ancient EC directive, which will make the licensing of individual herbal medicines prohibitively expensive and thus drive out of business too many practitioners in that growing field of medicine?

Mr. Newton: Of course, I am aware of the concern that has been expressed and have been subject to correspondence on it, as have other hon. Members. As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health made a statement last Friday making it clear that herbal products currently exempt from product licensing under section 12 of the Medicines Act will continue to enjoy that exemption under the new legislation that comes into force on 1 January 1995. There was some concern about whether that resolved the question regarding aromatherapy. Those products can be sold without a product licence if they are not medicinal products—that is, if no medicinal claims are made. That will remain the case after 1 January 1995. I hope that my answer reassures both my hon. Friend and those on whose behalf he speaks.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Transport to place a copy of the marine accidents investigation branch report in the House of Commons Library? May we have a debate on that important issue in the near future?

Mr. Newton: I shall bring the first question to the attention of my right hon. Friend and consider the second myself.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): Is the Leader of the House aware of the deep disappointment among thousands of people about the lack of a specific reference to the Child Support Agency in the Queen's Speech? Since the Select Committee on Social Security has now reported on the Child Support Agency, which has always been the last excuse by Ministers for delaying action on that matter, when can we expect a debate and legislation on that important item?

Mr. Newton: Of course, I am aware of the concern expressed about the Child Support Agency. The hon. Gentleman will know that we all welcome the Select Committee's full support for the principles behind the child support scheme. My right hon. Friend and other colleagues in the DSS are currently carefully examining what the Select Committee has said and I am sure that they will come forward with a response at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the Leader of the House ask his colleagues in the Department of Health to make a statement on the subject of women who have suffered radiation damage as a result of treatment for cervical cancer? Will he ask his hon. Friends to include in that statement the conduct of health authorities which are withholding information from that extremely hard-pressed group on matters that affect their personal health?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly bring those concerns to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): As the Leader of the House is ruling out a statement on cot deaths, will he allow for an early debate on the findings of "The Cook Report" and the failure of the DTI, the Secretary of State for Health and the Chief Medical Officer to take action four years ago on the sale of mattresses that give out toxic gases, which could have avoided possibly hundreds of cot deaths?

Mr. Newton: I hope that any response that I gave earlier was not seen in the dismissive way that the hon. Gentleman implied in his opening remarks. It was certainly not intended like that. I repeat that I am sure that my right hon. Friend and her advisers are looking

carefully at what has been said and written in recent days, and I shall bring to her attention the hon. Gentleman's remarks as well as the earlier remarks.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May we have an immediate statement from the Attorney-General about his dilatory approach to the extradition of Father Brendan Smyth? Is the Leader of the House aware that, quite apart from what is happening in Dublin, many people are concerned about the stewardship of that matter by the British Attorney-General, who has let down the police, the children abused and their parents? Is it not time that the Attorney-General made a full and frank statement about his sloppy handling of that matter?

Mr. Newton: The House would not expect me to accept the hon. Gentleman's rather extravagant and over-heated language, but I will certainly undertake to bring his remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend, who, I am sure, will be doing his job with proper diligence in a matter that obviously requires care.

Madam Speaker: I called at least one hon. Member today who came in towards the very end of the Leader's statement. I wish it to be known now, at the beginning of this new Session, as I made it known in the last Session, that it is not my intention to call Members who have not been in their place during an entire statement. Individual Members owe this courtesy to the Minister who is making the statement, and they should be aware that, if they come in late, they cannot expect to catch my eye in future.

Points of Order

3.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I have your help?

Yesterday, I tabled a number of parliamentary questions in connection with the Attorney-General's conduct of the Brendan Smyth case. I cleared the matter of the sub judice rule with the clerk at the Table Office. There was not a sub judice problem. At 9.45 last night, I tabled an early-day motion about the same matter, and it did not appear on the blues this morning. When I inquired why, I was told that it had been taken back to examine whether it was a matter of sub judice. I reiterate that I had already cleared that, earlier in the day. When I asked with whom the matter of whether there was a problem regarding sub judice had been cleared, I was told that it had been referred to the Attorney-General.

I find that unacceptable and breathtaking, and I would like you to inquire into the matter for me, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I understand that the hon. Gentleman sought to table his motion yesterday evening, and that the Table Office thought it right to make sure that some of the matters canvassed were not sub judice in the Northern Ireland courts. It was not possible to establish the facts last night, after the law courts had closed. I believe that that is the normal, and obviously the sensible, practice. When the Table Office clerks have to establish facts in matters of this kind, they of course have to consult the courts, and their normal point of contact is the office of the Law Officers of the Crown.

I am glad to be able to tell the hon. Member that his motion has now been cleared, and of course it will be printed tomorrow, but I believe that the hon. Gentleman had a genuine point of order to raise, and I am glad that he has done so.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Dunn.]*

Question again proposed.

Foreign Affairs and Defence

3.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): The range of British interests in the world is so wide that the holder of my office has a rather hard choice on occasions such as this. He can either scamper hurriedly from subject to subject, country to country, and try to go around the world in 40 minutes, or he can select—and this year I shall select. So I shall not mention, for example, Kashmir, Cyprus, Gibraltar or the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Pergau.

Mr. Hurd: I might mention that towards the end.

All the subjects I mentioned take up much time in the Foreign Office. They are all important. If hon. Members raise those subjects, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will do his best to cover them when he replies to the debate. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will speak specifically about the peace process in the middle east; he has just returned from that region.

I start with a subject that is very much in the news today. The House will have heard the news from Dublin that the Taoiseach resigned this morning. I think that it is right to thank Mr. Reynolds for his work in the past three years, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written to him today. Under his leadership, the Irish Government have established support for the peace process throughout the political spectrum in Ireland.

We have no doubt that the peace process will continue. It does not depend on any one person, and it has the overwhelming support, not only of both sides of the House, but of the people of Great Britain and of Northern Ireland and those of the Irish Republic. Therefore, we shall press ahead. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will press ahead and, as we have already announced, we shall begin exploratory talks with Sinn Fein and loyalist political representatives before the end of the year.

Bosnia takes up a great deal of the time and emotions of Ministers, the House and many people in many countries. It is reasonable to ask first: what is the British interest in Bosnia? It has three parts. Stability in Europe is essential for our security, so we want to do what we can to bring the war to an end and to prevent it from spreading. Secondly, we want to end suffering and save lives. Thirdly—I emphasise this to the House today—we must not allow the strains created by Bosnia to disrupt the transatlantic partnership. The danger is there for all to see and I shall work with all my energy to prevent such disruption.

The realities of Bosnia remain as they have been throughout, with one important exception. It remains true—as it has always been true—that the international community will not impose a solution by force. It follows that the fighting will stop when, and not before, the parties fighting are persuaded to stop. What has changed in recent months is the willingness of President Milosevic in Belgrade to accept the plan prepared by the international community and to put pressure on the Bosnian Serbs to do the same. That is an important change, as the House will recognise, and we must put that change to good effect. We must use the machinery at our disposal as effectively as we can. That means using aid, using the United Nations' force to mitigate the suffering and using the contact group of Russia, America, Britain, France and Germany to promote a solution.

It is still hard to be optimistic about that. The latest outbreaks of fighting have been destructive rather than decisive. The Bosnian Government have attacked, Bosnian Serbs have counter-attacked, and villages have changed hands and been destroyed. There are more blackened ruins and there is more hunger as the third winter of the war approaches. There are more corpses, but there is no outcome. No one has gained and no one will gain a decisive military victory.

That setback follows a period during which some signs of normal life returned to Bosnia. A year ago, every day 1,500 shells rained down on Sarajevo and every day civilians were killed by snipers. For most of this year, people in Sarajevo have known days on end when there have been no shells and no sniper casualties. Schools have reopened in many parts of Bosnia and more than 90 per cent. of aid convoys now get through—before the ceasefire barely half did so. All that is at risk and now lies in an uneasy balance between peace and war.

Our aid workers and troops remain hard at work. Our aid workers have used the lull in fighting to restore gas supplies, reconnect 71,000 people to mains water and electricity, and restart medical services. Our troops have rebuilt bridges, reopened roads and defused dozens of small local crises that never reach the newspapers. The aid workers and the soldiers of UNPROFOR perform deeds of quiet heroism every day. They cannot impose peace, but where a fragile peace exists they can soften the suffering. That is why I say that General Rose and all his troops deserve our strongest support. We share his concern about the recent upsurge in fighting. Our troops can stay there doing their job of building peace and saving lives only if they can do so without unacceptable risk—that is a crucial "if" as we have all made clear, repeatedly, to those involved.

UNPROFOR and our aid workers work to keep people alive and to maintain a fragile peace on the ground. In the contact group we have to work to keep the prospect of peace alive. Only the Bosnian Serbs now block that way to peace as they constitute the only party involved to have rejected our plan. We cannot simply turn off the engines

and wait. We have to find additional routes to a settlement, new ways and a wider solution. Tomorrow I shall be discussing with the Russian and French Foreign Ministers how to keep pressing forward. Soon after that I shall talk to the American Secretary of State and the German Foreign Minister. I am sure that only a united effort by the contact group will succeed.

Meanwhile, we must continue the arms embargo in the Adriatic. There has been much publicity about that operation, which must now adjust to the change in the American role announced last week. But it should remain effective. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State and I listened in Holland on Monday to a careful analysis of this by the new Secretary General of NATO. Having heard that, I am confident that the NATO action can remain effective. We must not inflate what is certainly a difficulty into a disaster for NATO, and we should avoid giving the problem a political weight that it does not deserve.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Has the Foreign Secretary seen reports in today's *The European* to the effect that United States military and intelligence personnel are giving assistance to the Bosnian Muslim side in the conflict, at the same time as the Americans are withdrawing intelligence co-operation from Britain and France in the enforcement of the arms embargo in the Adriatic? Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to condemn that intervention and to make it clear to the American Government that we do not take kindly to the fact that they are making the task of our troops in Bosnia much more dangerous?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is inadvertently doing precisely what I was warning against. He is taking the fact that two American ships in the Adriatic have had their orders changed and is pushing it forward, quoting reports to which I do not give credence and raising the whole question of future American reliability. That is not justified by what has occurred. If at any time we feel that the risks to our troops become unacceptable, they must be withdrawn; but we do not believe that that is the effect of the change in the instructions to the American ships.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend repudiate what the hon. Gentleman has just said? He talked about the Bosnian Muslim side. Will my right hon. Friend make it quite plain that we are talking about the legitimately recognised Government of Bosnia, which is not purely Muslim, and that there would be no fighting now had the Serbs accepted, as the Bosnian Government reluctantly did, the contact group proposals?

Mr. Hurd: That is right on both points, but I want to return to the general point that I am trying to make, which is fundamental.

It is the firm belief of the Government—and, I think, of the Opposition—that the Atlantic alliance remains the foundation of our defence and that the presence of the United States in Europe must not be discounted or thrown away. I say that because some commentators, here and even more elsewhere—in Paris, for example—have rushed to rash judgments on this point in the past few days. I do not believe that we should revise those fundamental judgments, which lie at the heart of our foreign policy, because two American ships have altered their duties in the Adriatic. In an age of uncertainty there are still some welcome certainties. One of those is the strength of the NATO alliance, and we must keep it that way.

Some reference has been made to intelligence and to the role of American officers in headquarters jobs at NATO—for instance, the admiral in charge of this operation. It has been made entirely clear that Admiral Smith will continue to conduct the NATO operation in exactly the same way as before.

In this context I should like to commend to the House the interesting speech and proposals made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence the night before last, when he spoke to the Pilgrims about forging an Atlantic community.

There is no contradiction between our commitment to the Atlantic alliance and the new relationship that we are building with Russia. Russia has joined NATO in one of the most important Partnership for Peace projects. In parallel, the partnership and co-operation agreement between Russia and the European Union was signed last June. We consult, in the same spirit, with Russia at the Security Council, the contact group and the G7 summit, and our British relationship with Russia exhibits a new breadth, openness and warmth. We saw that when President Yeltsin was with the Prime Minister at Chequers in September, and I saw it when Her Majesty the Queen visited Moscow and St Petersburg last month, when the Royal Standard dramatically flew over the Kremlin.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Has my right hon. Friend seen the report by the Frankfurt-based Institute of Soviet Affairs which shows that the institute believes that Russia has 4.8 million men under arms? That is twice the officially recognised number of 2.3 million and even more than the number of men that Russia had under arms at the beginning of the reduction of armed forces in Europe in the late 1980s.

Mr. Hurd: I have not seen that report, but I shall check it. My hon. Friend's question leads me straight into what I was about to say—that we should not delude ourselves that the new dialogue and openness about which I have spoken will be easy or that Russia's interests will always coincide with ours. We cannot be naive but must be hard-headed about that. When we now meet we do so in the hope of agreeing on solutions and not just, as in the past, as a way of expressing disagreement and accepting it as inevitable.

Earlier this year I suggested to President Yeltsin in Moscow that underlying our new relationship was the principle of "no vetoes, no surprises". He agreed, and that is how we should continue to operate. One area on which our perceptions have certainly differed is Iraq. When President Saddam Hussein's troops moved south again last month, we sent two naval ships and a battalion of Royal Marines and doubled our deployment of Tornado aircraft in that region. As a result of that and the American action, the threat was again seen off. But it reminded us that we need to be vigilant, to be prepared to deploy troops in the field and to use our influence and authority in the Security Council.

There is a route for Iraq to return to normality, and it is clearly set out in the Security Council's resolutions. The recognition of Kuwait, which Iraq has just announced, is a step forward, but it is long overdue. However, it is not the only step that is required before sanctions can be lifted. Saddam Hussein, alone in his sumptuous palaces,

[Mr. Hurd]

bears responsibility for the suffering of the Iraqi people. The Security Council has made it quite clear in resolutions 706 and 712 how Saddam Hussein can obtain funds to relieve the suffering of his people through the sale of oil. He has repeatedly refused that help.

A general point goes to the heart of any sane idea of world order. Under chapter seven of its charter the UN Security Council has the power to pass mandatory resolutions binding all member states. That power should be used sparingly, perhaps more sparingly than in the past. Such resolutions, especially those that apply sanctions and put on embargoes, inevitably cause inconvenience and loss and are unpopular with some member states. That is why they should be a last resort.

I have mentioned the sanctions against Serbia-Montenegro, which are thoroughly disliked in the Russian Duma. An arms embargo applies to all parties in the former Yugoslavia and, as it applies to the Bosnian Government, it is deeply disliked by most members of the United States Congress. Equally, there are mandatory sanctions against Iraq which Russia and perhaps others would like to see lifted before long. All those matters are for legitimate debate and review. At present I think that those mandatory resolutions continue to be observed by the major powers. However, if member states, and particularly permanent members of the Security Council were to ignore or contravene those mandatory resolutions, others would quickly follow suit. The authority of the Security Council and the United Nations would quickly unravel and our hope for a more orderly world would begin to dissolve. We are all aware of the temptations and pressures not to comply, but it is essential that those temptations and pressures be firmly resisted.

Mr. Tim Sainsbury (Hove): While my right hon. Friend is dealing with issues in the middle east, will he confirm that we also need to be vigilant against international terrorism? Will he also confirm that we will do all that we can, including the use of the mandatory sanctions to which he has referred, to bring pressure to bear on all parties that support international terrorism?

Mr. Hurd: I gladly confirm that. As I have said in the past, we are particularly concerned about the policies of Iran, and my right hon. Friend knows what we have been trying to do to focus world attention on terrorism. He will not find us lacking in that regard.

Let me turn to a subject that the House has discussed endlessly, but rightly. The future of Europe is always high on our agenda and there are ups and downs. Some people rejoice in the ups and some in the downs, but we are making progress on the things that matter for Europe and for the entire world open trading system.

The GATT agreement was a great success. We now need to ratify the agreement and make sure that the World Trade Organisation gets going as a vigorous decision-making body, keeping up the pace of trade liberalisation. I welcome the decision by the European Court of Justice earlier this week, underlining the role of member states in carrying out the GATT agreement. I commend that judgment to those who tend to believe that the European Court always makes its judgments in a centralising direction. Now the European Parliament—and all of us—can get on with ratifying the agreement and so, I hope, will the United States Congress.

It has been a good year for enlargement—another of our objectives. The people of Austria, Finland and Sweden have cast their votes and we now hope the Norwegians will vote to walk through the door that is open for them. The door should stay open; we should not behave like nightclub bouncers letting a privileged few slip in and slamming the door on others outside.

Our association agreements with six central European countries set a course for further expansion and we are encouraging those countries to prepare themselves for membership. We are now beginning to negotiate association agreements with the Baltic states, as they have their place in the European family.

As expansion to the east and to the south takes place, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pointed out, the European Union must continue to encourage greater flexibility to match the greater diversity of its members. It is not a question of dilution. We need and believe in a strong, confident union which demands adherence to legal obligations, but the European Union must be more sensitive to its internal differences. It is already happening to some extent; we can see it in the principle of subsidiarity that is beginning to take root and increasingly in what some of our partners say. I read the speech by my French colleague Monsieur Juppé in the French Assembly this week. He said that he was no enthusiast for the concept of the European super-state, however dressed up in federalism.

I was in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Tuesday and I was struck by the way in which leaders of both left and right volunteered that there was no real appetite, even there, for an extension of the competencies of the Commission. There will be plenty of argument about the powers of the Parliament, but the idea which used to be orthodox in those circles that the Commission should steadily extend its competencies into areas not now covered by the treaty has reached the high water mark. We have to bring our own ideas and we shall do so.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Foreign Secretary mentioned the treaty and what was outside the treaty—presumably he was referring to the treaty of Rome. Does he agree that title I of the Maastricht treaty gives powers to the Commission to generally supervise and be in a supervisory capacity over both the treaty on European Union and the treaty of Rome?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman knows what actually happens under the second and third pillars and we can go into more detail another time, but it certainly is not supervision by the Commission. They are intergovernmental arrangements. The Commission is present, but it does not have the same powers it has in the Community itself—the first pillar.

We are working out and will bring forward our own ideas and energy to the work of preparing for the 1996 conference. The House will have many occasions to discuss that. We have a more immediate problem that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) during the business statement. We need a clear and effective strategy to root out fraud against the Community budget.

This week the Court of Auditors published a report which highlighted the scale of the problem. It was using for the first time the greater authority which we, the British, insisted it should have and which was put into the Maastricht treaty.

It is for the Commission and the European Parliament to tackle fraud effectively. It should be at the top of their agenda, not in some half-baked postscript. Europe can never be healthy, robust or successful if that cancer is not adequately treated. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is pressing for better financial procedures, more rigorously applied. It is also why my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, through the new intergovernmental system, has launched an initiative to ensure that fraud is treated as seriously in other member states as it is in Britain.

I repeat what I said this week at the European Parliament. I believe that the newly elected Parliament and Commission have the opportunity to prove their energy and clear-sightedness. They should gain a reputation for themselves by cleaning out the stables and insisting that member states do the same.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I remember an occasion in 1981 when my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who was then a junior Treasury spokesman, replied to a debate on that very issue. Ministers assured the House that they would deal with the problem of fraud in the Community. That was 13 years ago, and every year since then Ministers have given assurances to Parliament and to the country that something would be done.

Even people like me—a committed European for more than 35 years—are beginning to question their loyalties because the Government have repeatedly refused to act. Why cannot some changes be introduced in the Community now, so that some form of international police force is given access to each member state to root out fraud in the way the Parliament and the people of this country expect?

Mr. Hurd: It was precisely in response to the sort of feeling that the hon. Gentleman has expressed that during the Maastricht negotiations the British Government insisted on new powers. That is why we have a report. The treaty came into force last November and it is now for the Commission, the European Parliament and the Finance Ministers to push ahead with implementing that. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has tabled a proposal for joint action. The Commission has tabled a proposal for action by itself, which we shall consider sympathetically.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is right to say that the matter has dragged on for far too long. Now, thanks to this country, there is an opportunity to deal with it effectively, not just through declarations— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman and I will exchange further views on this matter in a year's time and then we can see how we are getting on. However, I assure him that we are on his side.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the question of fraud, I remind him that yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, in an otherwise brilliant speech, that we should give greater powers to the Court of Auditors to investigate fraud in the United Kingdom. Is it the Government's policy to allow international investigators to come here and investigate our frauds? Or will that investigation be carried out by our police and our Serious Fraud Office, in the usual, accepted way?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. and learned Friend asks an important question. To some extent, the responsibility lies with the Commission. It must put its house in order. It has tabled a proposal, which we are studying, that would provide greater efficiency in that process. Of course, the responsibility also lies with member states as 80 per cent. of spending is by them. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has tabled a proposal for member states to be compelled to carry out their responsibilities more effectively. Both sides of the issue are important.

Mr. Skinner: I listened carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman said about the British Government having pushed for the new powers. He said that the system would be cleaned up. Why, then, did the Chancellor of the Exchequer go to an intergovernmental meeting a few weeks ago and vote to write off more than £500 million that the Italians had swindled from the rest of the nation states? The Foreign Secretary talks about a massive clean-up campaign, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer went along with other member states and voted to write off that £500 million, which means that the British taxpayer has to pick up the bill.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman has that example entirely wrong. Let me explain it to him. Everyone recognised that the Italians and the Spaniards had, to put it mildly, over-benefited from the milk quotas. The Commission proposed a fine of 2 billion ecu for the two countries. We thought that that was not enough and we took the matter to court. The compromise that my right hon. and learned Friend accepted means that Italy and Spain will be paying a fine of not 2 billion ecu but 3 billion ecu—1 billion ecu more entirely as a result of the action taken by the British Government. That is not bad. *[Interruption.]* I hope that when the hon. Gentleman, who is not doing a great deal of listening this afternoon, has studied the figures he will recognise that he was wrong and pay the appropriate compliments to my right hon. and learned Friend on a good success.

I want now to move on and say just a word about another part of UN work which has not been really noticed since the disasters in Rwanda faded from the television screens. Rwanda has tested the UN system almost to destruction. I do not think that any of us, looking back, can be satisfied with the way in which the international community responded. Action, not hand-wringing, is now needed. We have made our contribution and we continue to do so.

Our cargo planes were the first to land back in April. Our aid specialists were there on the ground when the refugees started to arrive. Since August, 600 British troops—this has gone almost unnoticed—have been with the UN force in Rwanda. They will be coming home this weekend. I pay tribute to the excellent work that they have done. The media have hardly done them justice. Our soldiers have literally kept the aid effort on the road, carrying out more than 800 repairs on UN vehicles, rebuilding bridges and treating 125,000 people in the field hospital.

[Mr. Hurd]

There are lessons to be learnt from that, and we are trying to learn them. We need to be better equipped to prevent such conflicts. When we cannot do that, we must be better equipped to respond quickly. I put forward some ideas on that to the UN General Assembly in September. We want to work with other members in developing a coherent structure for conflict prevention in Africa. We are following up those ideas with the Organisation of African Unity and we hope to have a meeting in Africa to carry them further fairly soon.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I shall not give way again until towards the end of my speech.

Mr. Mullin: Is not one of the lessons to be learnt that we should not keep selling arms to those tinpot regimes?

Mr. Hurd: I shall come to that later. I pass over, as Cicero used to say, the hon. Gentleman, one of the most progressive Members of the House, and the way in which, when it suits him, he describes third-world countries as tinpot regimes. Such a patronising attitude causes immense irritation in the countries that used to belong to colonial empires.

I come now to our own last remaining large colonial territory. Hong Kong will cease to be British in 1997. But the value to the region of Hong Kong's amazing dynamism must continue—and will continue if the transition runs smoothly. There is a huge British stake in the territory—3.5 million British passport holders, 1,000 British companies and investment worth more than £90 billion sterling. But there is more to our responsibility than that. There is the duty to 6 million people in the territory to hand over Hong Kong in a way that preserves their confidence—everyone's confidence—in their territory. We have a duty to the world and to ourselves to achieve the transition in good order.

The Hong Kong Legislative Council has accepted our view of the right constitutional arrangements for the territory. We now want to turn that page and tackle and resolve the many outstanding questions. We have just had the welcome agreement on financing the new Hong Kong airport, which I have seen being built. It is on time and it is the biggest single engineering project now going ahead in the world. That is an important step. In the months ahead we shall be working for similar progress in other areas. With China, we need to put aside the sensitivities and suspicions of the past and press ahead with practical co-operation.

I will refer next to the recent High Court decision on the Pergau dam project—which, understandably and rightly, has aroused a certain amount of comment. I will not go over the whole background. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am willing to do so, but that would take time, and I would be repeating the evidence that I gave to the Foreign Affairs Committee, by which I stand. The Committee's inquiries, made under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), went wider than the court judgment. It examined the events of 1988 and the political and commercial background, and the court did none of that.

The court was not asked to enter and did not enter into the question of arms sales. I understand that the court had nothing to say on that point. My understanding—and I will explain why it is only an understanding—is that the court has for the first time interpreted the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 under which the aid programme was given and decided that the Pergau project falls outside it. The court has not yet produced its written judgment. When it does, I shall study it and decide whether to appeal.

We must decide whether the Overseas Development Administration can live within the new judgment and yet continue to run an aid programme of benefit to this country as well as to the recipients of aid. I am thinking particularly of the aid and trade provision designed by a Labour Government in 1977, to benefit British industry as well as the recipient country. We shall study that point as soon as I receive the court's written judgment. Subject to any appeal—and we can decide on that only when we receive the judgment—we must of course fully comply with the court's judgment. Meanwhile, I have asked the ODA carefully to review all the projects and activities that it funds, to see whether any others approved under our previous understanding of the 1980 Act fall outside the interpretation of that legislation, which was given for the first time last week. I have read newspaper reports of that interpretation and have a transcript, but I do not yet have the full judgment. In a matter of this importance, clearly I need the full judgment before taking a decision.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I understand the Foreign Secretary's difficulties in making too bold a pronouncement at the moment, because he has yet to see the High Court judgment and to decide whether to appeal. However, will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance now that if he accepts that judgment, or if he appeals and loses, any funds already paid to the Pergau project from the ODA's budget will be restored to the ODA, and that any future sums to be credited for the Pergau dam against future ODA budgets will be disallowed and that the ODA will be able to spend as though no commitment to Pergau had been made?

Mr. Hurd: I will deal with that point in a moment. I may not entirely satisfy the right hon. Gentleman, but I will go as far as I can today. I would prefer to deal with these matters in sequence. I do not intend to evade the right hon. Gentleman's point because it has been made in many places.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Was Malaysia a signatory to the Rio accord? I believe that the court specifically said that it felt that the way that Malaysia generates electricity is uneconomic, in that it decided to go for hydro-electricity rather than burn fossil fuel. Surely it is strange when a court starts telling countries that they should burn fossil fuel rather than choose clean hydro-electricity.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend illustrates my difficulty, because I do not think that the court said that. None of the reports that I have read touch on that matter. Judging by some comments, the court commented on arms sales, and on this or that. I must have the considered judgment of the two judges in writing before I can weigh those matters and decide how best to respond.

The judgment, in any case, clearly does not lessen British involvement in the Pergau project. The dam is now 75 per cent. complete and it involves some 200 British companies. We have contractual obligations toward the banks financing the project.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hurd: No. I shall make progress, as I have said. What the judgment would mean, if we decided not to appeal, is that the project should not—could not—henceforth be financed from funds voted under the 1980 Act.

I now come to the point of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. Until we have received and studied the written judgment and decided for or against an appeal, we cannot decide on the implications for the aid programme of the money already spent on the Pergau project or the funds likely to be required—the right hon. Gentleman's point—from this year to 2006. Again contrary to some press reports, no decision at all has been taken or indeed could be taken on those points, and the House will be informed of a decision when it is taken.

I shall give the figures, because some reports go well astray. The total cost of support pledged for the project will amount, on the latest calculation, to £216 million; £24 million has been spent in previous financial years, and £11 million has been spent so far this year. A further £11 million is due to be spent before the end of the financial year, but no payments need to be made in the next few weeks. The remainder, which is £170 million, will be spread over the next nine years, with a peak payment of £26 million next year—that is the most in any one year—and the year after. Until the judgment, those were financed out of the aid and trade provision which I have already mentioned. At present, the aid and trade provision runs at £100 million a year, which is between 5 per cent. and 6 per cent. of the total aid budget. It is useful to have those figures on the record, because it puts those large sums in the right perspective.

There has been some attempt, to which the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has lent his mind and his tongue, to prove a link between aid and defence sales to several countries. I would like to make one point clear. During my time as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, I have at no time authorised or been aware of any link between British aid and British defence sales to any country anywhere in the world. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the House will accept that assurance.

Of our 10 biggest aid recipients, all are low-income countries, seven in sub-Saharan Africa, and three in Asia. Nearly 80 per cent. of our bilateral British aid to developing countries goes to the poorest among them. Indeed, the OECD, as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) will know, in the recent review of our aid programme, recognised how British aid focuses on the poorest countries—it wishes that there were more of it, but it recognises that what we spend is focused, as it has always been, on the poorest countries. That picture is far removed from the suggestion that our aid flows are determined by prospects of arms sales. It is absurd to maintain that we should not provide aid to poor countries because they buy our arms, or that we should not pursue defence sales in countries where we give aid.

There is a certain unreality about some of the discussion. How many employees of British Aerospace, GEC, Rolls-Royce, Racal and other defence exporters would accept losing their jobs for such a specious policy? I wonder what redress those employees would have and what court they would go to for redress for lost employment if the Labour party's policies prevailed in this matter.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I do not want the right hon. Gentleman to lose the point on the Pergau dam. I would like him to be a little more explicit in his answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). The question is very simple. Whether or not the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary decides to appeal—according to one newspaper report, he said that his instincts are not to appeal, but that is a matter for him—if it is shown that the money was unlawfully used, all that we need to know is that it will go back into the aid budget and that the aid budget will not suffer as a result. Surely the answer can be yes or no.

Mr. Hurd: No, because the question is hypothetical. No Minister would answer a question of that kind. I have said that there will be no decisions on any of those points, either on past or future spending. We shall have to take that decision if I decide not to appeal. As soon as that decision is taken, the House will be informed. I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), but I will not give way again.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Ultra Electronics in my constituency is typical of many companies in other constituencies which are responsible for selling arms? It sells sonar buoys to many parts of the world. Many of the people employed there are not impressed by people in the Labour party and elsewhere who say that their jobs should be given up. They know that other countries will take over—[HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] By cancellation of arms sales for whatever reasons. Sonar buoys are as much a form of arms as anything else and Opposition Members ought to know that.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend, not for the first time, puts a note of reality into the debate. Opposition Members are a little silent on the matter. They know that it is not only, or even mainly, Conservative Members of Parliament who represent industrial constituencies who write to us saying, "You must give an export licence to this project because jobs depend on it." There are plenty of examples of that in the files. Nor is it just Labour Members who write in. Westland is an important export contractor. That is why it is necessary for not only the Government but the House as a whole to get the balance right. I shall now explain in the last few minutes of my speech how we seek to get the balance right.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hurd: I will not give way any further. The whole House will accept that a balance is needed. We recognise, as the United Nations charter recognises, that countries have a right to self-defence. If a country wishes to defend itself it needs good equipment. A great many British companies supply high-quality defence products. That is the chain of reasoning and it is hard to resist. We need to

[Mr. Hurd]

ensure that when those products are exported, they are sold responsibly. We need to take careful account of the use to which the equipment may be put.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank the Foreign Secretary for giving way at last. Can he explain why his Government have consistently sanctioned arms sales to Indonesia, ipso facto supporting the invasion and occupation of East Timor and the genocide of 200,000 people in that country? Does he not think that the blood trade of arms to that country has to be stopped?

Mr. Hurd: The reason why we allow—under certain conditions that I shall come to—export sales to Indonesia is precisely the reason put by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman for defence, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who said that he supported the sale of Hawk training aircraft to Indonesia because that country was part of a south Asia security system. The Opposition Front-Bench team, seeking to strike the balance that I am talking about, came down on the same side of that balance as the Government on the point that the hon. Gentleman mentions. They were right to do so.

Administering the balance is the job of our export licensing system. If we believe that an application raises concern that equipment is likely to be used for internal repression, we will refuse it. If we are not satisfied about the impact of a proposed sale on regional security, we will refuse it. We have also withheld licences on sales which we thought unsuitable or unfit for the economic or technical capacity of the buyer. That is not academic. In seeking the balance, we refused, often, I expect, against representations from Members of Parliament, some 300 export licence applications last year, including riot control equipment where we were concerned that it was likely to be used for internal repression.

We will not put unnecessary barriers in the way of British companies which responsibly earn revenue and sustain the jobs of the 400,000 people in this country who work in the defence industry, or the approximately 90,000 of those whose jobs depend upon defence sales overseas. We are highly competitive in this field. It comprises only 2.1 per cent. of our total exports. But we are not prepared to dull the competitive edge of that part of our industry to satisfy people who are well-meaning but ill-informed; people who have no responsibility for the prosperity of the British people or for our ability to earn our living in the world.

As I have tried to show, our outlook on foreign policy is worldwide. That is because the interests that we promote and protect stretch across the world. We rely on exports to supply a quarter of our gross domestic product—more than twice as much proportionately as Japan or the United States. As an investor abroad, we are only just behind those two. As a home for foreign investment, we are second only to the United States. We are a European power with interests that reach far beyond Europe.

Protecting those interests, which is our daily job, is not done through some grand design or idealistic vision. It is done through hard work and, I hope, accurate perceptions—taking the world as we find it, identifying British assets and those things that we are strong at and setting them to work as effectively as we can, in the interests of prosperity and security for our people and inthe interests of a more stable and prosperous world.

3.50 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): There could not be a more appropriate moment for the House to debate foreign affairs than the day after the Gracious Speech, given that they provide most of the text of the speech this year.

We wholeheartedly agree with many of the objectives set out in the Gracious Speech. We welcome the support that is expressed for the development of political democracy and a multi-racial society in South Africa. Many Opposition Members worked to support the struggle to end apartheid and we share with the Government the objective of building on that victory to provide a stable future for the peoples of South Africa.

I would also add our voice to the support in the Gracious Speech for the middle east peace process. I hope that, in the year ahead, there will be surer progress towards that peace.

We shall co-operate, whenever possible, with the Government on developing their agreement with China to secure the long-term future of Hong Kong on the basis of the joint declaration.

On all those matters, the Opposition share much common ground with the Government on the role that Britain should play in the world.

I endorse the Foreign Secretary's observations on General Rose and the troops under his command. We fully support their dedication and commitment and appreciate the dangers that they face in Bosnia. We support the commitment in the Gracious Speech to achieving a peaceful settlement in the former Yugoslavia.

I must enter one word of caution—the terms that may offer the best hope for an immediate ceasefire are not necessarily the best basis for a long-term solution. The conditions under which it may be necessary to obtain a ceasefire may mean the partition of Bosnia. I press the Government to recognise the fact that Britain must observe those United Nations resolutions that call for a long-term solution in Bosnia—a solution that will both recognise refugees' rights to return to the areas from which they have been evicted and respect the integrity of Bosnia's borders. I invite the Government to support any initiative that could restore Bosnia as a multi-ethnic and pluralist society and not to leave it for ever in a European version of apartheid, based on ethnic partition, as we celebrate the decline of apartheid in South Africa.

I concur with what the Foreign Secretary said about the United States's decision on the arms embargo and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. I am sure that NATO will be robust enough to withstand that difficulty. I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary did not focus on where that decision leaves the United Nations. There are clear United Nations resolutions on the matter of the arms embargo on all the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The United States has frequently used the United Nations in ways that have been harmonious with its foreign policy. We have the right to tell the United States that the legitimacy of those resolutions that it wishes to get through the United Nations depend on it in turn observing those UN resolutions with which it might not entirely agree.

Each of those issues is very important, but I recognise that the balance of the Gracious Speech, by devoting most of its time and space to the rest of the world and only the minority to Britain, is not a tribute to the importance of world events but an admission that the Government do not have much to offer on domestic issues. It is a further measure of the thinness of the Gracious Speech on domestic issues that what has dominated comment on the Gracious Speech has been the reaction to the European legislation contained within it. Yesterday was our first day back and before we have had a single vote in the new Session, the Prime Minister has named which vote he will regard as a vote of confidence.

The device may well work, and I rather suspect that the rebels will be dragooned into line. I should not be surprised if that happened, because the threat to call a general election is a very potent weapon with which to threaten Back Benchers since, on the present polls, half of them would lose their seats. The Prime Minister has demonstrated that he does not dare let his own Back Benchers vote on the merits of the issue because his own party is too deeply divided over Europe.

I am advised that in foreign affairs a more bipartisan tone is required than is customary. I shall endeavour to rise to that unusual demand. May I therefore congratulate the Foreign Secretary on trying to knock some common sense into his party over Europe at the Conservative party conference? He will recall that, in a speech to that conference, he warned the party that

"we can get just a little high on xenophobia".

We know who the right hon. Gentleman is worried might get a bit too high on xenophobia for their own, and the party's, health. They are the same people whom the Chancellor this week described as fanatical anti-Europeans—people such as the Secretary of State for Employment, whose speech to the conference did not just get high on xenophobia, it positively turned on the booster rockets and entered the stratosphere.

Any of our European partners observing the foot-stomping in Bournemouth which greeted the call of the Secretary of State for Employment to "stop the rot" from Brussels is unlikely—I put it diplomatically, as befits this role—to be more favourably disposed to British interests the next time they are negotiating with the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues in Brussels.

The House will be aware that I come to this brief from the Department of Trade and Industry, and it may therefore be appropriate to put in the context of my experience at the DTI and what I learnt there how I view our relationship to Europe.

The broad landscape of the development of trade and industry around the world shows that, at the turn of the century, the world will be dominated by three industrial blocs—north America, the European Union and the newly emerging industrialised countries of the far east. It will be a very lonely world for any industrial country trying to survive outside one of those blocs. Europe is the only one to which Britain can realistically belong. The issue is not whether we are in Europe, but what kind of Europe we are going to belong to.

The Gracious Speech referred—grudgingly, I thought—to the intergovernmental conference which is coming in 1996. Our view is that we should not approach the IGC as something to be feared, whose advent is to be resisted and whose conclusions are to be obstructed. We believe that the IGC should be embraced as an opportunity to open up the agenda of Europe.

On some of that agenda, we shall have common ground with the Government Front Bench. I am an enthusiastic supporter of the principle of subsidiarity, but I just wish that the Government would practise at home what they preach in Europe. Instead of giving an example of subsidiarity to Europe, Britain provides the example of the most centralised state in Europe. A consistent feature of this Conservative Government has been repeated Bills curbing subsidiarity to local government and, when the Government are resisted, the abolition of some of the powers of local government.

The Foreign Secretary will have our full support in the task of getting priority for enlargement towards the countries of eastern Europe. The historic challenge that is facing Europe is how we respond to the breakdown of the old order in eastern Europe and how we embrace those nations in a community of the democratic nations of Europe. When the history of this period is written 50 or 100 years from now, I suspect that those who write it will be puzzled by the obsession that western Europe has shown with its own institutions, often to the exclusion of the need to open its doors to the countries of the east.

On those points, I think that I am on common ground with the Foreign Secretary, but, in the year ahead, two issues are likely to be contentious. First, we are firmly committed to a social dimension to the European Union. That union cannot be a union that offers only tangible benefits to business without improving the standards of the work force of business. That is why we deplore the Government's opt-out from the social chapter. That opt-out has left the Government so isolated in Europe that the only political party that shares their view on the social chapter is the French National Front.

That opt-out has also left the Government increasingly isolated in Britain. Last week, an event occurred that demonstrated its irrelevance. One of Britain's biggest food companies signed a deal with representatives on behalf of 26,000 members of its work force in eight countries to provide a European works council across Europe. The managing director said:

"We believe that a workforce that understand the objectives of a business and the pressures are better able to respond appropriately."

Under the opt-out, that company could have left out its British workers and avoided creating a works council to embrace them. That same managing director said that the company had not done so because that "would be counterproductive". What was that company? It was United Biscuits, which, since 1979, has given £850,000 in donations to the Tory party. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not enough."] At the current going rate that adds up to 425 parliamentary questions, enough to keep us busy during oral questions until christmas. Even that pillar of the Conservative party has come to the conclusion that the opt-out is counter-productive for its company.

The reality is that major British companies that compete in Europe know that they would not have the slightest difficulty in complying with the terms of the social chapter, because half of them are already observing it punctiliously in their factories across Europe. It is time that those companies' work forces in Britain had the same rights as those enjoyed by their European work forces.

[Mr. Robin Cook]

The second subject on which we shall continue to press the Government is serious reform of the CAP. Since 1979, the cost of the CAP has more than doubled and the current budget provides for no reduction in spending on the CAP for the planning period of the Commission. It is not just the cost to the taxpayer that matters but the cost to families who pay higher prices for food and the cost to the environment from turning the countryside into prairies to produce food that we cannot eat. The cost to the standing of the European Union also matters, because most of the stories used by its critics to discredit it come from the CAP. That was demonstrated again in this week's report from the Court of Auditors, which detailed the most spectacular example of £1 billion that we gave to grub up vineyards, only to find, at the end of the period of expenditure, that the output of wine is up one fifth.

Today, the Foreign Secretary welcomed that report, as he did in a speech to the European Parliament on Tuesday. On that occasion, he expressed some satisfaction at the fact that the report had at least revealed the scale of the problem. Unless we are prepared to take action on it, there is not much point in being pleased with a report for that reason.

I would have more respect for the urging that the Foreign Secretary has given the Commission of the European Parliament to root out the problem if, last year, the Government had not proposed a cut of £31 billion from the CAP budget on anti-fraud measures. Moreover, the Government have still failed to take up the great majority of their share of the funds available from the Commission to combat fraud in Britain. I would have more respect for Government statements on waste in Europe if the Government, during the British presidency, had not agreed that the European Parliament should continue to traipse round three separate sites, at enormous extra cost. Against that background, the brow-beating of many Conservative Members about waste and fraud in Europe sometimes seems to spring less from an enthusiasm for rooting out fraud than from an anxiety to preserve it as a stick with which to beat the European Union.

Those of us who want Europe to succeed must recognise that our greatest priority must be to eliminate the fraud and waste that lower support for Europe among public opinion.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): We have heard at great length about the CAP, which the hon. Gentleman says is a problem and a disaster. Exactly what different action would the hon. Gentleman take to stop the problem with regard to the CAP?

Mr. Cook: I have two answers: one for the long term and one for the short term. In the long term, we must review the system by which we guarantee the price at which we shall buy any amount of food that is produced. In the short term, I shall give one clear priority that the Commission should take on board: I see no reason whatever why Europe should provide £1 billion to subsidise tobacco production when every Government in Europe are trying to stamp out tobacco smoking. Nor does it help then to say that the tobacco does not matter too much because it is so bad that nobody can smoke it.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I must proceed with my speech.

The lengthy passage on foreign affairs in the Gracious Speech touched on many parts of the world besides Europe. Given that the subject was on the Foreign Secretary's mind when he was putting the final touches to the draft at the weekend, I was surprised that the Gracious Speech did not mention the Malaysian Pergau dam. However, I welcome the fact that the Foreign Secretary mentioned it in his speech. I must confess that, at one point over the weekend, I was worried that he might follow in the footsteps of his Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin), and disappear before I had had my first debate with him. Indeed, the Foreign Secretary has confided to the BBC that he had thought of resigning when it emerged that payments of aid for the Pergau dam were illegal. But, as is so often the case with the Government these days, he had second thoughts and changed his mind.

I cannot congratulate the Foreign Secretary on that issue. My best efforts to be bipartisan break down at this point. I concede, however, that he should not be in the dock alone. The deal for which he is left taking the rap was set up by Baroness Thatcher. If it assists the Foreign Secretary, I am happy to add Baroness Thatcher to the charge sheet—and to any other charge sheet that he cares to suggest. That does not let the right hon. Gentleman out of his special share of responsibility for the debacle. The defence that his Department advanced in the court case was that the Foreign Secretary gave his personal authority to the payments for Pergau, so the ODA could not be held to have behaved illegally. If that was his Department's defence, he cannot now escape his personal responsibility for having got it wrong.

The Foreign Secretary's reaction to the judgment has been one of pained surprise—it never occurred to him that the payments might be illegal. If, during those actions, nobody stopped to ask whether they were illegal, that makes the whole episode worse, not better. It aggravates rather than mitigates the offence.

Let me rehearse to the House the actions that led to those payments. The Foreign Secretary authorised payments in aid, even after he had been told that the Pergau dam was not a sound economic project. He persisted in those payments after cost overruns in the project greatly increased the degree to which it was unsound. He overrode the views of the ODA accounting officer even when those views were formally recorded. When asked by my predecessor, he was unable to find a single precedent for a Foreign Secretary overriding the formal advice of his accounting officer.

If we are now told that he did all that without once asking whether it was legal to do so, we have an alarming glimpse into the private arrogance of a Government who have been there for so long that they no longer even ask whether there are limits to their personal authority.

In the event, the right hon. Gentleman has resolved not to resign. Very well. If he stays, the least that he can do, in the event that he chooses not to challenge the court judgment, is to put right the injustice that he has created.

The first step in doing that would be to give an undertaking that he will pay back to the aid budget the money that was illegally taken from it. The second step would be to ensure that never again do payments of aid become entangled with the sale of arms.

I listened with the greatest of care to what the Foreign Secretary said about arms sales. It might be helpful to the Foreign Secretary if I were to caution him, by reminding him of an event that will occur this year, although it was not mentioned in the Gracious Speech—I well understand that the Government may not be looking forward to it—and that is the publication of the report of the Scott inquiry into arms sales to Iraq. That inquiry was sparked by two discoveries in the wake of the collapse of the trial of the executives of Matrix Churchill. The first was that the Government connived at the sale of British machine tools to Saddam Hussein, in the knowledge that they would be used in building up his armaments industry. The second was that, in 1988, one of the Foreign Secretary's predecessors, Lord Howe, secretly agreed to relax the guidelines on arms exports to Iraq without any statement to Parliament, but, in the same year, made a statement to Parliament in which he publicly and eloquently deplored the use of chemical weapons by the same Iraqi Government to whom we were supplying those machine tools.

As the Foreign Secretary is aware, I attended several of the sessions of the Scott inquiry. I was impressed by the thoroughness with which Lord Justice Scott explored the issues with his witnesses. I think that it is fair to say that many of those witnesses were also impressed by the thoroughness with which they were explored. I am sure that the Foreign Secretary would not want to appear before a Lord Scott inquiry five years from now, explaining current arms sales.

The lesson of the Matrix Churchill affair is that the Government must be honest with the House about the criteria on which they decide to grant exports for licence. That is why, if there are to be major arms contracts with Indonesia, the Foreign Secretary owes it to the House to be open with us about the basis on which they are supplied and about the advice that was tendered by the Foreign Office in the discussions about those licences. For example, is the Foreign Office satisfied with the human rights record of Indonesia, and is he entirely satisfied that none of the weapons that we have supplied have been used to enforce aggression and the continued occupation by Indonesia of East Timor?

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): In the light of those remarks, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would comment on the last Labour Government's point of view when, in April 1978, they authorised the sale of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia. Does he think that the position was any different then from what it is now?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is correct and, as we have had several exchanges about that during Trade and Industry questions, I am familiar with the ground. The hon. Gentleman was perfectly correct in saying that the initial contract for Hawk aircraft was given by the last Labour Government. They were provided as training aircraft, and they were supplied on the clear understanding that they be used as training aircraft. *[Interruption.]* With respect, at the time, there was no evidence whatever that Hawk aircraft may have been used in East Timor.

I see the Foreign Secretary shaking his head. If he has any evidence that Hawk aircraft were used in East Timor in the 1970s, when the last Labour Government were in power, he should share it with the House.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and I do not intend to do so again.

The issues now are whether those Hawk aircraft have been used in East Timor, and whether the Foreign Office has any evidence to support that claim. If so, was that reflected in the discussions about the export licences for further contracts?

Mr. Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Is he aware that, in August and September this year, two Hawk aircraft were used in bombing missions in the eastern part of East Timor which had been authorised by the Indonesian Government? That is yet another reason why there should be an arms embargo against the Indonesian regime, as long as it perpetrates human rights abuses, and as long as it illegally occupies East Timor. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Cook: I do not understand how Conservative Members found that amusing. I do not understand what is comic about the suggestion that those Hawk aircraft may have been used against a civilian population in East Timor. If that is indeed the case—the Foreign Office will have better information than that available to any of us—it is not a matter for jest and comedy in the House, but a matter for serious condemnation which should be reflected in our future arms exports.

Sadly, East Timor is only one of 50 areas where there is active conflict. As the Foreign Secretary said, the United Nations is now approaching its 50th year. More demands are now made of it than when it had the energy of youth. In its first 43 years the United Nations mounted 15 peacekeeping operations. In the past six years alone, it has mounted 17 peacekeeping operations—more than in the preceding 43 years. Those 17 peacekeeping operations involve 3,700 British troops in various locations around the world. We salute the courage of those troops and the sacrifices that they are occasionally called on to make.

The expansion of the peacekeeping role is partly because the cold war has gone and we no longer live in a bi-polar world. That presents us with a positive opportunity for a new international security order in which the world community, not the super-powers, claims the right to police, and accepts the responsibility for policing, the observation of peace between nations. I entirely agree with the Foreign Secretary that, if that opportunity is to be grasped, the United Nations needs to look at some fundamental reforms of its structure and efficiency. If we are to respond to international crises, we must do so in a less ad hoc fashion, in a more professional operation. If the United Nations is to become the fire brigade of the world, it should at least be put on a permanent footing so that the fire engine can be updated every time there is a crisis somewhere around the globe.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): My hon. Friend is right to say that we no longer live in a bi-polar world, but many things that are happening in the world derive exactly from that condition—I think especially of the Republic of Angola. Is my hon. Friend aware that truce talks have yet again broken down and that, having

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agreed to a proper agreement for the umpteenth time, Mr. Savimbi of UNITA has yet again said that he will not sign? That agreement was sponsored and brokered by the United Nations—is it not time that the United Nations acted strongly and compelled Savimbi to accept it?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has put on record a concern that I entirely share. It is a matter of great regret and deep frustration that it looked as though Angola might be achieving a peaceful outcome, but it once again appears that it will be plunged into turmoil. My hon. Friend has been helpful because I had intended to turn now to the tragic events in Rwanda, which illustrate the slowness of the international community to respond—a subject on which the Foreign Secretary touched—and, more importantly, the international community's negligence towards crises in the making.

I acknowledge that Britain has a larger presence in Rwanda than most other countries—a fact in which Britain can take pride—but, as the Foreign Secretary agreed, the response of the international community as a whole is a matter for deep concern. The United Nations has made a commitment that we will deploy 147 human rights monitors in Rwanda—one to each district. That is vital if we are to build confidence among the refugee camps and enable refugees to return in safety. I understand that, as of last week, fewer than 30 human rights monitors were in place. Moreover, those 30 monitors had available to them only six four-by-four vehicles, one of which was donated by Oxfam. I see no reason why the international community should be dependent on charity to carry out a United Nations resolution.

The remarkable fact about the Rwandan crisis is not the poor nature of the response but the wilful negligence that helped to create the conditions of the crisis. Rwanda is one of the poorest nations, and has one of the densest populations, in the world. In the late 1980s, the price of its coffee halved. The reaction of the International Monetary Fund was to impose a structural adjustment programme on Rwanda which produced a major reduction in public spending, introduced charges for health and education, intensified the poverty of local people and reduced the public support available to help them to alleviate that poverty. After all that, the international community need not feign surprise at the fact that the tension and desperation which followed led to communal violence.

Rwanda is not exceptional. It is, unfortunately, only too typical of the pressures on sub-Saharan Africa. Here I come to what I thought was the most breathtaking line in the Queen's Speech—the one that said that Her Majesty's Government

"will maintain a substantial aid programme."

The Foreign Secretary knows that the aid budget proposes no such thing. Certainly, the Government have a commitment to raise it to 0.7 per cent. of gross national product, but instead of moving towards that target they are steaming steadily away from it. The aid budget reached that percentage of GNP in 1979; it is now down to 0.3 per cent. and still falling.

The aid budget is frozen in cash terms, which means that it will not maintain its value in real terms. The final footnote to the tragedy of Rwanda is the fact that the Government are budgeting to cut aid to Africa by £60 million over the next three years. We are spending four times that amount to build a dam and flood a valley in Malaysia—at the same time as planning to spend less on piping clean water to the poorest communities in the world. How is it possible to justify such priorities?

The message from the conflicts born of this poverty is that international security is best built on international solidarity, in which the wealthiest nations help the poorest out of the poverty that breeds conflict. It is in our own interest to do so, because our troops will be called upon to serve to prevent the conflicts.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is being philosophical and is entirely justified in so doing. If he had looked at Africa 20 years ago he could have argued that a great deal of the suffering was due to poverty. Of course, poverty remains; I just do not agree with his analysis now. The recent troubles of Rwanda, Mozambique, Angola, Somalia and Liberia are not primarily the result of poverty. They are the result of communal tensions and of the breakdown of a civil society. I do not believe that that is essentially the result of poverty or of a deterioration in those countries' standards of living over the past 20 years. The real difficulty that the United Nations faced in Rwanda, in what until recently would have been regarded as a purely internal matter, was how the international community could prevent Hutus from slaughtering Tutsis, or the other way round.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman correctly said that he and I approach these matters from different political philosophies, but I invite him to ask himself a question. If he believes that the violence and disruption in so many parts of Africa originate only from communal tensions and tribal differences, how come the same tribal differences and tensions existed 20 years ago but without the same degree of violence and disruption across the continent? I would also ask him to reflect on the fact that, during the past decade, the African countries that were poor at the start of it have become even poorer. In most of the countries that he mentioned, child mortality has increased, life expectancy declined and participation in education decreased. The Foreign Secretary may shake his head but those are the facts.

Not surprisingly, given those facts, we find that we are faced with greater violence. Even if there were room for doubt about the causes, surely the wise course for any responsible Government to follow would be to err on the side of that doubt and not risk making the situation worse by cutting our aid programme for Africa.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House by how much a Labour Government, should there ever be one, would increase the overseas aid budget?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman need not look to the future: he can look to the past for an answer to that. In a situation of grave difficulty, and without a penny from North sea oil, the last Labour Government increased the proportion of our GNP that went on aid. Since then, the Conservatives have drunk the North sea oil revenues but have cut the amount of aid. Our commitment is perfectly plain. We shall seek to resume the work that was being

carried out by that previous Labour Government and make progress towards the target of 0.7 per cent., as resources permit.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No; I have given way for the last time.

I was saying when the Foreign Secretary disagreed with me that international security is best based on international solidarity. Before concluding my speech I should like to put one other thought to the Foreign Secretary, and it is my reason for believing that international solidarity is in our interests. The pressures of poverty are eroding the environment of the third world. Because we share a single globe, that damage threatens the climate on which we depend for our standard of living.

Increasingly, security, trade and the environment are making us all members of an interdependent world community. In the year ahead, we shall judge the Government's foreign policy to see whether it strengthens our ability to put into the world community measures that would establish international security. We shall judge whether it gives expression to the international solidarity that a responsible and still relatively affluent nation owes to the world's weaker members. When the Government's foreign policy passes that test we shall support them during whatever period they manage to stay in office. When their policies fail that test we shall expose and challenge those failings until we manage to put the Government out of office and give Britain a Government who will introduce a Queen's Speech that will be full, decisive and based on our values of social justice at home and our commitment to international security and solidarity abroad.

4.26 pm

Mr. John Patten (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I should like to examine the Gracious Speech in relation to the two classical Tory themes of continuity and momentum. Queen's Speeches are rather like the trains by which one is threatened at French level crossings where one is informed by notices that another train will be along in a bit. Another Queen's Speech is always being prepared as soon as the Gracious Speech of a new Parliament has been produced. I have listened to 15 such speeches, some of which have added to the momentum of Conservative government while others have added to its consolidation and continuity.

I should like to examine the Gracious Speech in relation to, first, the constitution; secondly, Europe; thirdly, privatisation; and, fourthly, the new civic and community agenda which may dominate British politics for the next 15 years just as surely as privatisation and other issues have dominated it for the past 15 years.

I rejoice at the fact that the Gracious Speech does not mention major constitutional change, to which the Leader of the Opposition has already so wedded his party. If he ever has the opportunity, he will rue the day that he allows a future Labour Administration to become mired in the depths of constitutional reform. The people of this country do not wish to alienate any part of our sovereign territory. As the last general election showed, people do not want major devolution for Scotland or Wales. Certainly, people do not wish to have any of the crackpot schemes for regional government that have been suggested by Labour Front-Bench speakers. Such schemes would be not only costly but would make Britain one of the most over-governed and over-administered countries on earth. Over the past 15 years, I have been pleased to note that no Queen's Speech has referred to major constitutional innovation. I hope that that will continue for the next 15 years of Conservative administration.

The second issue is that of Europe. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary knows that I am pleased when one of Europe's ups, rather than one of its downs, is raised here or in the media. The whole House is aware that I speak from that standpoint. I certainly give my wholehearted support to the European finance measure in the Gracious Speech.

I am concerned, as is the whole House, about fraud. There is no need for me to speak at any great length about the problems presented by mass fraud in the countries of the European Union. They have been discussed quite enough in recent days and they do not need elaboration from me. Action has been taken, much of it encouraged by the Government, and I congratulate them on what they have done. However, I am saddened by the lack of apparent concern shown by the German presidency about fraud.

The German presidency should have reacted very quickly indeed in the past two or three days and promoted the calling of a special council at ministerial level—possibly the highest ministerial level of all—to show the people of Europe that when their money is used for European purposes, it is done in as straightforward and honest a way as possible.

I am sorry that the German presidency has not taken that action and I urge my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to consider applying to the German presidency, under the emergency procedures that are available, for a European ministerial council to be held as quickly as possible to demonstrate that action will be taken over the issue of fraud. We do not need cries of initiatives or new stunts to get Europe off the hook; we need action to show that, at the highest level, European Heads of State—and, if necessary, Heads of Government—are sufficiently concerned about the issue to make it a top priority.

I urge on my right hon. Friend speedy consideration of that possibility. I fear that, as such matters are played back into the new Commission and, as my right hon. Friend said, we all travel carefully and hopefully in respect of the new Commission and the European Parliament, the issue of fraud will get lost in the undergrowth again. It will be there in the shrubbery and, once it leaves media interest, will not receive as close an examination as it should.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: I give way to my hon. Friend, but I remind him that I am just a simple Back Bencher and cannot answer on behalf of the Front Bench.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and welcome him to the debate. He is certainly not a simple Back Bencher, although he is a Back Bencher. Does he agree that one of the problems of the German presidency in this context, as he so ably pointed out, is

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

the current German obsession with further and deeper political union at the cost of all else? Does he agree that that is one of the big problems that has been missed?

Mr. Patten: My right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who has come to sit at my feet, muttered sotto voce that it has always been in the treaty of Rome. When one reads such treaties, one finds that we are signed up to all sorts of things that my hon. Friend might not actually like.

I am about to turn to exactly those points which my hon. Friend asked me to address. It is my belief that the European contributions measure will lead to money from British taxpayers funding European matters. I am one of those who is happy when Europe goes through its up, rather than its down, periods. Therefore, part of our contribution will be funding the activities which lead us into intergovernmental conferences in 1996. As I am happy to inform the House, in the first half of the year the Italians will be in the presidential seat and in the second half there will be the Irish, so 1996 will be an interesting year.

Much of the debate on the measure will quite properly flow around preparatory measures and positions being taken by different countries in the run-up to the IGCs. I urge my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his right hon. Friends to ensure that the British voice is strongly heard in the composition of that agenda.

We are major players in Europe; we are at its heart. We must be major players in proposing the agenda for the intergovernmental conferences in 1996. Above all, we should not allow them to be inward looking and concerned with further and further harmonisation within a Europe that is moving unsteadily in that direction; for example, Europe has the highest non-wage labour costs of any part of the globe.

As anyone who travels in the far east—as I have done on a number of occasions—will know, the killer economies there are moving at such a rate that they are likely to threaten the economic and social stability of the European Union and that of our friends across the north Atlantic before the decade is over. Therefore, it is critical that my right hon. Friend encourages such discussion as there is to be outward, not inward, looking.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made an interesting speech recently, which was reported on the radio. He called for a warming of the north Atlantic link. I am a great admirer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but such is the economic threat—I do not use that word idly—from the far east that the European Union may have to consider a much closer relationship with the North American Free Trade Agreement countries. They are the United States and Canada, which have recently been joined by Mexico, and will doubtless be joined by further countries. We all know about NATO and we will need it in future, but we must also properly consider the North Atlantic Economic Organisation, which could well bring together the two powerful trading blocs. We will debate such matters in the House in the run-up to the IGCs.

It is important that we ensure that Europe considers the major constitutional issues within the European Union. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that his colleague Mr. Juppé had said that he was lukewarm—or some such phrase—about the possibility of a European super-state. My right hon. Friend suggested, both in the way that he spoke and through his body language—or as much of it as I could observe from behind him—that he was at one with Mr. Juppé. If so, let that be a key constitutional strand in the debates running up to the IGCs.

We need to be clear about the role and relations of the European Union and individual sovereign states. Ideas cannot easily be bucked at this stage. These are difficult questions to ask, but I am the first to admit that they are much more difficult to answer. Nevertheless, we must finally decide what are the role and relations of the sovereign states and the European Union. Is the Commission a government or is it a servant of governments? Those are major issues that, notwithstanding our treaty obligations, we have not dealt with as the Twelve, let alone as a future Sixteen or Twenty-two. We must ensure that we have a European Union working in the way that I profoundly wish it to work.

There are interesting times ahead and I believe that 1996 will be a defining moment in the history of Europe. I also believe that it will be a defining moment in the European issue within the United Kingdom. Therefore, it demands the most careful, cautious and deeply thoughtful approach from those of us who support the Government, as I do, to ensure that the issues are addressed as properly as they can be during the next two years.

I want now to deal with the agenda for privatisation contained in the Gracious Speech. Gracious Speeches come and go and agendas begin. We still have a long way to go with privatisation. I have made inquiries at the Treasury and it appears that we still own 40 or more state industries and corporations. That is wrong. The best people to run businesses are businesses. Government have no business to be in the business of running businesses, although we must run our business as a state in as businesslike a way as possible. As a Conservative party, we should make it a policy aim to ensure that by the end of—let us be generous—1999, the end of the century, we have sold and returned to the private sector all those things that can be sold and returned to the private sector, so that we have a clean slate with which to begin the new century and to tackle the new agendas that are coming to the fore.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government have concluded that some things are unprivatisable? Can he explain why in the Queen's Speech there were no measures to privatise either the Post Office or the Vehicle Inspectorate?

Mr. Patten: As I said earlier, I am just a simple Back Bencher, squire. Those questions will have to be put to those on the Front Bench.

I would wish by 1999 to have cleared the board of everything we own that the Government can usefully get rid of, because ownership can sometimes clutter up Government activities. Again and again, ownership has been proven to be much better in private hands. Just look at the benefits of 15 years of Conservative Government in conveying ownership to council house tenants of their houses or flats, or to those who have bought shares for the first time.

Lastly, the new agenda of British politics in the next 15 years of Conservative Government will be to complete, of course, a number of those things that we have started, such as the privatisation programme, but also to begin a whole process of trying, just as we have given ownership to the British people, to persuade the British people to take more responsibility.

I remember my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, as Home Secretary, coining that excellent phrase "the active citizen", which was all about the taking of greater responsibility by people in our community. We are on the eve of developing a form of civic Conservatism which will begin the process of disseminating power. We have seen only a few footsteps in that direction so far—health service reforms, the giving of power to grant-maintained schools with governors made up of parents, local people, business people and teachers. We have only begun that process.

The Labour party talks a lot about community. We all know what it means by community. It means the reinvention of local government by other means and the giving of power to those people who used to run communities so that they can do so again. On the radio this week, we heard that the Isle of Wight county council, which I guess is Liberal controlled, cannot run its care in the community programme. The immemorial cry of a county council in trouble, one which cannot do its job properly, is that it does not have enough resources—that is, that it does not have enough money.

Why have we not gone a step further than we have in the past? The Queen's Speech does not take us down this path. For many years, we have had housing associations to bring together fruitfully that combination of public and private money and public, private and voluntary sector endeavour, to provide social housing for people in need who need to rent. Why do we not have care associations which take over the provision of care in the community from those county councils that cannot provide it properly? Those are the sort of ideas that are not yet reflected in the further dissemination of power.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: I see that I have over-excited the hon. Gentleman, so I had better give way.

Mr. McWilliam: Is the kind of caring Conservative-controlled council that the right hon. Gentleman is thinking of for the future to be more on the model of Westminster city council?

Mr. Patten: I long enjoyed the excellent services of Conservative-controlled Westminster city council at one end of my life, as I have enjoyed the excellent services of Conservative-controlled councils in Oxfordshire at the other end of my life. I am pleased to have given way to the hon. Gentleman and to have endorsed Westminster city council as an excellent council.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: I like Wimbledon council, too.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I hope that my right hon. Friend does not, because, unfortunately, it is temporarily under Labour control.

My right hon. Friend will remember that he and I joined common cause in the past in promoting the concept of active citizenship. I welcome what he has said today. Linking that with what he said about care in the community, would he welcome opportunities for private sector companies to deliver community care in an efficient and caring manner?

Mr. Patten: Yes, of course. Again and again, the private sector has worked its magic in enhancing provision funded by the state at a higher level than could otherwise have been provided.

It is on that note that I end. Agendas change. There is continuity and change in the Queen's Speech. I hope that there will be continuity and further change in future Conservative Queen's Speeches. In examining why we should not have constitutional legislation, why we should be cautious about what we do in Europe, why we should drive on with privatisation and why we should think of new frontiers in order to transfer responsibility, as well as ownership, back to our citizens through the concept of a more civic Conservatism, I have tried to consider how those changes can carry us through the next 15 years. Above all else, it is critical to set out clearly each of the strands of Conservative thought and to show that the plan is there for the next 15 years, just as there was a plan which has carried us so successfully through the past 15 years. My right hon. and hon. Friends have my strongest support.

4.46 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): We do not often have the chance in the House to debate foreign affairs, so I hope that the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) will forgive me if I do not follow him down the interesting highways and byways of a simple Back Bencher.

I want to return to the main theme of the debate, which is the broad sweep of world affairs and, faced with the same problems that everyone else faces of a miscellaneous ragbag of points, I want to try to set what I have to say about one or two particular instances of our relations in the general context of the plea that the Government have made from time to time, but not strongly enough, for the spread of good governance.

I define good governance as having four component parts. First, we should encourage the promotion of free and fair elections, for the simple and obvious reason that one can search the human history book in vain to find any example of where two democracies have gone to war. There is no greater assurance of the promotion of peace than the promotion of genuine democratic traditions in countries around the world.

Secondly, another cornerstone of good governance is accountable and transparent government. At a time when we are talking about corruption, whether it be in the European Community, where we call it fraud, or whether it be the misuse of some of our aid programmes, the only way to root out corruption is to establish accountable and transparent government.

I came across one example on my travels during the summer recess when I was astonished to be shown the new palace in Lilongwe which was built by Dr. Banda before he was removed from office and which cost $70 million. The scale and extravagance of that would have been horrendous in any country, but in one as poor as

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Malawi it was a scandal. It was robbery of Dr. Banda's own people and it makes doubtful some of the United Kingdom aid programmes to Malawi when such gross misuse of funds was going on. It is a great tribute to the new democratically elected president of Malawi, President Muluzi, that he has declined to take up residence in such an absurd place.

Thirdly, in the quadrangle that creates good governance there is freedom of expression and association, including freedom of the press and, fourthly, independence of the judiciary and access to a genuine legal system. Those are the values that we should be attempting to promote as part of our foreign policy.

In particular, I welcome the speech on that theme made by Baroness Chalker at Chatham house in July when she talked about putting policy into practice. My only criticism of Government foreign policy is that that high priority has not been reflected right across the board—not just in the Foreign Office but in the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence and aid programmes. I add to the pleas made during the Foreign Secretary's speech. Regardless of his consideration of the legal judgment in the Pergau dam case—I am concerned not so much about the legalities as about the political mistakes that were made in that instance—I hope that the £216 million earmarked for that project will be reinstated in the aid programme.

It has sometimes been said in the House and elsewhere that the standards that I outlined are western standards and that we cannot expect people in Asia or Africa to aspire to them. That is a racist approach to international politics—and when it is said by people who are themselves Asian or African politicians, it is positively insulting. If, as the Gracious Speech repeats, we are committed to upholding human rights, we must accept that torture hurts just as badly whether one's skin is white, black, brown or yellow. We should not accept in any part of the world any departure from aiming at high standards.

I pay tribute to the work done in that sphere by the Westminster Foundation—a new and small organisation which is inadequately funded compared with the munificence of German political foundations or the American Endowment for Democracy. Nevertheless, the foundation has made a good start. One sees from its annual report that, even with a small budget, it is playing a part in promoting good governance. I only make a plea in the direction of the Treasury that its work should continue to be enhanced.

I am a little concerned that the Gracious Speech refers to celebrating the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. I hope that we shall do more than simply wave flags or hold meetings or church services. The UN's 50th anniversary is a time to pursue some of the ideas proposed by the Foreign Secretary in the past, and to adopt the proposals made by the UN Secretary-General in his document "Agenda for Peace". We should recognise that a UN charter drafted in the circumstances of 1945 is not really appropriate in the circumstances of 1995. We want the charter revised, more relevant structures and a more streamlined organisation.

I join hon. Members who referred to the UN's peacekeeping role and to the way in which, sadly, we are often too late on the scene. I saw that for myself graphically in Rwanda in July, when I found myself sitting in the limited office then available in Kigali to Ambassador Khan and to General Dallaire. It was sad to note the length of time taken to provide the 5,000 troops promised by the Security Council. A chart on the wall showed each of the countries from which the contingents were to come. When I was there, the number arriving was 900 out of 5,000 promised. I asked the general when he needed the troops, to which he gave the political response, "Yesterday." As we know, the tragedy unfolded and the troops were late in arriving.

I add to the tributes already paid to the British forces in Rwanda, who in July had just arrived and were settling in. It is a magnificent operation, but it is sad that it was so late. Will the Government support the initiative taken by the Dutch Government in the Security Council, to press for a standing rapid deployment force? It is not suggested that armed troops should be on standby in Geneva or New York, but there is a realistic proposal to have forces assigned by member nations ready to be moved as a fire-fighting expedition as and when required.

I am concerned that, with the end of the bi-polar world to which reference has been made, there has been a tendency recently in Washington to regard the interests of the UN and of the United States as one and the same. In Somalia and in the recent decision concerning arms for Bosnia, we have seen the continued erratic nature of United States foreign policy, which may get worse with the recent reverses in the American elections. It will be even more difficult to achieve a coherent United States foreign policy when the Government no longer carry a majority in Congress.

British foreign policy should be directed more through the European Union, as foreshadowed in a recent speech by the Foreign Secretary and in the Maastricht treaty. We look forward to much greater cohesion in defence and foreign policy in the European Union.

One area of further development in the UN is the recently created UN register of the arms trade. At present, it is only a register and not fully effective, but it has been established only two or three years. I hope that in future it will become an instrument of international arms control.

Although people complain with some justification about the degree of bureaucracy in various UN agencies, it is as well to remind ourselves that the UN's annual running budget is only one quarter that of the debt that Mr. Robert Maxwell left behind when he died, which gives a sense of perspective. It is money well spent if we can make the United Nations a much more effective instrument of international policy than at present.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that now that UNESCO has cleaned up its act administratively, we should rejoin it? If so, should we do so before America rejoins or after?

Sir David Steel: Yes, I hope that we rejoin UNESCO.

The Government recently received formal proposals from the Swedish Government for the creation of an international institute for democracy and electoral assistance, which has the UN's blessing but will not be another UN international agency. It will be established by international treaty next year. Although officials from the Overseas Development Administration have been engaged in preparatory discussions, the Government have yet to

make a commitment. I believe that that useful proposal will help us in spreading the mechanics of democracy around the world.

In the context of the wider view of foreign policy that Britain should be pursuing, I must mention our relations with one or two specific countries. I start, as did the Foreign Secretary, with the current state of affairs in Iraq. I visited that country in the summer with the Bishop of Leicester, at the request of some Iraqi citizens living in this country, to assess the present scale of suffering of the Iraqi people as a result of the protracted dispute following the Gulf war and the impact of sanctions.

I believe that we would not have made the progress that we have made with Iraq had it not been for international pressure. I am not suggesting that international pressure should have been any less. However, the Americans in particular are in danger of obfuscating two entirely separate issues in the UN Security Council resolutions. The first dealt with the oil embargo and related specifically to weapons of mass destruction and efforts made by the United Nations commission under Rolf Ekeus to establish monitoring machinery in Iraq.

Slowly and painfully, progress has been made. The commission has reported that all verification procedures are now in place, but we must wait some time to see if they work. That issue should be treated separately from the wider question of sanctions, which relates to issues such as recognition of Kuwait compensation and missing persons. I am glad that there has been progress with those issues too, even within the last couple of days. The Iraqi Government—admittedly, four years after the end of the Gulf war—have recognised the state of Kuwait, its boundaries and territorial integrity. It is necessary to recognise that, because of the effect of the Saddam regime in Iraq, there is real human suffering in that territory. We did not just go on a Cook's tour organised by the Government. We made our own inquiries, met the aid agencies and went to places without the Government's foreknowledge. The scale of human suffering in terms of the lack of medicines and food is very genuine.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary cited the text of the resolution which enables Iraq to sell some oil, but it is necessary not to stick by all the detailed regulations which were contained in the final proposal of the United Nations Security Council, because there is no doubt that the bureaucracy involved is a clear transgression of national sovereignty. We should enter into dialogue with the Iraqi Government to make sure that the people of that country do not continue to suffer.

I have suggested, for example, that, on the issue of the Kuwaiti missing persons, if the Iraqi Government really believe what they say—that they have no Kuwaiti prisoners still in their prisons—they should open the prisons to inspection by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such positive suggestions could be pushed forward, but it is difficult to do so while we have no diplomatic representation in Iraq. Fundamentally, I am arguing for a bit of carrot as well as a bit of stick in dealing with the Saddam regime, in the interests of the people there.

I now refer briefly to Hong Kong. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary mentioned that we were about to undertake a most extraordinary step—the transfer of 6 million people for whom we have been responsible into the hands of what is fundamentally a very autocratic regime which certainly does not meet any of the standards that I have set out. So be it; that will happen. We used to have an annual debate on Hong Kong, yet we have not even got around to debating the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs report on Hong Kong now that we have reached this delicate stage. We should have a debate on Hong Kong very soon.

It is undoubtedly the case—it is the Governor's own view—that we were very late in paying attention to the development of democracy in Hong Kong, but, now that we have done it, it is regrettable that we have shackled Hong Kong with the commitment in the basic law not to have political ties with the outside world. If we are really to have two systems in one country—one democratic and one in accordance with the wishes of the People's Republic of China—it is right that people in Hong Kong should be free to associate with international political movements, be they Socialist International, Christian Democrat International, or Liberal International in our case.

In the meantime, while we are still responsible for the government of Hong Kong, I make one plea: we should devote as much attention as we can during our remaining tenure of Hong Kong to improving the environment. I remember when I first went there back in 1965 or 1966 as a very new Member of Parliament. I was rather shaken by the poor standard of the housing that we were building in our own colony. It has improved over the years, but it is undeniable that, over the decades, we have been rather negligent as a colonial administration in dealing with the problems of the environment and of pollution. The problem is now becoming very serious in Hong Kong, and not just aesthetically; it is beginning to pollute marine life, to the possible danger of the human beings who consume it. That issue should receive much greater attention as we come to the end of our period of tenure.

Let me refer next to Kenya. I do so because President Moi is visiting this country. If we consider the four standards that I have set out, we must say that, at the moment, Kenya is not adhering to any normal standard of good governance. The Kenyan human rights commission has documented nearly 300 cases of police torture this year. The election commission itself is not independent; it is appointed by the Government, something that we would not tolerate with the Boundary Commission in this country. Judges still receive instructions from the Government. Newspapers—either individual journalists or publications—are threatened. Members of Parliament need permits in order to hold public meetings in their constituencies, and 36 of the 85 opposition Members of Parliament were gaoled for lesser or greater times during 1993. The Bank of England, too, has failed to pursue the banks in this country which were involved in the Goldenberg scandal.

All those matters can be legitimately criticised. When people ask, "Why do you pick out Kenya?", the answer is that Kenya is a great friend of this country and that one is entitled to be more candid with friends than with enemies. The Prime Minister has raised one human rights issue with the President, but I hope that we will do more to make it clear that a new governor of the Bank of Kenya and a new Finance Minister do not constitute a return to good governance. More than two years ago, the Kenyan Attorney-General promised that there would be reviews of the constitution, and in particular some of the colonial legislation which is still in place. That has not happened

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yet. The opposition parties have not always been entirely helpful in the process, but we must say to the Kenyan Government that a lot more needs to be done.

I could say the same—in the interests of time, I will not—on the subject of Nigeria, another friend of this country which at the moment is seriously in default of the standards of good government.

I now refer to the arms trade. I take a rather different view from that of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. I do not regard it as just a British issue. Regional conflicts around the world have been fuelled by the arms trade, from Bosnia to Angola. Just the other day, the Croatian Defence Minister said:

"What I need, I get. The arms market is saturated, so saturated you would pay three times the price if you got things legally."

It is reported that

"Mr. Susak described buying arms in countries including Poland, Bulgaria and Russia as 'an open market' and said Croatia was now providing the army of the Muslim-dominated Bosnian Government with anti-tank weapons and ammunition for mortars, cannons and machine guns."

An analyst of *Jane's Defence Weekly* has also pointed out:

"They have obtained Russian-made rocket-propelled grenades from the former East Germany, Chinese anti-tank weapons from Pakistan and ammunition from Iran."

I am not talking purely about a British phenomenon. The arms trade is one of the perils of the world today. There are new entrants—sadly, among them is South Africa. There is evidence that the South Africans were supplying both sides in the Rwandan civil war right up until last year. We must take a grip on the arms trade as a subject on its own.

I know the counter-argument—the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary almost hinted at it—that we must sell because, if we do not, somebody else will. That is, of course, the argument for a coherent European policy. Rather than having, as do some countries in the European Community, an arms embargo on Indonesia while we do not, an embargo on the sale of land mines while we do not, or other embargoes on Rwanda while we did not, there is a need for a coherent approach in the European Union on the issue if we are to have any hope of creating a common defence or foreign policy in future.

If we are to protect jobs at home—I hope that it is not suggested that the economy is in such a parlous state after 15 years of Conservative rule that we desperately need to keep the arms industry flourishing—we must be realistic and accept that the end of the cold war surely means a diminution in the demand for arms. Therefore, we should, as the Clinton Administration have done in the United States, do much more to encourage our own arms industries to diversify into other sectors.

A new Indonesian human rights commission was appointed by the Indonesian Government, and I met its members only two weeks ago. It is a good step forward, but it is a terrible regime. The Amnesty International report included some disturbing quotations in its 126 pages. After the massacre of 270 people in East Timor in November 1991, it quotes General Mantiri as saying:

"We don't regret anything. What happened was quite proper . . . They were opposing us, demonstrating, even yelling things against the government. To me that is identical with rebellion, so that is why we took firm action . . . I don't think there's anything strange in that."

Are we saying that we are so hard up that we have to sell arms to a country which takes that view of its own population?

When we sell arms to capricious regimes, we find that they come back to haunt us. We had the recent case of Dr. Mahathir of Malaysia who suddenly announced one morning, because he did not like a report in *The Sunday Times*, that he would not do any future business with Britain. Far more worrying are the commitments that we have entered into in the past through our export credits guarantee provisions.

In 1993, Britain was the fourth-largest seller of arms. The World Development Movement, which I congratulate on having raised the court case on the Pergau dam, has revealed that arms sales receive more Government support than other export sectors. Almost 80 per cent. of British arms sales go to third-world countries. The Government have increasingly boosted defence exports in the past decade. In 1980-81, the year after the Conservatives came to office, defence exports took 6.5 per cent. of all export credits. That has risen to 48 per cent. last year. That is an extraordinary expansion.

When things break down, as in the case of Iraq, what happens? Since the Gulf war, British taxpayers have had to bail out the banks and the companies who were involved in arms sales to Iraq to the tune of £652 million because the Iraqi Government have defaulted on paying debts; so the taxpayer has a right to question the sense of relying too much on the arms industry as part of our economic activity.

Mr. Alan Clark said on the radio the other day that we should not worry about the nature of regimes and that selling arms was good business for Britain. It was all the old argument: "If we do not do it, someone else will." The Minister for Export Trade followed him on the programme and described him as a relic of empire. But at least Mr. Clark's view is refreshing, open and honest. I find that the Government's policy on the arms trade is wholly confused and sometimes duplicitous.

We welcome the references in the Gracious Speech to progress in the containment of nuclear weaponry, but it is a sobering thought that, since the end of the cold war, no one has been killed by nuclear weapons but hundreds of thousands of people have been killed or maimed around the world by conventional weaponry of one type or another, including landmines.

I believe that good governance, like charity, begins at home. I hope that during the rest of his time in office—however long that might be—the Foreign Secretary, who enjoys a considerable reputation not only in Britain but around the world, will use his efforts and Britain's unique position as a member of the Commonwealth, of the European Union and NATO to promote good governance as a major part of British foreign policy.

5.12 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). His interesting remarks, particularly on weapons proliferation, reinforce my view that the Foreign Affairs Select Committee is right to invest a great deal of time and effort in a study of weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation. It hopes to report to the House and contribute to the debate on which the right hon. Gentleman commented.

Although the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is not here, I welcome his arrival in foreign affairs debates. He has a very sharp mind and possibly a sharp tongue, too. I hope that we shall hear more comments from him. I enjoyed a certain amount of what he said, although I differ from him on some of the points that he made in opening. I know that it is early days for him in foreign affairs, but he seems to think that the world is divided into blocs. I beg him to get rid of that illusion. Of course, the politicians like to talk about the blocs of the European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement, Asia and so on, but the hon. Gentleman will find as he travels round that all the forces of international finance, trade and investment are working immensely rapidly the other way.

The fine constructions of politicians about different blocs and how they will line up and trade with each other are being increasingly marginalised by the enormous interpenetration of trade, investment and, above all, capital. That makes nonsense of a regional concept and even of a regional financial concept of Europe. I shall come to that in a moment. The hon. Gentleman will learn that and see that globalisation has happened far faster than the bloc-makers and bloc-analysts imagine. That is yesterday's analysis of the world, not tomorrow's.

I am glad that foreign affairs has been promoted to Thursday in the debates on the Address. It used to be a Friday subject. That is good news. I hope that it is a recognition of the fact that foreign policy is not a separate, slightly eccentric category which ill-informed opinion pollsters put at the bottom of their list. When they find that they get fewer ticks for it, they conclude that foreign policy is of little interest compared with health, education, welfare and domestic issues. That does not reflect the reality, which perhaps the promotion of today's debate and certainly the Gracious Speech reflect, that the foreign policy context is beginning to condition everything. It conditions the most intimate domestic aspects of our lives, jobs and financial affairs. That needs to be taken into account by political leaders when they explain how they intend to face the problems of the future.

I listened yesterday to the new leader of the Labour party. He began with a good speech. For those of us who have been here a long time, it contained one or two distinctly Wilsonian phrases. It brought back memories of the Wilsonian generalities about what the Labour party would do in this situation or that. There was a lot of stuff about the need for safe communities, good schools, lower crime rates and the rest. Join the club. We all want those things. They make fine additions to the peroration of a speech, but they are not policy and they do not take account of the wider international context which the new Labour party leader must begin to bring into his thinking and his speeches.

Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition talked about a burst of growth. I should say perhaps more robustly than it has been said so far that that is not so this time. Much of the debate has not recognised what is happening to the British economy now. I am not all that proud of what is happening, in the sense that it should have happened before. For 30 years politicians, some of whom are in the Chamber at this moment, have made speeches in which they wished for sustained, inflation-free, export-led, investment-led growth in the British economy, the emergence of the pound as a strong currency, lower unemployment, higher productivity and so on. All those things are now occurring.

I have to pinch myself when I hear some of the spotlessly non-partisan analyses that come from objective quarters. The performance of the British economy is described as a sustained, not a transient performance and one that is delivering remarkable results and a perky export performance. Apparently even the Government's deficit is now falling.

Many of the gurus are writing reports in which the word "surprised" occurs a great deal. That means that they forecast different things more along the lines of the forecasts of the hon. Members who speak for the Opposition. They said that it would all be low growth, high inflation, bad exports and rising unemployment. The gurus are all surprised that it has turned out the other way.

We are now delivering an economic performance that I wish we had achieved in the 1960s and 1970s. We had some export growth at times after various devaluations, but it all rotted away and evaporated in higher costs, lower productivity, strikes and all sorts of social difficulties. This time that is not happening. We have a highly responsible trade union movement. We have virtually no strikes. There are occasionally one or two, but they are very few.

Productivity is soaring and investment is pouring into the country to the point at which, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, we are taking 40 per cent. or possibly closer to 50 per cent. of the entire inward investment into Europe from countries in Asia and the United States. That is the reality of the international scene and the way in which the international economy is treating the British economy. That must be taken into account. One cannot simply ignore it and rant away about how terrible everything is, say that we must have more social spending here, there and everywhere and ask why the Government do not do it. That is an unrealistic stance. I hope that a little more realism will appear in the speeches of the Leader of the Opposition as he develops his style.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The right hon. Gentleman described a very happy view of the British economy. To what aspects of Government policy, especially financial and economic policy, does he ascribe that happy turn of events?

Mr. Howell: The hon. Gentleman is tempting me. I shall certainly not pretend that Government policy in one country is totally responsible for all sorts of conditions, which as I explained are influenced by the global context. Nevertheless, the Government's present management of public finances is extremely prudent. They are creating the right monetary climate. We would all like short-term interest rates to be lower, but they are being managed with great skill, prudence and concern for the right monetary climate. The Government's deficit is falling and we are beginning to reap the benefits—years afterwards, as they always come much too slowly—of some of the labour market and social policy reforms of the past decade.

Mercifully, we have not become entangled in the outdated, overcentralised and uniform social overheads that are making investment in continental Europe extremely unattractive. We have taken a much more modern stance and we have not centralised our social provision in the way that the Opposition Front Bench team wants, for some reason that I do not understand.

[Mr. Howell]

Those improvements are to the credit of the Government, business men and others. On this island and in Northern Ireland, they are beginning to deliver an economic performance that politicians have been waffling on about for 30 years but have never managed to turn into a reality. Now it is happening.

Mr. Budgen: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend, who has listed a persuasive catalogue of the Government's triumphs, all of which are true. Does he not think that he should mention 16 September 1992?

Mr. Howell: I did not mention the date, but I mentioned the event. Perhaps my hon. Friend did not hear. I mentioned devaluations, or at any rate adjustments to the exchange rate, which have played their part. I do not dispute that for a moment. The asperity of his question is a little unjustified. I am well aware of all those things. Perhaps that one incident had some effect, but it is not the entire reason why our present position is so very good.

A much wider issue is overshadowing the European Union debate. It lies behind whether we should subscribe to the social chapter and whether we should be able to deliver rising consumption, higher living standards and so forth in Europe. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) said in an excellent speech—I agreed with about 95 per cent. of it—that issue is the rising power and competitiveness of the dynamic Asian economies. They are proceeding at such a pace that those people who think that we have dealt with the Japanese challenge and that they are over the hill anyway are living in cloud cuckoo land. We are about to be confronted by a rising economic and competitive power—a power based on high technology and quality—and, what is more, a rising political power, which is already reflected in international institutions and will make anything that has gone before look mild. Far from arguing about which benefits should be enhanced, which social standards improved and which areas of consumption increased, policy makers in London and the rest of the Union should be preparing people for the fact that the name of the game is not benefits and improvement, but survival. Europe is confronting a problem that it has never before faced. It is a challenge to the lifestyle, values and intellectual hegemony of western European philosophical superiority, which we have never confronted before and for which most European electorates and most political debates, including this one, are completely unprepared.

Mr. Patten: I agree with my right hon. Friend's analysis, which was more elegant than my attempt to portray the threat presented by the tiger economies of the far east. Does he agree that it is because those economies want low non-labour costs that they are becoming so productive? It is because they are jumping over our technology to new technologies in a way that we could not have imagined. Most of all, it is because they are not obsessed with internal harmonisation mechanisms. For example, there is no search for a single currency in south-east Asia. They are looking outwards and progressively towards the realities of the economic world.

Mr. Howell: Asia is not a bloc. When those countries come together, as they did outside Jakarta recently, it is to call for free trade and not for blocism of any kind. Some of the other qualities that they are developing sound suspiciously like those qualities that we thought were a European monopoly—civic values, which my right hon. Friend mentioned, hard work, loyalty to the family, commitment to high savings, a total commitment to children's education both day and night and all the other values that one associates with the Protestant ethic, as well as a reluctance to move towards greater consumption. They have those values and they are beginning to deliver fantastic economic performances.

Let us consider some of the facts. By 2025, the gross national product of the east Asian powers will be the same as that of the European Union and the North Atlantic trade bloc combined. Throughout the recession, the national products of countries in eastern, central and parts of western Asia have been growing at more than 6 per cent. The export opportunities are vast. A fairly small economy such as Malaysia already imports more from the United States than the whole of eastern Europe and Russia. That is just the beginning. There will be a vast range of import potential for those countries. The Asian countries will not merely make products for export to us with their lower labour costs. They will provide vast import potential—huge new markets that we must be agile enough to grasp.

The challenge will require a total change in our attitude to what is attainable and where we put our resources. When I visited Bombay recently I was impressed when major entrepreneurs told me that they intended to develop the highest quality steel products and steel alloys for export to world markets. They will do so at a cost that will be 25 per cent., at the most, of that of the cheapest equivalent steels produced in the European Union.

I do not know how we will cope with that competition and I do not think that anyone is prepared for it. We talk as if our steel industry were fine, but it is not. It is about to be challenged by competition of a type that we will have the greatest difficulty in meeting.

One must judge the debate and the Gracious Speech against that background—the new realism about our needs in Europe and how on earth we can maintain or increase our competitiveness, rather than pile more benefits and costs upon ourselves. The speech by the Leader of the Opposition came out as yesterday's message. His concern was a centralised standard of social provision that would not even be laid down at national level but in Brussels. On such sensitive issues one would think that one would argue that social care and rules should be crafted as closely as possible to the shop floor and the people concerned. The idea that they should be crafted in Brussels and their support ever-enlarged seems totally inappropriate. It does not fit into the new context that candid political leaders should be explaining to their supporters.

The real European debate is how to increase our competitiveness, take the best from other cultures and see what we can learn from them. I mean the Confucian and Islamic cultures—especially the former, which is part of the culture that is providing the framework for some of the most successful economies on earth. I am not saying that we need to copy the Chinese or Indonesians on human rights; that would be crazy. But we need to take some of their values, just as the Japanese a century or more ago decided not to copy the west, but to take the best of our values and techniques and apply them and graft them on to their own culture. We need to do the reverse with equal vigour. If we go on in the mean time

preaching our own European superiority and reacting to threats by putting up more protectionist barriers, we are all doomed. There will be constant failure and a decline in our living standards.

I would apply the same strictures about irrelevance to my hon. Friends who are getting worked up again about the increased contributions to the European budget. The position is different from that which prevailed at the time of the Maastricht treaty debate. I must confess—this may be a shock and a horror to some—that I felt that the cause of the Maastricht rebels in questioning the rush to political and monetary union which was embodied in the Maastricht treaty had some very commendable parts to it. I did not follow it myself, and I voted with the Government. But there was, and remains, an extremely valid argument that elements of that treaty were, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) in his excellent book, "A Treaty Too Far".

But to use the same sort of language and thought in saying that the additional expenditure on the European Union budget requires the same degree of indignation is getting things badly out of proportion. If the anti-Maastrichteers want to concentrate on doing some useful unravelling of the bad side of Maastricht or halting federalist impulses, they should look at other aspects of the Edinburgh package. For instance, they could look at the fact that, unfortunately, we allowed half our aid programme to slide into the hands of international and multilateral funds; about 40 per cent. of the aid programme has gone to the European Community. That needs a certain amount of examination and I am glad that the Foreign Affairs Committee is about to put before the House a detailed analysis of some of the consequences of that. There is a cause for those concerned to fight.

Let us turn our minds, as others have suggested, to the agenda for the 1996 IGC. Let us make sure that we make an effective input to the so-called reflection group which began in the summer. We should propose arrangements for reforming the Commission and the Court of Justice, and for making subsidiarity a real political process. That means bringing political decisions to the House of Commons about what the Commission may be brewing up and turning into regulations before those things are dumped on our heads.

Let us develop the links with the European Parliament—which we are always talking about vaguely—into specific links which would enable the House to learn much earlier about the policy seeds and bulbs which will grow into the directives and regulations that cause so much dismay later. We are always saying that the European Parliament does not tell us. We scrutinise the legislation, but by then it is too late. We must get into these matters much earlier. That would be a far more useful diversion of energy for some of the much-vaunted rebels than rushing to the media every five minutes, telling them of the terrible things they are going to do.

I apply the same strictures to another line of thought that has developed in the European debate—that it is all hopeless and that we have been defeated before we start. The view is, of course, shared by extreme enthusiasts of a federal Europe, who say that there will be a German-French axis and a federal fix, and if we do not join immediately, we are doomed; and the extreme anti-Europeans, who are certain that there will be a Franco-German axis, that we are out of it and defeated, that we are not winning the argument and that we should cut our losses and get out of it altogether. There is a diagnostic alliance between the two wings which I believe to be completely wrong and defeatist.

We would do much better to develop confidently—now that we are Europe's most successful economy—our view of how the European agenda should unfold after 1996. If we do that, we will find that we have a wide range of allies in all the other countries of the European Union; including new members such as the former European Free Trade Area counties, the would-be members from the Visegrad countries and others. That requires vigour and confidence in the development of our view of Europe. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has shown that, and I would like other Government Members and everyone concerned with the development of our policy in Europe to show it as well.

By the same tokens, and against the background of my recognition of the power of Asia, some of the ideas which right hon. and hon. Members are floating about beefing up the Atlantic community—my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) mentioned that—are, if I may say so, a little out of date. If one sits in Washington, or west of Washington, one is halfway into the Asian world, and one can recognise the enormous, dominating and increasing power of Asian investment, trade, standards, quality and design in 1,001 ways. I am not just talking about Japan, but about the old and new tigers as well.

The Atlantic community is of interest in developing NATO and I am glad to see that the United States is beginning to talk about expanding NATO and is not just sitting on its thumbs on the matter. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who will reply to the debate tonight, will no doubt have something to say on that, and there are ways in which we can strengthen, rather than weaken, transatlantic security arrangements. Interpreting the misunderstandings over Bosnia as a great rift between America and Europe is an absurd exaggeration, and I am sure that the matter can be carried forward.

The idea that there is an Atlantic community beyond security is too narrow, and we must concentrate on what we must do to develop further, as this country is doing with great success, our links with the great Asian economies which will dominate during the next 20, 30 or 40 years. It is a matter of great pride to me that this country is carving out a unique foreign policy with Japan. We have built a closeness of identity and understanding in all sorts of areas. Those areas may not appear in the script. They may not fit in with the view of blocs, or with the view of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale that we must give priority to Europe, or with the idea of an Atlantic community. They happen to fit into the reality, and they are of vast benefit to this country, as well as to Japan.

The reality which we all face is not the marginal one of European budget contributions or whether we have a social charter. The reality is that the Asian challenge of competitiveness will overshadow everything. Our choice is either to give up and go for protection—Sir James Goldsmith is inclined to do that, and certain policy makers of influence in Europe are longing to put up the protectionist shutters—or to embrace the challenge and learn from the best of different cultures which, hitherto,

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we regarded with some patronage and a smiling superiority. We now see to our surprise that they can deliver up economic and industrial success, technology, learning and quality on a scale which we never dreamed about.

We had better get our skates on and understand how those cultures work and what we can take from them to prepare ourselves for the years of struggle ahead to remain competitive and to maintain even what we have in the way of a standard of living.

5.37 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I agree with the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) that we should not look at the world in terms of blocks. May I remind him that my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) emphasised the fact that the future of Britain cannot be outside Europe and the European Community?

Some of us held views contrary to that in the past. Many of us have changed our views in the intervening 20 years, and particularly in the past 15 years, because much of Britain's manufacturing base has been decimated despite the fact that resources are there. North sea oil revenues—£124 billion of them—were available for investment, but they have been allowed to be whittled away by the Tory Government since their election in 1979. We might ask ourselves what the Germans or French would have done with those revenues. Whereas, 20 years ago, it was just conceivable that Britain might be the offshore Japan of Europe and go it alone, those days are long gone. We must accept that we must make our way in the world as part of the European Union.

That does not mean, of course, that we should accept every institution of which Britain is a member, for example NATO. It was a child of the cold war. At that time many of us looked forward to the day when the Warsaw pact and NATO folded because it was no longer necessary to maintain those warring alliances. The Warsaw pact has gone, but the Gracious Speech still refers to NATO playing

" a wider role in protecting stability throughout Europe."

I must warn that I believe that NATO could be a source of instability in Europe if we seek to enlarge it in line with an enlarged European Union. We want that union to be enlarged by eventual membership of Scandinavian and eastern European countries, and even the Baltic states. If we were to propagate the view, however, that we wanted eastern European countries such as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia—and perhaps Finland—to be members of NATO, that would be met with a swift reaction from Russia. We might then find ourselves back in the days of the cold war. For that reason it is important to develop the role of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The summit at Budapest should be used to give the CSCE more power and influence in international relations. At least Russia is party to the CSCE; similarly its participation in Partnership for Peace is extremely welcome.

With the end of the cold war relationships have changed. The United States, for example, recently decided to defy a United Nations resolution by lifting its arms embargo against the warring factions in Bosnia. Although the Foreign Secretary does not want us to depart from the pan-Atlantic relationship within which we have worked since the second world war, I advise caution.

In common with many of my hon. Friends, I welcomed the election of President Clinton, but I must confess that now I am not so sure. I saw the wonderful work done by the American forces who were sent in to Somalia by President Bush. They saved people in Baidoua, Belet Yuen and other townships from starvation by getting food to them. Those troops carried out a highly successful operation in most dangerous circumstances, but then President Clinton decided that helicopter gunships were the answer to President Aidid. I look to Europe and not to those across the Atlantic to determine future British foreign policy.

One of the greatest dangers that lies ahead of us is the rise of Muslim fundamentalism, which is already apparent in Egypt and Algeria. In a decade from now, middle eastern countries, should they be ruled by rogue leaders, could launch missiles against this country, if they so wished. For that good reason it is important that we should achieve a common foreign and security policy not only with our present partners in the European Union but with those other countries that we hope will join it. We must also work with Russia, which is vital to the future of European security.

Security is not built on military alliances. We must ask ourselves why we have wars in places such as Rwanda. They are caused by poverty, disease and strife within communities. We must, similarly, guard against a rise of nationalist forces in Russia and eastern European countries. How do such forces become powerful? They are created by the divisions that arise in societies which throw their all behind the god of the market.

Whenever I meet visitors from Russia and eastern Europe, or go to those countries, I always warn people against a mad rush from the extremes of highly centralised, planned economies, such as that which existed under bureaucratic control in the former Soviet Union, to extreme Thatcherite market economies. I know that Conservative Members would not agree with my advice, but I always say to those people, "For God's sake, don't throw the baby out with the bath water." I remind them that not everything that existed in the former Soviet Union was a disaster. In 1956, for example, a White Paper was published—it prompted some discussion in the House—which showed that adult further education and university education was available to far more people in the Soviet Union and in the United States than in Britain.

Because of the loss of welfare provision and mass unemployment in east Germany, the recent elections in Germany were not only marked by gains made by the SPD—I was pleased about that—but by gains made by the PDS in the eastern Länder. For the same reason, parties which consist of former members of the Communist parties are coming into office in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary. I hope that those former Communist members have learnt from their mistakes, just as I hope that Conservative Members have learnt from the mistakes that they made during the Thatcherite period—a period that some of us still doubt has come to an end.

The Foreign Secretary referred to the Baltic states and their eventual membership of the European Union. I hope that that day is not far away, but we must remember that that will mean that Russians will live inside the European Union. It is therefore important to insist that when those

countries apply for membership, their record on human rights for minorities in their countries should be absolutely without blemish. The Latvian Government, for example, must be told not to discriminate against the large Russian minority within their country. For example, a person who speaks Latvian fluently and who considers himself Latvian, not Russian, is still discriminated against and is denied certain rights because he served at one time in the Soviet army. It is that type of problem that leads to conflict, just as it did in the former Yugoslavia. The fact that we recognised Croatia, which was discriminating against its large Serb population not just in Krajina or the borderlands but in Zagreb itself, is the reason why there is now a war in Bosnia.

Although ethnic cleansing has by no means been all one-sided, our media should consider taking a more even-handed approach to the former Yugoslavia. A fortnight or so ago, the news was full of the offensive launched by the Muslim forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, central Bosnia and around Bihac. It went almost without comment or criticism in the western media, which simply said that the Muslims were trying to get by military means what the Bosnian Serbs had refused to give them by not signing the contact group's plan. But the United Nations' resolution does not call for military action to reinforce the contact group's plan. Today, however, reports have appeared in our newspapers on the Serb counter offensive around Bihac, and President Izetbegovic who, a few weeks ago, was launching his offensive and gloating about how he occupied more territory inside Bosnia, is calling on the UN to take action. We should tell him that there will be no military action.

The Government have been right—I hope that no deals will be done in the future—to maintain their opposition to lifting the arms embargo, as the Americans have. For God's sake, let them not be persuaded, as they were by Herr Genscher on the recognition of Croatia, to lift the arms embargo. The humanitarian effort would undoubtedly come to a standstill if there were a large-scale influx of heavy armoury, as has been suggested, for the Muslim effort in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Government have made it clear, and they should maintain their position clearly in the future, that our contingent in UNPROFOR will be withdrawn if the arms embargo is completely lifted.

I welcome the fact that some sanctions have been lifted against Yugoslavia—that is to say, Serbian Montenegro—because it must be recognised that there are more than 200,000 refugees from Bosnia and Croatia, and they are not all Serbs. Anyone who visits refugee camps, as I have, in former Yugoslavia will see Muslims being tended by Serbs. It is not true to say that, in the Serbian-controlled part of Bosnia, there are no Muslims, and that Muslims are not living easily with their fellow Serbs. A degree of civilisation exists within an otherwise uncivilised part of the world.

Human rights is the most important issue in terms of our international policies. The rights of minorities, wherever they may be, should be put at the forefront. I agree entirely with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on the arms trade. It is no use the Foreign Secretary telling the House that if we do not supply arms, somebody else will. It is no use him saying that the Opposition do not want to maintain the jobs of the workers whom we represent. Of course we do, but those workers would agree that that does not justify putting arms into the hands of murderous dictators. After all, the same argument could have been used in the early 1930s, when the Foreign Secretary of the day might have said that Herr Hitler was trying to build up the German economy and that Germany had suffered many disadvantages after the treaty of Versailles, so we shall provide him with some of our machine tools to get his factories going. There is no justification for selling arms to regimes such as those in Indonesia. There was no justification for selling arms to the Iraqi regime, which later used them against our constituents who were there with our military forces.

The whole of our foreign policy should be aimed at creating a better spirit of humanity so that, when somebody is tortured in Pinochet's Chile, and when whole families are murdered in Suharto's East Timor, it affects us equally. It is sometimes said that man is not an island—

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's words when he looks back with sound knowledge at regimes such as those in Iraq and Indonesia and makes judgments on the sale of arms. Will he look forward and name the regimes—perhaps Saudi Arabia and others—to which we should not sell arms in the future? It is easy to make retrospective judgments, but when the Government are making decisions, they must consider jobs and look at current events rather than at what happened in the past.

Mr. Wareing: What the hon. Gentleman has in mind is the fact that Saudi Arabia is the source of our oil supplies, which should make a difference. I am sorry, but that should make no difference.

Mr. Gallie: No, that was not what I had in mind. May I explain to the hon. Gentleman? It is all right to look back and say that we should not have supplied arms to those regimes. Will the hon. Gentleman look into the future and, given different democratic processes and change in Governments, try to determine which regimes should not be sold arms in the future?

Mr. Wareing: I hope that any British Government worth their salt would try to persuade even our "commercial friends" that democracy is the right way forward. I do not excuse the rule by sheikdoms in the middle east. Those countries, too, should come under pressure. It is all very well to say that they produce important raw materials for our industries, but they need customers. If collective action were taken through the United Nations, as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale suggested, no customers would be willing to trade with dictatorial, autocratic regimes that torture their populations and threaten the lives of people in other countries. That is the criterion on which we should proceed.

Someone said to my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) earlier, "Ah, but a Labour Government did so." May I say at the outset that I do not excuse any former Labour Government for their mistakes. Before I came to the House in the 1960s, there was an argument about whether we should maintain a naval base at Simonstown and supply aircraft to the South African regime. We should not have done. We were wrong to do so. Sometimes parties must admit that, yes, they made mistakes. When Labour Governments sold arms to South Africa or to any other dictatorial regime, it was a mistake, and it must not happen again. I am sure that, after the next

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general election, when a Labour Government will further a progressive socialist foreign policy, in the European Community, that will be one of the mistakes that will not be repeated.

5.59 pm

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), especially when he speaks about the former Yugoslavia, because the House appreciates his considerable knowledge of the scene there: he has visited the country frequently, and he has many interesting things to tell us.

I was not quite so happy to hear the hon. Gentleman's opinions about the arms trade, but I shall not take that one up. He asked where the proceeds of North sea oil have gone, and it is worth reminding him of the large chunks of the United States that are now in the hands of English companies, partly as a result of North sea oil.

It is also a privilege to be allowed to take part in this debate on the Gracious Speech about foreign affairs and defence, and one has to start with a self-denying ordinance. There are a hundred and one fascinating topics to pursue. I want to say something about the United Nations, and something—you will not be surprised to hear, Madam Deputy Speaker—about the middle east. However, I shall begin with Europe, because currently the media spotlight is on our European future, partly as a result of the great rebellion—which I think is now dissipated.

I am delighted that the new Minister for Europe, my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), is here to hear my brief words on the topic. I hope that the Government will help to popularise the European Union, because I believe that the lack of public support for what the Government are trying to achieve puts the brakes on to some extent.

The European Union can help. We are scandalised by the fraud that has been disclosed. I welcome the suggestion that a country that has grossly abused the system should be cut off from European Union aid. I wonder what the Government's position on that proposal may be.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Townsend: May I proceed?

Secondly, the European Union obviously must avoid some of the nonsenses that the media delight in picking up, be they bent bananas or harmonising the noise of lawn mowers. They drive our constituents nuts—quite rightly. My hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that, in the urban constituency of Bexleyheath—we got rid of our last cow just before I arrived on the scene—my constituents are maddened by the huge subsidies that go into the agricultural system in this country and many others.

The tabloid newspapers look at Europe through the wrong end of the telescope. I am described in one of the parliamentary reference books as a Euro-idealist, whatever that may mean, but, yes, there is an element of idealism in the concept of the Community that we are trying to build up.

Let me put it this way. My grandfather was in the Navy for four years during the first world war; my father was in the Army for five years during the second world war. Both those wars began in Europe, and they came about as a result of the great antagonism between France and Germany. Now we have France and Germany inside the Union, haggling away about the minutiae of European Union daily detail, and that is splendid. Let no one minimise or misjudge the magnitude of what Europeans have been able to achieve in western Europe. It is a success story.

The problem is that too many countries are trying to join too soon, before they are ready. That makes life difficult. We shall have to change the structures of the Community at the next intergovernmental conference, and I welcome the proposal that we should drop one of our Commissioners. We shall react to change the structure of the Community to deal with the genuine problems of success.

I hope that the Secretary of State has a moment to listen, although I confess that he has heard my opinions in private many times. I support the ideas that Sir Leon Brittan and Lord Carrington have put forward over the years. We simply cannot continue to draw a line between defence and the European Union. Times are moving on. We must build up a European dimension to our defence policy.

At the moment, the Foreign Secretary can talk about European security, but he is not allowed to talk about European defence. How can one have a rational policy for European industries if one totally excludes the defence industries, which are an important part of the whole?

I should like the Government to be more positive about involving the European Union in defence. One of the by-products of the recent, very unfortunate, move by the United States in relation to Bosnia may be that it will draw attention to that argument.

I shall now briefly discuss the United Nations. I happen to be the Conservative representative on the committee that is trying to decide how we should celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. I assure the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who, incidentally, I welcomed to Hong Kong in 1965 as a Government official in Hong Kong, that that committee is determined not to be complacent, not simply to sit back and say, "How well we have done". On the contrary, we are only too well aware that the United Nations must advance to tackle the new problems that were mentioned earlier.

One aspect, curiously, has not been mentioned—the increase in the number of the permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations, the P5. I am proud of the fact that it was Britain that called a special summit meeting a few years ago, to consider the future of the United Nations, just after Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali had been appointed, and following, thank God, the end of the cold war, which had paralysed the United Nations.

When the Prime Minister made a statement in the House after that successful summit, he said, in reply to a question by me, that he saw no reason to change the number of members who had permanent seats on the Security Council. While we have been away for the summer, the Foreign Secretary has said that the United Kingdom now would welcome Japan and Germany as permanent members of the Security Council.

I am not criticising the Government. What has changed is that Germany has now sorted out its constitutional problems and, I hope, will start helping UN peacekeeping operations around the world—that help is sorely needed—and Japan has committed troops, first in Cambodia on a small scale, and secondly, more recently, in Rwanda.

The Germans are right to resist the call to put their troops into Bosnia. I am sure that the hon. Member for West Derby is only too well aware of how they treated the Serbs in the last world war. However, it would be good to have some German aeroplanes to take part in enforcing the no-fly zone over former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Wareing *rose—*

Mr. McWilliam *rose—*

Mr. Townsend: I give way to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam).

Mr. McWilliam: German aircrew and aircraft are policing the no-fly zone in E3 sentry aircraft.

Mr. Townsend: I am informed that they have not yet committed any of their fighters, but no doubt the experts can put us right about that.

I hope also that the Germans might play a part in Macedonia, and relieve some of the United States troops there.

Mr. Wareing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Townsend: May I continue, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind?

Mr. Wareing: I simply wish to make it clear that there are German aircraft in the former Yugoslavia, but they are providing essential supplies, flying from Zagreb to Sarajevo.

Mr. Townsend: I am specifically referring to the shortage of fighter aircraft to enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia.

I hope that the Germans will play a big role in UN peacekeeping. However, I think that there is a danger that, if the P5 turn into P6, P7, P8 or whatever, the Security Council may become unwieldy and unmanageable. God knows, it is hard enough for the Foreign Secretary to obtain agreement over Iraq or Bosnia at present.

We all enormously welcome the cautious progress being made in the middle east. I gather that the Secretary of State, who has recently been there, will make further comments on that this evening. I particularly welcome the comparatively recent move between Israel and Jordan—about time, too.

There is an appalling tendency for our newspapers to suggest that all is now well, and we can turn our gaze elsewhere. That is quite untrue. The Syrian front will be a difficult one for the Israeli Government. Yitzhak Rabin encouraged the settlers to move there, and now he must try to persuade them that Israel is to abandon the entire Golan heights. I hope that the Secretary of State will make it absolutely clear that no halfway measures will be acceptable to the United Kingdom.

The other day I came across a wonderful quote—it must be 20 years old now—by the late Lord Caradon:

"To imagine that security comes from repression, grabbing and holding territory, from creeping colonisation in Arab lands or from a concrete encirclement in Jerusalem, from domination by forts and outposts, is a most dangerous deception."

He continued:

"every schoolboy knows that forts in enemy territory are not a guarantee of security, they are a guarantee of insecurity, an invitation to resistance, harassment and attack."

I have two observations to make about south Lebanon. I find it distasteful that, within a few days of Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman Arafat being awarded the Nobel peace prize, certain Shi'a villages in southern Lebanon should be shelled in retaliation against the activities of Hamas in the occupied territories and Israel. Those shells killed innocent Lebanese civilians. The chances of hitting a member of Hezbollah are few and far between.

I wish to draw attention to the horrors of a detention centre camp called Khiam in Israeli-occupied Lebanon. I am told that, since 1985, that camp has held 230 Lebanese Shi'a citizens. There is a dispute between the south Lebanese army—the Israeli surrogate force in that part of the world—and the Israeli defence force over who is responsible for that camp.

Believe it or not, the individuals in that camp are not allowed visits from relatives and the International Red Cross or Red Crescent are not allowed to see them. That is scandalous—I am told that a Foreign Office Minister has raised the matter with the Israeli authorities. When he winds up today's debate, will my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence give an assurance that the British Government will not allow that matter to rest?

Gaza should concern us all. Support for Hamas is on the increase. We must remember that it was the Israelis who helped to build up Hamas as a means of countering the influence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. As long as we ignore the Palestinian problem, or put it on the back burner as Yitzhak Rabin has been trying to do, the more support will flow towards Hamas.

The British Government are playing a useful role and supporting the Palestine police. But Chairman Arafat—who has unfortunately adopted an all too autocratic style in Gaza—needs the help of the international community now. It does not take much imagination to see how desperately wrong things could go if jobs are not created in Gaza and the occupied territories. Individual Palestinians who dream about a Palestinian state must be able to see that the sewerage system is beginning to work, jobs are coming and there is some prosperity.

I am a strong supporter of British foreign policy. We are in a unique position as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the European Union, the Western European Union, the Commonwealth and the G7 countries. But that means that we must have an active and constructive foreign policy. We normally do, but this is no moment to sit back on our laurels.

We are privileged to be served by probably the best diplomatic service in the world—a phrase given to me by a United States diplomat in London. He said, "I cannot understand how it is that I read in your papers, day after day, scandalous references to your diplomats, when we are all jealous of their linguistic abilities, traditions and

[Mr. Townsend]

skills." We are lucky that our diplomatic Rolls-Royce is driven by the Foreign Secretary, whose reputation is growing ever greater in the international community.

6.15 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I am privileged to participate in the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), with whom I had the honour of sharing a desk room many years ago—they were happy days.

I wish to take up the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) about former Yugoslavia. He was right to say that, if the then Federal Republic of Germany had not dashed in desperately to recognise Croatia long before any countries in former Yugoslavia should have been afforded recognition, we would not be in the sorry state that we are now.

But the fact that we are in our current state leads me to the remarks of the hon. Member for Bexleyheath, who suggested that Germany should play a more active peacekeeping role around the world. It should, but it is not practical to employ in a peacekeeping role German soldiers or Luftwaffe aircraft in an area which they once occupied and in which they had 40 divisions.

I, too, have travelled to Yugoslavia, and I know how local people feel. I know that such action would do more harm than good. The Luftwaffe is doing a sterling job in flying transport aircraft and E3 Sentry aircraft that help us to police the no-fly zone. It picks up those aircraft that are breaking through the no-fly zone and directs the fighters to them.

I take issue with the Foreign Secretary when he tries to dismiss the American change of policy in Bosnia as merely changing the orders of two ships. That is to misstate what has happened. Once again, for domestic political reasons, America has decided to break with the rest of us. The snag is that we have British soldiers on the ground, up front in Yugoslavia. Those soldiers would be at risk if the change of policy provoked any escalation in the fighting.

Our troops are carrying out a splendid job for one reason only—to ensure that relief reaches the civilian population in the forward areas in Bosnia. That is their only task; they are not trying to police the area or to impose a truce. They are performing their task supremely well. They would be unable to do so were it not for the superb work of the Royal Engineers in opening up tracks and emergency roads to allow the convoys to get through. I am fortunate enough to have travelled to those regions and to have seen at first hand what is happening.

I wish that people would not be so off-hand in their use of the phrase "ethnic cleansing", which happens on all sides. The phrase does not mean ethnic cleansing: it means that a thug knocks on a door in the middle of the night and tells the inhabitants of the house that they are the wrong religion, and that if they do not move out in the morning, he will burn down their house. If they do not leave, he burns down the house around the people in it. That is not ethnic cleansing; it is xenophobic thuggery, and it should not be tolerated anywhere.

We need to remind America that it is our soldiers who are at risk in Bosnia. Much the same happened during the Gulf war, when, for domestic political reasons, the Americans could not bear to take action against the Iraqi looters and terrorists on the Basra road, so they stopped us going after the Republican Guards armoured battalion.

Had we been able to go after that battalion, 45 Commando might not be sitting on the border guarding Kuwait now. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will be able to tell me tonight that my friends in 45 Commando can look forward to spending Christmas at home. It would be tragic if they had to be away, as they are not long back from Northern Ireland.

I am delighted that peace is progressing in Northern Ireland, and delighted too to hear the Secretary of State for Defence say that, if the process continues and we can withdraw troops, we will not consequently reduce infantry numbers, because the infantry are already overstretched. I have a two-week-old niece in Northern Ireland, and some nephews, and I want those children to grow up there with the same freedom and chances that I had. I do not want them to have to put up with what my wife had to face when she was young—the problems that drove her away from Northern Ireland. The only good result of that was that it enabled me to meet her.

We often say that we should not sell arms to tinpot regimes or repressive dictators, but we forget that our defence manufacturing industry is actually part of our defence capability. Without that industry, our capability would be significantly diminished. Incidentally, our defence manufacturers use a great deal of steel to make the things that our soldiers, sailors and airmen need. During the second world war, Lord Haw-Haw said that the Luftwaffe was going to destroy the Derwenthaugh cokeworks which was so essential to our steel industry. In the end, the Luftwaffe never managed it; it took 14 years of Conservative Government to flatten those cokeworks.

I must also condemn the Government for their short-sighted forward ordering policies, which have resulted in the Swan Hunter shipyard being virtually destroyed. It was a shipyard with a proud tradition of building great naval vessels on time and to price—and without defect. All that is lost now.

The same appeared to happen with the FH70 ammunition saga. We decided to give the order for that ammunition to the Germans and the Italians. The Germans discovered that they could not produce it, and passed the order to the Belgians, with the result that, during the Gulf war, we could not obtain 155 mm ammunition from the Belgians, because they were not too sure about the Gulf conflict. That was appalling, but we are in grave danger of making the same mistakes again.

Gordon Foxley, director of munitions procurement at the MOD, has just been convicted of bribery. The Government are trying to recover some money from him. Victor Temple QC, prosecuting, said that the Government were keen to recover the balance of corrupt moneys. The judge, however, said that there was no evidence that the MOD had lost by being supplied with ineffective fuses and ammunition. He said that there was no evidence that Mr. Foxley directed work away from the Royal Ordnance factory—that was one reason why he gave Mr. Foxley a reduced sentence.

The facts do not support that contention. The only reason why the judge had no evidence was that the MOD, for reasons of its own, chose not to present any. The facts of the matter are that the Jurgens fuses that Mr. Foxley persuaded the MOD to purchase instead of Royal Ordnance fuses cost £14.40. The Royal Ordnance fuses cost only £6. The episode meant the loss of a factory at Blackburn and more than 1,000 jobs lost in Royal Ordnance factories, including at mine, Birtley—not to mention the loss of £24 million of taxpayers' money.

The fuses made by Borletti, the other company that bribed Foxley, did not work in rain and were useless in battlefield conditions. The MOD presented no evidence, because it would have been politically uncomfortable to present any. The Government have wittered on at us about the need to introduce foreign competition. There is such a need, but there is no need to do it in this way, by giving in to bribes from foreign companies.

We have lost British jobs and British defence manufacturing capability, simply because of a combination of a corrupt civil servant—fortunately there are very few of them—and a Government policy that found it inconvenient to produce evidence that suggested that British jobs were being lost.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) and with my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) about the need to be careful when we sell arms—we should not just sell them to anyone. We must also be careful to distinguish between commission-influenced peddling and bribes. A healthy defence manufacturing industry cannot be based on either.

There have been some long speeches today, and I do not intend to make one myself. I want to end with a plea which I hope the Defence Secretary will pass on to his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

I refer to a tragedy that occurred on 19 September 1989, when a UTA airliner went down over the Tenere desert, just north of Chad. On board was a friend of mine, David Middleton. I spoke to his wife just the other night. I have written to the Foreign Office and taken deputations there on behalf of Mrs. Middleton, but since 1989 neither she nor other British dependants have received compensation for their loss.

Mrs. Middleton has not even received her husband's belongings. They were sent on to someone in Canada, and she was tersely told that if she wanted them back she would have to get them herself. She is in Paris tonight. She should have been at a hearing today, but it was cancelled because UTA wanted more information—copies of her marriage certificate and her children's birth certificates. The airline seemed quite happy to recognise who she was several years ago when it sent her husband's remains back for her to dispose of; now the airline is not happy to bring the matter to a conclusion.

I do not think that the Foreign Office is doing enough to help Mrs. Middleton and other British victims of the disaster to obtain their rights. The same applies to other British victims of terrorism. I therefore ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to press the Foreign Secretary to stop this injustice, to stop the bureaucratic wrangling and to use all his influence with the French Government to say that enough is enough. Why have French victims been compensated while British victims have not?

6.28 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), whose references to Northern Ireland I particularly welcomed. It is little short of scandalous that so few right hon. and hon. Members take a detailed interest in Northern Ireland.

It is interesting to observe that the Labour party has changed its Front-Bench spokesman on Northern Ireland, and is moving away from its aggressively nationalist posture. It is perhaps too much to hope that one of the great parties in the House will openly support the Union, but it is certain that the Labour party is moving towards a more friendly attitude to it. I have no doubt that the Unionists, who were once our allies but who often now are unfortunately our enemies, will have noted the important change in the Labour party's view of Northern Ireland.

The Government gave a frank exposition to those of us who might have doubts about the European Communities (Finance) Bill. I have not made up my mind about that Bill. I was aware that, at least in year one, not a great deal of money was involved. Arguably, it was only £75 million, and it seemed necessary and reasonable to listen to the Government's arguments about the matter.

I am grateful to the Prime Minister for raising yesterday the issue of a general election in such a clear way. The last time that issue was raised was at the end of proceedings on the Maastricht legislation. Those of us who had the misfortune to disagree with the Government on the treaty did not have much time to consider the position, and there was no great opportunity for the nation, the newspapers and commentators to consider the grave constitutional issues that were raised by the threat of a general election.

At that time, there was no great certainty that the monarch would have allowed the prorogation of Parliament and a general election. Therefore, we did not really know, and the threat was never really tested. The Government are to be congratulated on succeeding in their threat, because everybody knows that threats in respect of Maastricht were justified, and that any threat that comes off is to be applauded, for winners always deserve applause and are always supported in the Conservative party.

There is now a new and helpful situation, in that a threat has been made not just overnight but at an early stage, which gives the Government and commentators an opportunity to investigate the position. Until yesterday, I had not made up my mind about the Bill, but it did not help to be threatened quite so crudely.

The first question that we must consider is whether the monarch has consented to prorogue Parliament if the Bill is not passed. Of course, it is now customary for the Government to give the impression that they are responsible not to the House but for the House. Many of the Prime Minister's observations at the Mansion House gave the impression that he was responsible for the House of Commons. However, an older view—and perhaps in our unwritten constitution this old view is out of date—is that the Government are responsible to the legislature.

There is now a quite extraordinary new constitutional theory, to the effect that, when the Government have entered into some form of foreign obligation which the House of Commons does not support, a general election

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

must be called. In relation to Maastricht, it was at least arguable that the issue had been raised before a general election. When I tried to raise it in my constituency, I was regarded by the media as an oddity and an eccentric. I understand that it was not generally raised during the general election campaign. However, I shall let that small point pass.

No one can argue that the outcome of the Edinburgh summit has been submitted to the nation. The only place to which an agreement with a foreign organisation can be submitted is this House. When the House is told, "If you disagree with the expenditure of £75 million, there must be a general election," it makes those of us who are Conservatives and Government supporters but who have the misfortune to disagree with extra expenditure in Europe ask, "What is our purpose in this place, and what is the purpose of this place?"

Surely, in the last resort, the House has always been able to say, "We are sorry, but you cannot have the money." That is what Parliament said to Stuart monarchs, and surely we are entitled to say that to the Government. If we say that, surely we cannot be told that it will precipitate an immediate general election.

For example, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howells) about the current movement of economic policy. Since 16 September 1992, economic policy has been good. We could argue about the odd detail here or there, the small points, but in general the policy has been good, and in the next couple of years that will be recognised. It is infinitely superior to any of the interventionist and high-spending policies of the Opposition.

I do not want to precipitate a general election, but as a Member of Parliament I want to be able to say that I do not wish to see money wasted and spent in Europe. It is disgraceful to threaten the House of Commons in this way so as to deprive us of our rights and emasculate us in our most important role. We argued about the role of the European Community during proceedings on the Maastricht legislation. If, for the sake of argument, we say that we should not have an interventionist industrial policy or whatever, in the last resort the only way to check the extension of federalism is to say that we will not pay for it.

It is said that the alternative to paying the money is to check fraud in Europe. There is nothing new in the reports from the Court of Auditors. Such highly critical reports have been appearing year in and year out for the past 10 years, and every rising junior Minister comes to the Dispatch Box and says, "This is disgraceful. We must do something about it. The Government will be unrelenting in stopping this."

That reads very well and gives great pleasure to the speaker of the words. It is noted by the chaps from the Whips Office, and it goes down very well. But, of course, nothing happens. Not only that, but nothing can happen, because Europe is a half-formed federal structure. As the Prime Minister acknowledged in his exchange with my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), if it became a fully federal structure, we would be even more angry about it.

Let us look at the present structure. The European Community has some limited control over Governments, but no control over individuals. We all know that the Italian Government are certainly shaky. Without being offensive, I can say that, from time to time, they are suspected of being corrupt. It has now been proved in the European Court that the Italian Government made no attempt whatever to enforce the system of milk quotas. The fine imposed upon the Italian Government by the European court was £700 million.

It is a federal structure that we ought to be supporting. Along went the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, with admirable frankness—I understand his language entirely, because I share both his educational and professional background—shrugged his shoulders and said, "When I was appearing in the Birmingham county court, I always knew that it was better from time to time to take half of what you could get rather than go for the lot."

That is all very well in the Birmingham county court when one is appearing for a plaintiff against a bankrupt defendant, but we were dealing with the most appalling example of fraud and evasion of Community rules by a democratically elected Government who we regarded as a suitable ally and partner within the European Community. It is all very well junior Ministers saying that we are going to do this, that and the other, but when the time came for collecting a bit of money and ensuring that a fraud was stopped, the Chancellor of the Exchequer let them off the hook.

There is no control over fraudulent individuals in the Community—nor can there be. Those of us who farm—[Hon. Members: "Oh."] The House may consider me particularly awkward about the Community, so let us assume that there are farmers who love the Community and believe it is the best thing in the world. However, if an Italian Euro-inspector of the ewe subsidy came along and said, "Hey Jock, have you got the right number of ewes?" they would resent it very much indeed. It would be a manifestation of an Euro police force. Of course, that will not happen.

Let us consider the Euro-control of countries. We are not in the same position as the northern states were in relation to the southern states in America. We are not about to send the Army into Milan and say, "Right, you pay the £700 million and don't mess around." It is, I repeat, a half-formed federal structure. The fight against Euro-fraud will always fail. It will always be a very useful subject for rising Ministers to grit their teeth, stick out their chins and look purposeful at the Dispatch Box, while nothing happens.

The only mechanism for preventing expenditure in Europe of which we disapprove is to allow the House of Commons from time to time to say to the Executive, "We are sorry, but we will not pay up." That is surely what an unemasculated House of Commons should be able to do.

I suppose that clever people who think that the House of Commons should be no more than a recruiting ground for the Government and have no powers at all, will be proud and pleased at the way in which we have been so successfully threatened, but it will be a sad day for the Government.

I end with a reminder. I watch with interest what Lady Thatcher says about the European Union, and I can conclude from her publicly stated remarks only that she now regrets that she was responsible for the Single

European Act. If she regrets it, it is mainly her own fault, because, contrary to the best traditions of the House, she bashed it through with a guillotine and did not listen to any of the arguments that might have persuaded her that, by her own standards, she was making a serious mistake.

If we emasculate the House because we think it clever to shut up 10 or 15 people who have a different view about funding the Community by threatening them, we should recall that we may see—I hope we do not—a further interventionist move in Europe. We may see a Labour Government who support it, and we may be bound by the constitutional argument that was put forward yesterday, to the effect that a British Government who have entered into an unwise agreement with foreign bodies cannot have that foreign agreement prevented other than at the cost of a general election.

This is an unwise attack upon the House of Commons; it is an unwise attack upon our constitutional rights; and I hope that there is good and sufficient discussion of it over the next weeks, so that the Government may realise what a grave mistake they have made.

6.45 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I shall not follow the same road as the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) as I want to talk about United Nations peacekeeping forces. We have often been told that there is no place for a UN peacekeeping force in a civil war and that is what we are hearing from the Conservative party.

As we debate the matter tonight, the UN operation in Somalia is being run down in a spirit of failure—as something that has gone badly wrong. That is serious not just for Somalia but for the whole world.

Let us go back two years when, because of the background of clan differences, the United Nations passed a resolution agreeing to military intervention, and then failed to do so until seven months later when 500 lightly armed Pakistani troops landed and were immediately captured. In the new year, we had the CNN-filmed invasion of Somalia by the United States, when 20,000 troops went in. We then saw 20,000 troops being withdrawn with their tails between their legs as the United States discovered that it was rather more difficult than they had expected.

At the moment another 20,000 troops, mainly from the Indian sub-continent, are being withdrawn at great risk to themselves and to the aid workers who are there. There is every sign that the shambles in Somalia will start up again and that there will be warfare between the clans. That need not have occurred. There were better ways to deal with the unrest, but what was needed was prompt and efficient intervention, backed by political will.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned Rwanda as a example of something which had tested the UN to the limits. He was disappointing in that he gave no sign of what he had learnt from Rwanda. Britain was utterly determined not to be involved, yet today the Foreign Secretary boasted about British involvement because, ultimately, 600 British troops became involved. They did a superb job, but are now being withdrawn. Something must have gone wrong when we were seeking not to be involved, but then became involved and boasted about our involvement.

Following the killing of the Rwandan President and Belgian peacekeepers in April, the Security Council cut back the UN presence to 271 troops. We backed that decision, but the world was appalled at the withdrawal from Rwanda and the failure of the UN to operate effectively there. We have witnessed appalling spectacles in a country of 7.2 million people, half of whom have been killed, made refugees or displaced.

On 13 May, the UN Security Council decided that 5,500 troops should be deployed in Rwanda. It is now six months later. On 7 July, Baroness Chalker wrote to Members of Parliament—two months after the decision—saying that it would be a further 10 weeks before those troops would be fully deployed. I was appalled to think that it would take four months to deploy 5,500 troops when thousands upon thousands of people were dying.

Baroness Chalker's extra 10 weeks would have taken the deployment date to 10 September, but it is now 17 November. What has happened to the promised deployment of those 5,500 troops? It is still two battalions short. After six months, an Indian battalion and a Zambian battalion are still to be deployed in Rwanda, yet apparently our troops are being withdrawn. In the strange way of UN peacekeeping forces, a contract between the United Nations and the Brown and Root company to provide logistical support has not yet been finalised.

The problem is not troops—troops are available in the world for peacekeeping operations—but political will and logistical support and command. The Foreign Secretary said nothing about how we would improve that. There can never be an effective UN operation anywhere in the world unless that logistical support is provided. Today, the right hon. Gentleman boasted that 565 British troops were deployed in Rwanda. When we last debated the issue in July, our commitment to Rwanda was 50 trucks.

What fills me with apprehension is that the defeated Rwandan army is now reorganising in Zaire and will resurface. It is disturbing that the UN seems to learn nothing from these operations. The French, rightly or wrongly, proved how quickly they could deploy their forces in Rwanda. They said, "We are going in" and they went in within days. In the Gulf over the summer, Saddam Hussein stirred again and there was no problem about logistics. The UN must be equipped to react. We must stop talking about UN reaction unless we mean it. The problem of logistical support must be solved.

Almost three years ago, the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali highlighted the problem and said that the UN had no stock of logistical equipment. It must place orders with manufacturers so that it can get its army moving. He said that Governments should commit themselves to keeping certain equipment on immediate standby and agree to make airlift and sealift capacity immediately available to the UN.

We must go beyond that to what was called, in "Agenda for Peace", peace enforcement units, which should be immediately available for the UN to deploy. The United Kingdom has to agree that such facilities are available. However, we must go even further beyond that to a UN standing force of people who are recruited to serve the UN and to be available for the UN to deal with issues as they arise. We cannot continue to commit people to peacekeeping forces when it takes seven or eight months for them to be deployed in a constantly deteriorating situation. Over the summer, the Foreign Secretary said that he had put forward some ideas to

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achieve that. I do not think that he has. The Government have proposed nothing to show how the matter could be dealt with more effectively.

I was disappointed by the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about arms sales. There was no serious tackling of the issue. He often appears to be Olympian and statesmanlike, but on this issue he descended into run-of-the-mill politics, such as saying that we must think about the workers in the British arms factories. If every statesman in the world took the same approach, no progress would be made. It is a serious problem. Unfortunately, Britain has too great an economic dependence on arms sales. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) referred to figures that show an enormous concentration of export credit guarantee facilities for the expansion of arms sales.

The Foreign Secretary is not credible in his protestations that there are no links between arms sales and British aid. His defence appears to be that he was surprised by the Pergau dam affair—that he would not have made the decision that was made, but that he had to honour commitments given by people before him. He suggested that there was but a brief entanglement of arms sales and aid. I caution the right hon. Gentleman that no one outside the Government is convinced on the Indonesia issue. It is transparent that there has been an expansion of aid to Indonesia at a time when, in all logic, it should have been falling.

I say that because, first, the number of exceedingly poor people in Indonesia has fallen gratifyingly over the past quarter of a century; secondly, Indonesia's access to international private finance markets is not a problem; and thirdly, according to Government policy, good governance should be a consideration—no one could say that the Indonesian Government are anything other than foul in their dealings with East Timor. What other country or part of the world could anyone name where there is a suspicion that a third of the population has been killed during the past 20 years?

Mr. Gallie: I accept some of the hon. Gentleman's comments. However, is he really suggesting that no one outside the Government would accept trade in arms with Indonesia? Is he aware of pressure from British Aerospace, which has a factory in my constituency, and which makes no bones of the fact that the arms trade with Indonesia is important to that company both within the United Kingdom and at Prestwick?

Mr. Worthington: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, which was made by the Foreign Secretary. What is the logic of the hon. Gentleman's position? It is that he has no moral stance on the sale of arms anywhere in the world. That is not acceptable to the Opposition. The hon. Gentleman would sell arms anywhere, to anyone, at any time. That is not good enough.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The hon. Gentleman had better be careful when he makes such a claim. Is he aware that the shadow Defence spokesman has publicly supported the sale of arms to Indonesia?

Mr. Worthington: Yes, I have been here throughout the debate and I heard that point being made earlier. I am surprised that the Secretary of State needs to repeat it.

We must consider the issue of arms and aid. It is bad enough selling arms, but to link that with sweeteners and aid is even worse. According to the Secretary of State's own figures, of about 15 major long-term bilateral aid projects funded by the Overseas Development Administration and costing more than £20 million, not one goes to sub-Saharan Africa, not one goes to Africa apart from one to Egypt, but four go to Indonesia. Those are real soft-term loans. Nothing is paid back for a seven-year grace period and the rate is 3.5 per cent. after that. That is a direct linking of arms sales and aid.

The Foreign Secretary has been visibly bruised by Pergau. He is a man with some decency and honour. It is interesting how much he stands out as a light on the Conservative Benches. He has been bruised by, and feels ashamed about, Pergau. The Foreign Secretary should have another quick look and open all eyes about Indonesia and all other countries. It is not possible to say that arms and aid are not linked.

We often get into crises and then ask what we can do. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale mentioned Kenya, with which we have the closest of links. Some ask what are our links with Rwanda, Somalia or Indonesia, but there can be no doubt that we have strong links with Kenya, not only in terms of exports but much more so in terms of traditional links with people.

The Foreign Secretary has talked about preventive diplomacy. I particularly want to mention Kenya today because President Moi is in the country and I want to express my intense concern about the condition of that country. There is no doubt that President Moi has no commitment to multi-party democracy—rather, it was forced on him by the donors. That has often been admitted. We should be exercising preventive diplomacy in Kenya. Do hon. Members know that about five years ago Britain received 50 applications for refugee status from Kenya, but in the first month of this year we received 800 applications for refugee status? The warning signs are there.

Baroness Thatcher—not Baroness Thatcher, she is a moment or two down the road—Baroness Chalker referred to the importance of good governance.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): That would not be Thatcher.

Mr. Worthington: I promise my hon. Friend that I am about to mention Baroness Thatcher as well. A fortnight ago in Kenya President Moi opened the £9 million Margaret Thatcher library at Moi university, fulfilling a pledge that she gave in 1987. Beware pledges given by Baroness Thatcher because they come back to haunt one. How many pledges did she give? President Moi opened the Thatcher library—

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): One book.

Mr. Worthington: It is funny that my hon. Friend should say that. President Moi immediately launched a nationwide appeal for books because there were none. There has been a collapse of services within Kenya. Should our aid budget be going into major capital projects in the university sector when it is generally agreed that places such as Kenya desperately need primary and

secondary education? Those services are collapsing and the ordinary people of Kenya can no longer afford school fees.

More important than that, our aid budget says that it is in favour of good governance, but last year university staff in Kenya went on strike for 10 months because they were not allowed to form a staff union. There is no academic freedom in Kenya. No research can be conducted in Kenya without the approval of the President's office. All senior appointments are made by the Government. Academic standards are falling as funding ceases. The average class size is 500 and there is enormous corruption in that section of the economy. The Government control what is taught and who teaches it.

As the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale said, there is no academic freedom, just as there is no separation of the judicial system from the state system. There is no freedom of association and expression. I was also amazed to find that in Kenya an Opposition Member of Parliament has to have permission to hold any kind of meeting. Such meetings can be stopped by a state functionary. One quote reads:

"We can no longer meet as academics. When we try to do so we are dispersed by armed police even in the privacy of senior common rooms."

What demands are we putting on Kenya with regard to human rights? What does the opening of the Margaret Thatcher library at Moi university by President Moi say about the way in which Britain is propping up a regime that we should not be propping up, when what we should be doing is emphasising academic freedom alongside all the other freedoms that we should be encouraging in Kenya and elsewhere?

It is about time that we got our aid budget on-side with regard to human rights. There is too much going round at the moment about our aid budget being linked with arms sales and repressive regimes. Rather than what it is promoting at the moment, it is about time that we used our aid budget to promote the good and noble in the world.

7.7 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I count it a privilege to be able to contribute to the debate on the Loyal Address. It is also a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who spoke with great force on the UN peacekeeping operations and on wider issues. However, I could not say with honesty that I agree with everything that he said.

I shall, with permission, review three areas—first, Northern Ireland from the viewpoint of defence; secondly, the European Union from the viewpoint of foreign policy; thirdly, from the viewpoint of defence and foreign policy, a particular and pressing point of conflict in the world which is important to Britain—Cyprus.

First, on a general note, I congratulate the Government on an excellent Queen's Speech, which could not in any way be called uncontroversial. It outlines a dynamic and ambitious legislative programme, which will build on past successes in the economy, industrial relations, foreign and defence policy, health care and the environment.

The programme will achieve two important objectives. First, it will continue the improvement of the economy's supply side; secondly, it will build on the far-reaching and successful Conservative social reforms in areas such as pensions, removing discrimination against disabled people and caring for the sick and mentally ill and for genuinely vulnerable people. We live in historic times. Who would have thought that Gerry Adams would be here today, in the mother of Parliaments?

The solution to the Northern Ireland problem has eluded all Prime Ministers this century, except, I hope, one. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister declared last year that Northern Ireland was to be his top priority, I thought that he had stuck his neck out a little too far. Do not get me wrong: I thought that he was absolutely right, but that he was rather brave. We know that the charge of great bravery is one that politicians do not seek when setting policy.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made tremendous and historic progress and great credit must go to him personally, above all others. That is not to belittle the important contributions of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), Albert Reynolds and others.

The Downing street declaration, based firmly on principles of democracy and consent, led directly to the IRA ceasefire on 31 August and to the cessation of loyalist paramilitary operations on 13 October. It promises eventually full-blown peace, notwithstanding the current political crisis in Dublin and the Irish Prime Minister's resignation.

One key issue to be resolved in Northern Ireland is the future of paramilitary weapons. I urge the Government to continue to pursue a co-ordinated approach with whoever takes power in Dublin in future, to achieve the removal and decommissioning of guns and explosives. I welcome the proposals to pursue a Northern Ireland Assembly and to produce a joint framework document to promote clear and soundly based relationships between the two peoples and Governments. Most of all, I welcome the fact that the constitutional guarantee remains, and will remain, rock solid.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House yesterday, there are formidable tasks ahead, but each day without violence is another small victory for Northern Ireland. The benefits of peace for the people of Northern Ireland are overwhelming. Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House must wish my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister well in his historic and brave endeavours. All should recognise that his personal strength, quiet determination and foresight have brought about a unique opportunity for lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

As to foreign policy, I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to estimate, when he winds up, the impact on the important Anglo-American alliance of the recent US elections. The people of America voted overwhelmingly for conservatism, less government, lower taxes and less state dependency—for individuals to take greater responsibility for themselves and their families. In a nutshell, America voted for greater freedom and for conservatism. I suspect that that will have a significant impact on America's foreign and defence policy and on the Atlantic alliance.

I rely on the old adage that what comes to pass in America one year often comes to pass in Britain a year or two later. Britain commands great influence in the world far beyond that which we might expect, given our country's size, industrial prowess or even military might—although man for man, our armed services are the best in world. We exert that influence because of our

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unique culture, traditions, history, language, and worldwide recognition of the quality and value of our national institutions.

Britain's special position was not secured and maintained by chance but results from consistent, sound Conservative policy through the 1980s and 1990s, when Labour would have squandered the country's position through nuclear disarmament and other short-sighted and mistaken policies. Labour would have destroyed, or at least threatened, Britain's position as one of the Security Council's five permanent members, through the party's defence, European and international policies.

Britain's special position is good for the world order. It is a positive international force for stability, democracy and the development of free markets which will lead the world from tyranny and poverty. I despair when Britain's position and status in the world are threatened and continually eroded by a short-sighted and self-indulgent media, often led by one of our greatest institutions—the BBC.

The media have done great damage to all our major institutions—the monarchy, Church, judiciary, industry and even Parliament. It is truly among the least corrupt Parliaments in the world, but it is derided and denounced by the media as thoroughly corrupt, which it is not. Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House are honourable, even if some are occasionally foolish and forgetful.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Despite the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the BBC, does he not agree that the BBC World Service has the finest reputation of any broadcasting service in the world? The hon. Gentleman does the BBC an injustice.

Dr. Spink: I am indebted to the hon. Gentleman, because I entirely agree that the BBC World Service is one element in Britain's special world status—something which we should cherish but which we often undervalue.

By damaging Britain's world standing, the media undermine our foreign policy. They are often led by a Labour party that surpasses other political parties only in its ability to denigrate our nation and institutions. That is one reason why socialists remain unsuitable for government.

At this point, I will cross party political lines and call on the Government to enhance Britain's position and status in the so-called new world order, by taking an early decision to rejoin UNESCO, which would do so much to help world development. The Government should make that positive move, and before the American Government. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to describe Government policy on UNESCO when he winds up.

As to Britain's position in the European Union, I am pro the European Economic Community. I voted for it. Unlike Mr. Blair and many Opposition Members, I have been consistent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman should know the rules of the House by now.

Dr. Spink: I am grateful for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Unlike the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and other Opposition Members, I have been consistent in my view of Europe, which focuses on two fundamental benefits. I do not apologise for restating the fundamentals, because they can become lost in the trivia and minutiae. They are worth restating.

The first great benefit is that Europe has delivered and continues to deliver peace, stability and democracy where they did not exist previously. I would sacrifice almost everything in life before I would sacrifice my three boys on the battlefields of Europe.

The promotion of peace, stability and democracy are benefits of the European Union that are too little explained, understood, celebrated and valued by right hon. and hon. Members.

The second benefit is economic. It is measured in terms not of cost alone but of the cost benefits of our membership of the club of Europe, of improved living standards for all people in society—the poor and the better off, young and old alike—and of jobs for workers.

Our membership of the European Union and our membership fee help to create a more stable Europe which can be a model for, and can influence positively, the stability and development of the wider world. I want that, so I will vote for the European Communities (Finance) Bill. I see relieved expressions among my right hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench. I am sure that my loyalty was never in doubt.

As for the future development of Europe, I seek an enlarged, deregulated, free-trading economic community—one in which rules are applied equally and fairly in each member nation, and in which fraud is policed equally toughly in all.

British Conservatives have played a major and positive role in the development of Europe in recent years. It was our Government who introduced budgetary discipline and fraud policing in the first place. We introduced the common agricultural policy reforms, which must go much further. We introduced the single market and enlargement. Those were British Conservative initiatives of which we can be proud.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister rightly recognises that Britain is irrevocably part of Europe and that it should be at the heart of Europe, but it must be a Europe that works, and works well, not a Europe based on the elusive sands of liberal or socialist dogma and ideology. Britain has taken a leading role in setting the European agenda, often saying things that other countries know are right. Quietly, they welcome what we say, but all too often they remain silent and allow us to do the hard work for them. That is as it may be.

We must look now to the 1996 intergovermental conference, to what we can contribute to that conference and to how we can continue our positive contribution to the development of Europe. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister must focus on key issues, such as how to establish a fairer voting system, how to develop simpler and more transparent legislative procedures, how the Council can exercise more control over the Commission, how to reduce the unwieldy number of Commissioners, particularly as Europe enlarges, and how to pursue budgetary reform, CAP reform and, indeed, the policing of fraud.

I now refer to the vexed matter of Cyprus. I restate Britain's special position as a guarantor of the independence of Cyprus. We are one of the guarantor

nations. We also have a special position of one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus, held a round of five informal talks with Mr. Denktash, the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community in the northern third of the island of Cyprus. Those talks established beyond doubt two facts: first, that Mr. Denktas espouses and is driven by Turkish policy, not his own; and, secondly, that neither Mr. Denktash nor Turkey currently has the political will required to obtain a solution to the problem of Cyprus. I say "currently", because I hope that the situation will change.

The facts today are plain: both Mr. Denktash and Turkey reject all the Security Council's resolutions, including paragraph 2 of resolution 939, calling for a solution based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with a single indivisible sovereignty. They are adamant in their demand for recognition of separate sovereignties for each federated component unit, and for recognition of a separate sovereignty for the federal state as well. Those are unrealistic goals. They are without international precedents; they are simply delaying tactics—they cannot succeed. Moreover, Turkey and Mr. Denktash are against Cyprus becoming a member of the European Union.

The United Nations Secretary-General's definition of political equality has also been rejected by Turkey and Mr. Denktash, as have the treaties of guarantee and alliance as they concern the guarantors and the unilateral right of intervention. They also reject demilitarisation. Responsibility for the failure to make progress, therefore, lies with Turkey and with the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr. Denktash. The Security Council should now take specific and pragmatic measures against the side that flouts its resolutions and frustrates the proper and equitable solution of the problem of Cyprus.

Progress can be made only if there is a change of attitude by Turkey on the key issues, in particular on sovereignty, demilitarisation, and the accession of Cyprus to the European Union. Therefore, I end by asking the Government now to consider promoting an international conference to move the issue forward. I ask Her Majesty's Government to do everything possible in the fast-coming talks to establish a timetable for Cyprus's accession to the European Union.

7.26 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) made an interesting speech, which was quite in keeping with the views that he and the former hon. Member for his constituency, Mr. Enoch Powell, have often expressed. Whenever I listen to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, I think that there must be something in the air in his constituency, of which I fully approve in general terms.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West and the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) referred briefly to the situation in the Irish Republic. Of course, that is the only country with which we have a land frontier, so perhaps the House will expect me to speak about the situation there. However, what is happening there is a private grief which those involved should sort out; it is not the business of Members of the House of Commons. We should sympathise and hope that they shortly find a way out of their problems. Perhaps some folk in the Irish Republic now think that the Act of Union was not a totally bad idea. One hopes that, one day, the foolishness of the teens and twenties of this century will be reversed.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) and other hon. Members said that we should try to pre-empt violence, and he referred in particular to places such as Rwanda. Although on the surface that seems a good idea, we need to decide whether armed intervention—that is what has been talked about—is needed, how it would be implemented and by whom, whether armed forces should wait until they are invited in, or whether they will have to fight their way in. When one considers the dangers involved in that, one realises that the matter is not as easy, simple or swift as some folk seem to think. Like many good ideas, it founders on the rock of reality.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) talked about three major trading blocs dominating the world over the next few years. He was corrected to some extent by the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), who drew attention to the various forces which are moving toward international trade, and therefore to far freer associations of trading nations rather than three large fixed blocs. If they ever came into being, they would be mutually antagonistic and would pose grave dangers to world peace. I support those who seek a steadily expanding volume of trade across the board. The general agreement on tariffs and trade is a large step in that direction.

I found the rest of the speech of the right hon. Member for Guildford somewhat depressing. He talked about the great eastern economies which would dominate the world for the next 20 to 30 years. He betrayed a pessimism about his nation which no hon. Member should exhibit. We should encourage our people and do what we can in this place to create a framework that will enable us to flourish and restore our position as far as humanly possible in the world.

In the Gracious Speech, the Government restated, among other things, their objective of a balanced budget. I hope that that will shortly occur, and that we will then move beyond that happy position and once more be able to repay debt, not least that which is piling up from previous years and the current year, and that which will pile up in the next two or three years.

I also listened with care when the right hon. Member for Guildford explained how well the United Kingdom was doing. Regrettably, when I asked him the reasons, he did not seem able to give them. The answer was supplied by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, when he referred to the happy events of 16 September 1992. That was the day on which the Government and the Treasury had to come to terms with the reality of fixed exchange rates.

Although there was much breast-beating, and sackcloth and ashes were much in evidence, we have seen the benefits of abandoning fixed exchange rates ever since. The Government were driven by the events of that day to go back to a floating pound. Indeed, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer had to re-create his policy on that day.

From that day to this, there has been a steady move to the happier position which the right hon. Member for Guildford described. He seemed unable to bring himself

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to say that the desertion of fixed exchange rates and the evils that flow from them led to the present position. Unless and until the House, and especially the Treasury team, understands that, we are in danger of getting back into the difficulties that led to 16 September. Perhaps the Government are moving in that direction.

The economy is steadily improving in a very fine way, as the right hon. Member for Guildford said today, and the Prime Minister said yesterday. In the light of that, the blunt statement that the Government will continue to pursue their firm financial policies is welcome. If we really care about the future of our country, we should all support the Government in those firm policies. However, such firm policies imply a measure of pain from time to time. As we are a member of the European Union, firm financial policies must be applied somewhat more widely than in the United Kingdom alone.

We are told that, out of the total spend of the European Community, anything up to £6 billion disappears in fraudulent exercises. That is a fantastic sum of money. It is a maximum of some 10 per cent. of the total—no one really knows the exact figure. If no one knows what is being lost in fraud, it tells us an awful lot of nasty things about the systems of book-keeping that are being used.

We must improve either the systems of book-keeping or the system by which the cash is dispensed in the first place. Budgetary discipline and elimination of fraud are a vital component of our membership of the EU. Budgetary discipline has been evident only in the sense that it has been so evidently missing.

There was a debate on fraud in the other place on 31 October. Those who have not read it should cast their eye over it. They will find an appalling litany of fraud and corruption and sleazy deals. Some of those sleazy deals reached the point at which the British Government were blackmailed by other members of the Community. For example, the milk quotas of Italy and Spain were increased. Yet Britain is short of milk quota. Our farmers are crying out for more quota. Instead of receiving more, our quota seems to go steadily down. That is a matter to which the Government could profitably direct their attention.

As one speaker in the debate in another place put it bluntly, there appears to be gross negligence in the way in which EC grants are handled. It is more than gross negligence. The system is so complex that it is almost impossible for anyone to understand it even if they want to. Many of the people who benefit from the fraud are not too anxious to find out what is going wrong. The system is complex, because so many different state systems are involved.

The Government spokesman in another place said:

"The responsibility for detecting and prosecuting fraud remains, nevertheless, with the member states."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 1994; Vol.558, c. 746.]

That may well be so, but I draw it to the attention of the House—if that is necessary—that most of those states are net beneficiaries of EC funds. Who has heard of any Government being hard on their people for plundering a pork barrel that was constantly filled by someone else—in this case, Britain and one or two other nations? Such a system does not lend itself to easy reform. If the facts are as stated in the reports given to the nation in the debate in the other place, the idea that the EU can be corrected by good housekeeping is wide of the mark.

It is a matter of fact and of interest that the same Minister I quoted in another place praised United Kingdom Ministry of Agriculture officials for their work. It is also noteworthy that Britain has a fairly high detection rate. Of course, that may mean that there is a lot of fraud here, but it is more likely to mean that a much higher percentage of fraud was detected in the United Kingdom than in other countries because our systems are efficient. I believe that another reason is that Britain is a net contributor to the pork barrel, so our Government were rather more anxious than others to ensure that fraud was diminished as much as possible.

It is also a fact of life that the same officials and their predecessors have always policed the United Kingdom agricultural schemes. I should have thought that that had a great deal to do with their success. The fraud detection system in Europe has been bad, and it is getting worse. It will deteriorate further as more nations join. Therefore, it is essential that all systems should be improved. Tinkering will not cure the problem. Everyone who has touched on that subject today and in the other place has said exactly the same. If we are to deal with it, we must create a system which devolves more responsibility to national Governments. Perhaps subsidiarity is the buzz word.

National Government would not be tied to economic, bureaucratic EC rules. A block grant system might be used. Spending would be better looked after, as Governments would be spending their own money. If the money did not go to those to whom the economic union had designated it, the internal democratic system in the various states would ensure that it did, so there would be far less fraud.

A harvest is there to be reaped between now and the fulfilment of the Government's commitment to own resources. That change needs to be carried into effect to ensure that this and future Governments of whatever party—that depends on the will of the electorate—are not severely embarrassed over the size of our commitment in the next few years.

7.39 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): It is a pleasure to follow such a respected Member of the House as the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), who was kind enough to refer in glowing terms to my home town. I was born and bred in Wolverhampton. The hon. Gentleman also referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and to Enoch Powell. It might interest the hon. Gentleman to know that Wolverhampton's motto is, "Out of darkness cometh light." That might help to explain why he has heard such good sense from my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West and his predecessor, the right hon. Enoch Powell, on so many occasions.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: And from you.

Mr. Gill: How kind.

In June, I visited Stockholm and had the opportunity to talk to members of the Swedish Parliament. I asked one for his view of the prospect of Sweden entering the European Union. Without a moment's hesitation he told me, "The political classes are all in favour." That was an

exceptionally arrogant remark, as it seemed to leave out of the reckoning the people who elected that man to Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West spoke well tonight. His was an incisive and challenging speech, which reminded us of an important question that all hon. Members should be asking themselves. He said that we were in great danger of turning the House into a rubber stamp to do the bidding of the Executive. I agree that it seems that no amount of reason, argument, debate or common sense will persuade the Government to allow those considerations to weigh most heavily.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West instanced how the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty were rammed through the House, in the first instance on a guillotine motion and on the second as a result of a vote of confidence. It is a very bad time for democracy when a measure that does not command the people's wholehearted support is put through the House in such a manner.

I remind hon. Members that, not merely in Sweden but in the other countries that held referendums on the subject, the margin in favour of joining the Union was very slender. Many of us regret the fact that although Ministers support referendums for African countries—now they even support one in part of the United Kingdom—they do not support a national referendum on the most important constitutional issue of my lifetime, and I am old enough to remember the war. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that politicians are prepared to treat the electorate with such apparent indifference.

I think that many of my colleagues privately realise, as I do, that that great endeavour can never be completely successful unless we take the people with us. I am reminded of what the former Member for Wolverhampton, South-West told me a few weeks ago: never forget that in the end the people will win. That is timely advice for my party and the Government. They may feel that so many of the things that they want to do to progress the European adventure can be pushed through the House on a guillotine or a vote of confidence and that there will be no reaction. There will be a reaction. Ultimately, the electorate will have the last laugh.

I hope that the leaders of the Conservative party have seriously calculated the effect on our electoral prospects of pushing the European Communities (Finance) Bill through the House on a vote of confidence, in the same way as they pushed through the Maastricht treaty and the Single European Act.

On the financial implications of the Bill, the Gracious Speech states:

"Legislation will be introduced to give force to the changes in the European Communities' system of own resources".

Barely five lines later, we read:

"Fiscal policy will continue to be set to bring the budget deficit back towards balance".

There appears to be a contradiction in terms. If the priority is to bring the budget into balance, surely one must consider carefully before committing oneself to additional expenditure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West said that perhaps hon. Members did not think that £75 million was a huge sum. It seems that when it involves something that the Government want to do, it is never a huge sum; when it involves something that our constituents or we Back Benchers want, it is always a huge sum.

Surely we must ask ourselves whether we can afford that Bill. Estimates of how much it will cost vary and I shall quote only one figure. At present, the British taxpayer is paying the equivalent of 3.4p on income tax to Europe. By 1999, it will have risen to 5.4p in the pound. That may be fine for some of our constituents, but I represent Ludlow in the county of Shropshire, which ranks 11th lowest in the country for male wages and second lowest for female wages. When we talk of spending another £75 million on the European budget, I am mindful of the fact that that money will have to be found from our constituents. Everyone pays. There is no way for any of our constituents to avoid paying. Perhaps some of them avoid paying income tax because of their low earnings, but everyone will pay because no one can avoid indirect taxation. The fact remains that everyone in the land will have to contribute in one form or another to that extra sum of money for the European budget.

The benefits are advertised by those who are in favour of European political and monetary union. I hear people from our own country saying how wonderful it is that European money is going to pay for good things in their constituencies. I am always at pains to remind those people that those good things in their constituencies are not being paid for by anybody other than themselves.

In point of fact, were that money not sent to Brussels in the first place, there would be more money in the pot in the United Kingdom to pay for those good things. As that money progresses from Whitehall to Brussels—and as we then go cap in hand to bring it back again—it has become a smaller sum because of the administration and the bureaucracy.

Dr. Spink: Is not my hon. Friend making an over-simplistic argument? Is not our general prosperity dependent on our membership of the European Union? Are not there wider benefits to be derived from our membership?

Mr. Gill: That is an old canard. People who wish to oppose my point of view portray me as being against Europe. I am not against it; I am favour of the Common Market as are the majority of my constituents. When they voted in 1975, the majority of my constituents and, I submit, the majority of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) voted in favour of the Common Market. But they did not vote for—and they were told at the time that they would not get—political and monetary union. That is what I, and some colleagues, find difficult to forget.

Dr. Spink *rose—*

Mr. Gill: I know that my hon. Friend is tempting me to engage in further arguments, and I should like to give him that opportunity.

Mr. Budgen *rose—*

Mr. Gill: I see that another of my hon. Friends wishes to intervene.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend comment on the humiliating position of Hong Kong in relation to China and the surrounding countries? I am sure that he would agree that it is plain that Hong Kong is about to become

[Mr. Budgen]

bankrupt. It is not part of a political union with surrounding countries, it does not have monetary union and it does not have its laws made by surrounding countries. Is not it plain that disaster is about to descend on Hong Kong?

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend tempts me to talk about the highly successful economies around the world which have no affiliation with any other country and which are not in federal structures. Those include stand-alone economies such as Japan and, as my hon. Friend mentioned, Hong Kong and many others.

I meet industrialists from this country who say, "Just give us the tools and we will do the job." They say that they do not need to be in a political or monetary union with other countries in Europe, and that they just want to get on with earning a living in the world, which they are capable of doing.

Of course, it is an historical fact that we have earned more of our wealth in other parts of the world than in Europe. People who are opposed to my view say that we do 60 per cent. of our business in Europe. That may be true, but we are only doing that business with 6 per cent. of the world's population. I do not know of any business man who would think that that was a satisfactory customer profile. Any business man worth his salt would think, "If I am only doing 60 per cent. of my business with 6 per cent. of the world's population, have I spread my risk far enough or cast my net wide enough? Are there not other markets which I could attack?" He would be absolutely right to say that.

My hon. Friend's intervention reminds me that he—more than anybody in the House—knows what I previously did for a living. While I am talking about the financing of the European Community and questioning whether we can afford it, I shall tell the House about something of which I became aware only a few weeks ago. It is a project funded by the European Union to investigate ham automated monitoring systems, and to carry out this HAMS project, as it is called, the European Community will finance the university of the West of England to the tune of £500,000.

Four generations of my family have made ham in Wolverhampton. My father and I were quite content to produce hams to the best of our abilities by using skills which were handed down from generation to generation. If a ham was substandard, it would be returned by the customer and we accepted that we might offend or lose that customer. That is what I still believe in, and it is what my son is still practising. I do not think that it is any part of the European taxpayer's duty or responsibility to give £500,000 of taxpayers' money to the university of the West of England to do something that is purely and exclusively a function of the commercial sector.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend and I are old men, and we are among the last of the people who did national service—my hon. Friend served in the Navy. To help many Conservative Members, will he explain how it is that we are preventing a third European war by giving subsidies to undercut him in the ham trade?

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend poses a challenging question, and I shall do my best to answer him in a moment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When the hon. Gentleman does answer, I hope that he will relate it to the Gracious Speech.

Mr. Gill: My remarks are in relation to that part of the Gracious Speech which refers to the European Communities (Finance) Bill, which is to be considered by the House a week on Monday.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West made an incisive and challenging speech. I know, as he knows, that many of the challenges which he laid down in that speech will never be answered, not least because there are no answers which the Government can honestly provide to some of the questions he asked.

That, I am afraid, has been a feature of our debates on Europe. My hon. Friend and others have made the arguments and we have won the arguments, but unfortunately we have too often lost the vote. My hon. Friend and I would be only too pleased to have a vigorous and lively debate, and then conclude that debate by voting on whether the arguments which we advanced were compelling and whether the House accepted them, but that is not to be. We will not decide the matter on the balance or the strengths of the arguments deployed by the likes of my hon. Friend. The argument will be decided by a vote of confidence put forward by the Government, and I regret that very much.

My hon. Friend asked in his intervention how war would be prevented by spending £500,000 on investigating how better to cure hams. My answer is that that £500,000 has been diverted to the university of the West of England for the HAMS project at the expense of the defence budget. I am pleased to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on the Treasury Bench. He has had the doubtful distinction of having to tell the House about regiments having to be disbanded, about aircraft of the Royal Air Force having to be grounded and about the acceleration of the programme for the disposal of ships.

That is the reality. We are prepared to spend a lot of money for no tangible return, but we are expected to buy the vital defence insurance policy that our country needs to maintain with a smaller and smaller premium each year. I agree with my hon. Friend that that is absurd.

Will all the partners ever be equal in the great endeavour that we are trying to create in Europe? I put it to the House that it is highly unlikely that the partnership will ever be an equal one. There may 12, 16 or even 20 partners, but there will always be a pecking order and inequality among the partners. The reality, whether we care to accept it or not, will be that the country to dominate in the Community will be that which has the biggest stick or the deepest pocket. On present performance, that country, sadly, will not be the United Kingdom. That is why we saw the recent humiliation of our own Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, who wanted a high-profile office, but who was severely disappointed because the Germans decided that they would rather give that office to their friends and neighbours, the Dutch.

That decision was quite understandable. The Dutch want to keep on the right side of the Germans, not least because they do a lot of business with Germany, which is the immediate neighbour of their small country. The Dutch consider that the potential that their economy has to offer will be far greater if they keep within the slipstream of the German economy than if they stay outside of it. Therefore, Germany looked after the Dutch and did not look after Britain, thus disappointing Sir Leon.

I worry when I see my country going around almost cap in hand to the Commission and the Council of Ministers to get whatever crumbs it can from their tables. That brings me back to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West. I agree with him that this country could stand on its own if it wanted to. It is resourceful, inventive and industrious. We have always looked to the world, where we have created so much of our wealth and made so much of our history. We ignore that at our peril.

8.2 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): If the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) does not mind, I will leave Europe for other colleagues to discuss. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) will correct the misconceptions that the hon. Gentleman put forward, should he catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The area that concerns me most is the middle east. The Gracious Speech referred to the Government's continued support for the middle east peace process. Everyone involved in that process is to be congratulated on the success achieved so far. I say "so far", but we have already not only had the initial Madrid conference and the active participation of the Norwegians behind the scenes to bring the Palestinians and the Israelis—they always have been the core of the middle eastern problem—together, but the successful declaration of principles and the signing of an initial peace deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians a year ago in September, on the lawn of the White House.

Since that declaration, we have had further declarations of principles in Cairo and in Washington. It is now time to review the middle east peace process to see exactly where it has reached. Success has been achieved, but on some issues there has been no meeting of minds and on others apparent success has proved false on the ground.

The most recent agreement between Israel and Jordan is welcome. If the Israelis were able to participate in this debate, they would be the first to admit that it was the easiest peace agreement for their country to sign. It involved no major difficulties concerning land, borders or refugees, but nevertheless it is a welcome agreement. We wish everyone who participated in it good will and we hope to play our part in maintaining the agreement.

The outstanding countries with which the Israeli Government must have direct, bilateral agreements are Syria and Lebanon. Anyone who understands the middle east will appreciate that an agreement with Lebanon is unlikely unless and until there is an agreement between Israel and Syria. Judging from the statements made by people on both sides, there appears to be little between Israel and Syria, but no peace deal has been signed. It is worth hon. Members considering why that is so, because the principles involved are similar to those that govern events in other areas that have been discussed today.

President Assad of Syria has made it quite clear that he would offer Israel full peace for full withdrawal. The Israeli Government responded by saying that the depth of the peace would be equal to the depth of the withdrawal. It seems that the two sides are saying the same thing, but there is still a gulf between them. As yet, no hands have been shaken and no accord has been signed. I have sought to discover from both sides the difficulties that lie behind the failure to reach an agreement.

It seems that one of the major problems facing a possible Syrian-Israeli peace agreement is the role of Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Part of the depth of the peace being equal to the depth of the withdrawal relates to the desire of the Israeli Government not only to have a peace deal through which people will meet, but one which leads to a substantial reduction in Syrian military personnel and military equipment. Equally, although Syria wants a peace deal with Israel and wants the Golan Heights back, it is concerned about what Israel may want in return. The Syrians know that when the Israelis talk about the depth of the peace being equal to the depth of the withdrawal, they mean the size of the forces that Syria will need to maintain within its borders.

One need only look at the role of Saddam Hussein in Iraq to understand Syria's problem. Although Saddam Hussein suffered defeats during the Gulf war, he was still able to threaten Kuwait recently. That led to the United Kingdom, the United States and others having to assemble their military forces in Kuwait quickly. That was aimed at deterring Saddam Hussein from taking further action because that would have resulted in action on our part in response, or, if he had not withdrawn, perhaps before he made any further moves. That gives some idea of the Syrians' concerns about the activities of the war machine that Saddam Hussein still maintains.

Those hon. Members who argue that the sanctions against Iraq should be eased have not taken on board the fact that not only does Saddam Hussein need to meet all the requirements of UN Security Council resolutions and decisions, but he has to make it clear that, despite the huge military forces with which, despite defeats, he is still able to threaten another Arab state, he is willing to enter into dialogue about the future use of his military forces. If we can concentrate on that issue, it might help the Syrians and Israelis to get together and make real peace in that area.

Like the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), I wish to discuss the role of the middle east peace process in relation to the Israeli-Palestine question. Clearly, everyone is happy to see progress towards resolving the bitter conflict in the middle east. But there comes a time when we must step back and consider what has been achieved so far and whether the process has met all the aims and aspirations that both sides and the world community intended and hoped from it.

The promising and necessary economic revival has yet to start in Gaza. The "economic dividend" of peace and human rights has yet to be demonstrated to the Palestinian Gazans. There have certainly been no human rights dividends. Israel continues to expand its settlements in and around Jerusalem and the west bank. It maintains settlements in Gaza, continues to imprison and torture Palestinians, and still carries out summary executions on the streets of the west bank. Those actions and delays at

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

every stage do little to build confidence. The latest delay is on the calling of elections for a Palestine national authority.

Those who visit the west bank and Gaza see a sapping of the Palestine population's morale. They witness a weariness and a draining away of optimism. We have a responsibility to rebuild optimism and show the people concerned that the peace process is important to the Palestinians.

In this debate tonight, we can make it clear that, as high contracting parties to the fourth Geneva convention, we stand foursquare behind our obligations on human rights and international law. The last time the Security Council voted on that subject was on Security Council resolution No. 904, tabled in response to the Hebron massacre. At that time, the United States abstained on the paragraph that referred to the applicability of the fourth Geneva convention and the need to consider measures of international protection throughout the territories occupied by Israel.

It is now reported that the United States is actively pursuing a programme of action, supported by Israel at the General Assembly, in an effort to eliminate contentious resolutions. It is not rational to imagine that undermining an international legal consensus by seeking to remove all mention of those rights from a forum where they should be mentioned under the terms of the UN charter would build confidence in the peace process. Nor does it build confidence when the impression is given that the states that are meant to guarantee those rights, which includes Britain, will step quietly aside and allow them to be overridden, leaving only the balance of power—the old "might is right" rule instead of the rule of law and international principle—to decide matters between the Palestinians and Israelis. It does not build confidence when the impression is given that, ultimately, the peace process in which the Palestinians are now asked to place their trust holds no guarantees that they will realise rights which the international community has for so long and so firmly affirmed.

That is why I am anxious for a reassurance from the Government that Britain, along with its European partners, will continue to uphold the applicability of the fourth Geneva convention to the occupied territories and that Britain will, neither by implication nor omission, give the impression that we are withdrawing support from that long-held position. As everyone in the House knows, if we did so the Palestinians' ability to negotiate successfully in pursuit of their self-determination would be critically undermined.

The BBC World Service broadcast, "Monitor", on 16 November translated a report from the Voice of Palestine radio in Jericho, which said:

> "In accordance with the agreement that was reached during the Palestinian-Israeli higher liaison committee meeting in Cairo at the end of last month, 400 international observers will be deployed in the Gaza Strip in the next few days."

Those international observers are a direct result of Security Council resolution No. 904. They are supposed to monitor the activities of the Palestinians and Israelis in the period leading up to the elections in Gaza, Jericho and the west bank. The agreement was signed by Dr. Nabil Sha'th, Minister of Planning and International Co-operation, and Shimon Peres, the Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs. The report continued:

> "the international protection force in the Gaza Strip will be responsible for monitoring the situation and submitting reports to the parties on any violations by the Israeli or Palestinian sides. This force will also work to enhance dialogue in the region."

At the last Foreign Affairs Question Time, I specifically asked whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would consider carefully European Union participation in any temporary international presence in the west bank and Gaza, if those elections took place. The Palestinians and the international community could only be disappointed in the outcome of the temporary international presence in Hebron, which ended up being protected by the Palestinian people rather than monitoring the Israelis' activities. It became a standing joke that, whenever trouble started, the Palestinians' main job was to protect the temporary international presence.

Although the Israelis and Palestinians have agreed on the presence of those 400 international observers, no discussion has yet taken place with the European Union on our participation, although some members of the European Union are liable to take part. Although a formal invitation has not yet arrived, I hope that an emergency middle east working group will be set up within the European Union so that we can seek to input into those discussions a European Union commitment to support an effective operational mandate for the temporary international presence, including reporting and applying the standards of international humanitarian and human rights law. I hope that the Foreign Office is prepared to take that on board.

I shall not say too much more on the middle east peace process except that it is at a delicate and critical stage. The Minister of State said that he wanted the elections to be successful and take place as quickly as possible. So do the Palestinians, and it is important that the elections take place quickly, if only to give democratic legitimacy to the Palestinian authority on the west bank and in Gaza and Jericho. I hope that the Palestinian elections will take place in an atmosphere that conforms to what we would expect in normal parliamentary elections. People from all parts of the Palestinian community should be allowed to promote their ideas, argue for their manifestos, whatever those might be, and be allowed free movement during the elections. I hope that the elections themselves are successful.

I shall now refer to one or two matters that were mentioned by my hon. and right hon. Friends, and comment on some of the proposals that were made by other hon. Members.

Several right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House referred to Indonesia. It is important that we continue to make it clear that, in spite of international condemnation, the Indonesians continue brutally to occupy East Timor. In spite of all the assurances that we have had, everyone else, including Amnesty International, seems to believe that the British Government have got it wrong—the Indonesian authorities are using the British-made Hawk aircraft in attacks against the Timorese people.

It is important that we make it clear to the Government, and to hon. Members who are obviously worried about the impact that the sale of defence equipment might have on their constituents, that we need to separate the

legitimate right of a Government to arm themselves to protect themselves, and our right to sell them those arms to be used for the legitimate protection of that country and its borders, from the use of that equipment—if we sell it to them—by that Government against people who are unable to defend themselves, and who are arguing only for self-determination, which was taken away from them by the Indonesians without any discussion with the international community.

If the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) is about to jump up to defend his constituents, may I say to him that I would prefer the workers in Ayr to sell more Jetstream 41 aircraft, and he will certainly have my support in campaigning for, and pushing, that good aircraft as a means of helping people to communicate and move around their countries, rather than the use of equipment that can bring death and destruction to innocent people in different parts of the world.

I shall briefly discuss another country that I mentioned in the previous foreign affairs debate—Cuba. I pay a compliment to the Government. During the United Nations General Assembly's discussion of the US economic embargo, to which the UN General Assembly recently affirmed its opposition, a United Kingdom Minister was due to go to Cuba. We all know the pressure that was put on the Government for that visit not to go ahead, and it is to the credit of the Foreign Secretary, his colleagues and the President of the Board of Trade that that visit went ahead. By all accounts, it was successful, and it is to be hoped that trade will come to this country as a result.

I am worried about the determination of the United States to maintain the embargo against Cuba. It is just plain daft. It is time for the Americans to bury the Bay of Pigs and the missile crisis, which are in the past, and to understand that there is increasing evidence of internal change in Cuba. There is movement towards an internal market and private ownership. There is increased trade with Europe and the far east. The discovery of oil is leading to exploration contracts with Canada. Tourism is increasing.

We should say to the Americans that they should accept that it is time to let Cuba into the real world and that all those things are in the past, and that, if we think that they are wrong, we are more likely to convince the Cubans that they should change policies by trade, tourism and cultural exchanges. The United States should at least consider opening up the democratic processes in Cuba.

I know that you are anxious to make progress, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I wish to make one last comment, about Turkey. It is important. I know that one of my hon. Friends would have mentioned Turkey, had he managed to catch your eye, but it would be wrong if we did not mention Turkey tonight. The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) referred to the role of Turkey in Cyprus; Turkey continues to cause serious alarm elsewhere in the region.

The arrest and trial of leading political figures from Turkish Kurdistan accused of treason and sponsoring acts of terrorism has done little to improve Turkey's image in the world. Undoubtedly, there is a genuine campaign of terror by separatist Kurds in southern Turkey. However, the response of the Government in imprisoning democratically elected representatives seeking to defend minority rights in Parliament can only create increased tension in the region and international criticism by human rights campaigners.

We should make it clear tonight that we are not prepared to have any form of relationship with a country that is prepared to lock up democratically elected members of Parliament who are simply arguing for the minority rights that they were elected to Parliament to support.

8.25 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): I shall follow some of the arguments made by the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) in my remarks, which will broadly concentrate on those parts of the Gracious Speech that refer to foreign affairs matters.

I doubt that anyone in the House could have expected to witness three remarkable events in the past five years; first, the collapse of the Berlin wall and the Soviet empire, secondly, the disintegration of apartheid followed by democratic elections in South Africa; and, thirdly, major progress in the middle east peace process. What a remarkable trio of events.

The previous situations represented much misery in the aftermath of the second world war, and I hope that they can give us hope, notwithstanding tragic regions of instability around the world.

I welcome, in the Gracious Speech, recognition of the need for the United Nations to enhance its peacekeeping and preventative diplomacy capabilities, but it is difficult to envisage that happening in the absence of a proper military command structure—the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has often had to do the United Nations' work for it—and in the context of member nations who do not see fit to pay their dues to the UN. I suggest to the House that the best celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations would be for the member nations to take a more positive attitude in those matters, which is a theme that I shall develop on other occasions.

South Africa is a country that I know well, and have visited often. I have lived and worked in hospitals there, and I applaud the courage and personal standing of two remarkable men who made peace possible in that region. President Mandela has received well-deserved praise for an extraordinary life. Perhaps former President de Klerk has not received the recognition that he deserves. I know the verkrampte Afrikaner population well, and know how difficult it was for him to deliver the return of civilisation to South Africa.

I hope that history will also record the United Kingdom Government's role in influencing change in the years when the Republic was outside the Commonwealth, often in the face of British companies leaving South Africa—I think to their moral shame, because I believe that many of those British companies were a force for good in the region, but they decided that it was a sinking ship and they had better leave it pretty quickly.

During those years, the continuing presence of the Union Flag on the South African flag symbolised this country's continuing moral obligations to that country. I believe that there were several distinguished British diplomats, and I hope that it is not improper to name Sir Robin Renwick as one of those who played an important part in bringing about change for good.

[Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes]

I now turn to Hong Kong. Obviously, the Government have done much to protect the people in that territory until 1997. There has been reference in the debate to a boom at a rate that it is difficult to comprehend in this part of the world. Any loss of confidence could still prejudice that.

I have always doubted the wisdom of tweaking the tail of the Chinese tiger in the interim period as it must be for the ultimate good, both of Hong Kong and China, especially in the era that will follow the death of Mr. Deng, for the two countries to work together. It is all very well to bring about moves to entrench and expand democracy in Hong Kong, but that is all too often misinterpreted by China. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and his colleagues will ensure that such misunderstandings do not get out of all proportion in future relationships between Hong Kong and China.

The middle east has been well served by statesmanship after decades of strife. It is hardly surprising that this country should harbour reservations about the past activities of Begin and Arafat. As with Rabin and Sadat in their different eras, peace has finally prevailed. Once again the United Kingdom Government have played their part. To echo the remarks of the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), I am sure that everyone in the House hopes that Syria will soon come to the table. We know the sensitivity surrounding the Golan Heights. I have an uneasy feeling that it will need American forces to police that area during any transitional peace settlement. It would be much more appropriate if United Nation forces fulfilled that role.

Having welcomed the overdue lifting of the arms embargo on Israel, I lead on to the subject of Indonesia, which has caused a fair amount of friction in the Chamber today. I recognise the moral, legal and practical issues involved in the subject of arms sales. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary touched on that issue earlier today. While it is obviously ludicrous to sell arms to one's enemies, it must be sensible to sell arms to well-established democratic allies and to neutral powers with a genuinely sound democratic and human rights record. There will always be grey areas and I think that Indonesia fits into that category. I should like to declare my interest: I visited that country for three weeks during the summer recess. I was sponsored by the Indonesian Government, but had the blessing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Indonesia is a strange country. It is not widely known that it is the largest Muslim country in the world. It practises marked religious tolerance and there is virtually no fundamentalist Muslim feeling in the country. It is also the fifth-largest country in the world, with a wider east-west span than the United States. The economy is booming and the standard of living rising in that exciting region of the world, whose influence is ever-increasing.

I accept that I am beginning to sound like an apologist for Indonesia but I shall now say that its human rights record leaves much to be desired—

Mr. Ernie Ross: Hear, hear.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I hear someone saying "Hear, hear"—it comes ill from the Opposition to criticise in that way when we have established today that the last Labour Government sold Hawk aircraft to the Indonesian Government barely three years after the annexation of East Timor. I have no idea whether there were signs on the sides of the aircraft stating that they were to be used everywhere except East Timor. The Opposition should think clearly and examine their consciences before criticising the Government 16 years later.

There seems to be a clear recognition, from President Suharto downwards, that mistakes have been made in the past, and positive efforts are being made to improve matters. That impression was reinforced by interviews that we held with numerous non-governmental organisations, the National Commission on Human Rights and outside organisations including the International Red Cross. The delegation accepted the invitation on the condition that it would visit East Timor and would be able to talk freely to representatives of various interests in that territory. Having listened to some of the comments of Opposition Members today, I wonder whether we are talking about the same place.

The island has the most extraordinary history. It was colonised at its western end by the Dutch and at its eastern end by the Portuguese, who were there for four and a half centuries. I have no wish to be offensive about our oldest allies, the Portuguese, but I have some knowledge of their other colonies. I have been to Angola and Mozambique. The precipitate departure of Portugal from those two colonies did not result in a happy outcome. I have been to Angola during the civil war and have seen the hostilities. We have heard today that, once again, the so-called peace treaty has broken down.

At the vaguest hint of civil disturbance in East Timor in 1974, the Portuguese governor could not be seen for dust—he got into his boat and departed. Some 20 years later the Portuguese are apparently lecturing the world on a moral issue and saying that they have a role to play. It seems that they failed their colony at the time when they were most needed. Who is getting all the blame? Indonesia. It is the most extraordinary chain of events.

The journalist Bernard Levin wrote what was perhaps one of the most vitriolic and unbalanced articles that I have ever read in *The Times* newspaper. It led me to the conclusion that Mr. Bernard Levin never moves from his axis between London W1 and Bayreuth to listen to Wagner. I do not believe that he has ever been anywhere near Indonesia in his life and he has certainly been nowhere near East Timor.

When one wanders round East Timor it is extraordinary to see that, after four and a half centuries of colonisation, there is no evidence of anything left behind by the Portuguese. At least in Angola and Mozambique there was some sort of infrastructure and education system, but in East Timor the Portuguese left a literacy rate of 8 per cent. and no infrastructure—electricity did not arrive until 1962. It is clearly a poor territory.

One hon. Member today questioned whether we should give aid to Indonesia now. If there is any place in Indonesia that needs aid, it is East Timor. Other territories in Indonesia are jealous of the funds being pushed into East Timor to lift it out of poverty—a good and legitimate use of our aid if we ensure that we have the influence to direct it to those parts where it is most needed.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said that the military governor of East Timor had justified what had happened at Dili. The right hon. Gentleman quoted an article by Amnesty

International. With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, I think that he is out of date as the general who is commanding there is, I think, General Adang, who makes no effort to defend what happened at that incident. He said that he had disciplined his troops and was looking to the future while bearing in mind the mistakes of the past.

I will not dwell on this subject any more, except to say that whatever he may have said subsequently in newspapers, Bishop Belo told me that he supported special status for the territory and that he was delighted that human rights were improving, that there was more investment and that education had improved markedly.

I should like to end on a slightly more general point. We have heard from the Opposition today outbursts of moral purity about arms sales, so I took the trouble to look at the Labour Government's record. We have already discussed the sale in 1978 of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia. I remind the House that the Labour Government that year also authorised the export of Sea Dart SAM and Blowpipe missiles to Argentina when it was under a military Government widely accused of human rights abuses. Where are the great moral standards there? In 1979 the Labour Government sold tanks to Iran, regardless of what they may have thought about the Iranian regime.

With the benefit of hindsight one can always sound pompous, but at the time one has to make a judgment, bearing in mind the interests of the defence industries in places such as Ayr and my constituency, in which Racal and many other distinguished defence companies are located. They do a marvellous exporting job for this country.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's typically robust, sensible policies as set out in the Gracious Speech. They will ensure that this country continues to be a force for peace in the world.

8.41 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I shall confine my remarks to the middle east peace process, to which several hon. Members have already referred. I very much agreed with what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and by the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend). I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about the middle east.

I want to discuss Gaza, Jericho, the occupied territories, and the need for our Government and other European Governments to take a more positive line on a number of matters. I refer first to the elections to the Palestinian authority. The Government have said that they want free and fair elections to be called—no one could disagree with that—but what is meant by free and fair elections? It is not just a question of who will be elected and how; it is also a question of what body is to be elected. The problem is that the Israelis say they want a single, small council with both executive and legislative power. The PLO has made it clear that it wants a division: a larger legislative council exercising some oversight of the Executive.

If we are interested in promoting democracy and pluralism, we should be sending a clear message to the Israelis, to the effect that we believe there should be a split—a legislative body which has oversight of the Executive. We should couple that with a message about the need for redeployment of the Israeli forces in the west bank so that the elections can take place.

The other major issue is the financial aid that has been promised and supplied by Britain and other European countries. The money is rightly being channelled to the Palestinian National Authority, but it is obvious that it is still getting through slowly. There were reports yesterday that, of the £450 million promised for this year, only £140 million is likely to get through by the end of the year. Such delays are often explained by demands that there should be accountability and transparency when the aid money is spent. No one would argue against the need for accountability and transparency; clearly aid should be used for the purposes it was intended for. But how far are the demands being made reasonable, and how quickly is it reasonable to expect them to be met?

I was interested to read in *The Guardian* yesterday the remarks of a senior official of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Uri Savir, who said that donors should drop their insistence on the creation of a Palestinian tax system and finance immediate projects to clean up the area—referring here to Gaza—and create work. He made the point that if that was not done there was a danger of an erosion of the peace process.

Besides the delays in the money coming through, there are all sorts of other financial pressures. There is chronic unemployment in Gaza, for instance. It is hard to see how Israel believes that that will be alleviated by imposing restrictions on workers from Gaza going to work in Israel. The Israelis have taken the decision to import foreign labour from Thailand in place of workers from Gaza. That hardly sits comfortably with declarations of their desire for economic growth. And without such growth the peace process will certainly be damaged.

A further difficulty is the withdrawal of European and other funds from the non-governmental organisations that have hitherto provided many of the services in the area. Because of the history of the past 27 years of occupation, many key services such as education and health—and agricultural development—have depended on NGOs. About 60 per cent. of primary health care and 50 per cent. of secondary and tertiary health care has depended on NGOs; and they have provided 100 per cent. of pre-school programmes, not to mention a significant number of schools. These are important services, important not only for themselves but for the signals that they send about the values of a society. The NGOs have also been concerned with human rights and many other grass roots organisations in which local people have been involved during the occupation.

There will be enormous difficulties for any Palestinian authority that attempts, quickly and easily, to take over responsibility for all these services. Money will be the biggest problem, given that there is no structure into which to fit such services, and there will not be much time to develop the necessary structure. Moreover, some of the services that the NGOs provide will not necessarily be seen as a focus for Government activity—services for women, human rights organisations and so on.

I believe that restricting and impeding the activities of some of these NGOs could have a detrimental effect on the population. There is evidence that funding is being withdrawn because of the promise of European Union and other money to the PNA. A recent example drawn to my attention concerns the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees. In 1994, 8 million ecu originally destined for NGOs was diverted by the EU to the funding of the Palestinian police. The relief committees were told not

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

to apply directly to the EU—there would be no money forthcoming this year or next. As a result, three health clinics that they run have already been shut and five more are under threat of closure. The clinics are often sited in some of the most disadvantaged and inaccessible areas. The Early Childhood Resource Centre based in Jerusalem is another organisation that has had to cut services. A day care centre in Hebron has closed and 20 per cent. of the staff have gone. It seems that international organisations are interested in funding infrastructures and building institutions, but not so interested in providing operating costs. They also make it clear that NGOs are low on the priority list.

I am not arguing that support for the PNA is not essential: it is, and it is important to build the structures and institutions of government and authority and to make them function. Money to the PNA should not be reduced: quite the contrary, because two things are happening simultaneously. On the surface, responsibility is being transferred to the Palestinian authority and at the same time there are cuts in services such as health and education. Although one is not the cause of the other, they will become associated in people's minds.

In opening the debate on the Gracious Speech, the Prime Minister said that the benefits of peace that people in Northern Ireland are now witnessing would be a powerful disincentive to renewed violence. That comment could apply equally to the middle east peace process. People must see benefits, and if a vacuum is allowed to develop those who step in will be the people who want the peace process to fail.

There is a delicate line to tread and it is not for us to dictate to the Palestinian authority what its policies should be. Perhaps the functions of some NGOs should be taken over, or perhaps some of them will cease to have a useful role. No one argues that there should not be change, but we should be careful not to lose the dynamism, flexibility and creativity that have been developed through some of the NGOs during the years of occupation. Funds through the ODA or the European Union should not be cut before considering the effects and without helping the PNA to assume its responsibilities. Extra money should go to the PNA and it should not be money that has been taken from other organisations.

We support the Palestinian authorities and want them to develop, take on functions, assume responsibilities and determine service delivery and policies. But we must also acknowledge and be prepared to support the independent role of Palestinian human rights groups and Palestinian NGOs. It is not good enough to hand over responsibility on paper to the Palestinian authority, to demand pluralism, accountability and transparency from it and to hold back the means to achieve those ends. If we do not provide the PNA with the means to develop we shall contribute to the foundering of the peace process.

8.52 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): One of the benefits of being called late is that one has had a chance to hear expert contributions by other hon. Members. At the start of the debate I missed a large part of my right hon. Friend's speech. However, I was fortunate enough to hear his positive and authoritative comments on Northern Ireland and Bosnia. Northern Ireland has been mentioned in the debate and in the media. I have been disappointed by the use of the word ceasefire. I understood that the Downing street agreement sought the abandonment of the bomb and the bullet by terrorists in Northern Ireland. We should not talk to terrorists merely on the basis of a ceasefire, but only if they are totally committed to political dialogue and negotiation on the future of Northern Ireland.

I missed my right hon. Friend's comments on overseas aid and in particular his remarks about Malaysia. This year I was fortunate enough to visit Malaysia with members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I had last been there some 30 years ago and there has been tremendous development since that time. The changes in Malaysia are almost beyond the comprehension of people who visited that country many years ago.

In recent times the issue of the Pergau dam has come to the fore. It seems that *The Sunday Times* picked up an old issue and began to replay an old story. Sadly, Opposition Members latched on to it, putting political interests ahead of the national interest. In our discussions in Malaysia we met the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and many others and there was deep resentment about the comments in Britain about the Pergau dam.

When countries such as Malaysia become independent and develop we must allow them to get on with their business in their own way. The Malaysian economy has developed at a rate of some 78 per cent. gross over the past seven or eight years and the country is moving away from third-world status towards developed-world status. That is to be admired, and it must be what overseas aid budgets are about—to allow third-world countries to develop.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): From what the hon. Gentleman says Malaysia has reached such a state of economic development that it does not need aid from this country. Many poor countries should get that aid.

Mr. Gallie: When I went to Malaysia 30 years ago it was certainly a poor country, but over the years it has received assistance and is developing. Perhaps it is now moving out of development status because of its own efforts and the way that it has used overseas aid to help its people and make changes. The time will come when it will be appropriate to cut the aid, but that time was not when the Pergau dam was suggested.

Malaysia recognised that it needed power and that it certainly needed the dam. I recall discussing this matter with the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who suggested that Malaysia needed gas turbines. That is an expensive way to provide power. Water power is provided by a renewable resource and it can be projected into the future at low cost. It is the kind of power that countries such as Malaysia need to lift them into developed-world status. I fully approve of the assistance that was given for that project, although by saying that I may be unfashionable.

There is another prospective project in that area, the Bacun project in Sarawak. It is similar to the Pergau project and is high-tech. It will be a 700 or 800-mile undersea cable between Sarawak and mainland Malaysia, and the project will be financed by private capital and will not require overseas aid. It will be to the credit of the Malaysians if they can take that project forward.

Some hon. Members spoke about interference in Kenya through educational involvement. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) suggested that we should pre-empt happenings in other countries. We cannot encourage the expansion of democracy and freedom in other countries and then pre-empt them and sit on top of them. That was a surprising development in today's debate.

When we discuss overseas aid projects and speak of lack of concern, perhaps we should have some concern for the jobs in Britain that could be affected by overseas aid. I draw the attention of the House to recent developments in my constituency where the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and I expressed concern to the Foreign Office about the way in which the feedback of overseas aid to Brazil was against the interests of those in my constituency through state assistance to the Brazilian aircraft industry.

When Ministers operate our overseas aid programmes, they should have regard to jobs and benefits for our industries at home while considering the needs of those countries that we wish to develop.

Turning to wider issues in the Gracious Speech, little has been said today about defence. I welcome the top priority given to national security which has been demonstrated amply over 15 years despite the pressures that my right hon. and learned Friend now has in his budget. Unlike previous Secretaries of State for Defence in recent times, it has to be recognised that financial limitations are being applied to defence issues. That has been demonstrated in the excellent paper "Front Line First", where reality has been applied to ensure that our defence systems meet future needs.

I was delighted to hear in the Gracious Speech that the United Kingdom is still intent on maintaining its nuclear deterrent. Whatever we do in this country, nuclear weapons cannot be uninvented. We can, however, stop further development and proliferation and that was an important commitment in the Gracious Speech.

The United Kingdom nuclear deterrent and the resolve shown by previous Conservative Governments and the Government of the USA brought about the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of repressive socialist systems in eastern Europe. The nuclear deterrent maintained peace between the major powers for almost 30 years, so we should be grateful that that element was built into the Queen's Speech.

I am delighted that the Labour party appears to be signing on to the principles of retaining our nuclear deterrent, but I look to its party conference and the problems that the new Labour party leader had with the grass roots of the party in dealing with the issue. Had that happened at a Tory party conference and had my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister been threatened and lost votes in conference, the media would have had a field day and would have totally written him off. We had no such problems and I am sure that our Prime Minister will be here for many elections to come, fighting the good fight.

I turn to the Scottish dimension and the situation at Rosyth, where I was pleased to come together on a cross-party basis with hon. Members who wished the Government to retain past commitments to Rosyth dockyard. In part we lost that argument, but we had strange bedfellows in that we lined up with people from nuclear-free authorities who were fighting to contain nuclear submarines at Rosyth. But we won a commitment to Rosyth dockyard continuing surface fleet maintenance. As we look to the coming Session of Parliament, I believe that when the Government consider the defence programme, they will stick to their pledges on that issue and I welcome that.

When we look at "Front Line First", we must also consider services, support and procurement. I have to register some concern at the GEC bid for VSEL. If the Government were to allow GEC to take over VSEL as well as owning Yarrow, they would be putting all their eggs in one basket in respect of warship construction.

There is a suggestion that GEC could put up separate tenders for each of the yards, but I do not believe that any company with ownership of two yards such as these would do so in a competitive way. On that basis, such a move would undermine the Government's commitment to ensuring competition in all aspects of its business and allowing market forces to operate in the defence industry while ensuring that there are options for delivery of such important items as warships from UK yards.

There is a difference between the warship and the aircraft industries. With warships, we rightly have a tendency to buy British. That is both wise and necessary. Therefore, it is important to have more than one warship construction yard in the United Kingdom.

There are other aspects of Britain's future defence requirements, and I think especially of the future large aircraft and the current thinking on the provision of transport aircraft for the military. I accept that the Hercules has done a good job over the past 25 years, but it was designed 30 or 40 years ago and a revamped version would not be the right aircraft to go forward into the next century.

There are other options. I would like to find an aircraft that increases volume both in capacity and weight and which offers greater fuel efficiency and flying range. That is what I would expect of an aircraft going into the year 2000. The European industry should have the opportunity to provide the future large aircraft for the RAF and other military forces throughout the world.

We must not turn our back on giving our aerospace industry the chance to compete. That will help to provide future Ministers with the opportunity to find deals that fit both our budgetary and military requirements. The hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) said that his preference would be for an aircraft such as the Jetstream 41 to be sold worldwide. I agree with him, but remind him that the investment in that aircraft has come from the success of British Aerospace's defence programme. We cannot ignore that fact.

Jetstream 41 has been greatly successful. At the beginning of this week Jetstream at Prestwick won an order from America for 60 aircraft. That is worth a quarter of a billion pounds. It shows great commitment from the management and work force. It recognises the assistance of the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry in ensuring that other countries do not use unfair subsidies against British industry. It also

[Mr. Gallie]

recognises some of the assistance given by the DTI and the Scottish Office in support of Jetstream during recent years.

Another opportunity for my constituency provided by "Front Line First" is the involvement of the private industry in training pilots for the RAF. The flying college at Prestwick can now bid for that business. It is also intent on picking up business from South Africa. Following the successful visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to that country, it was suggested that Britain should use its knowledge and experience to benefit the emerging sectors of society in South Africa. I can see no better way of using our expertise in our flying colleges than to train coloured pilots who were not given such training in South Africa in the past.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), I, too, welcome the changes in South Africa. We must be grateful to the Government who, during recent years, have turned their back on imposing on South Africa sanctions which would have been particularly damaging to its emerging nation status now.

I should like to believe that the Government's common-sense, realistic and practical policies in foreign affairs and defence matters which are demonstrated in the Gracious Speech will be continued well into the future.

9.10 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): At this stage of the debate it is tempting to follow all kinds of hares and red herrings, but I shall resist doing so and keep to the main point that I want to make.

Five months ago the United States President, speaking to the French National Assembly in Paris, said:

> "America will remain engaged in Europe. The entire transatlantic alliance benefits when we, Europe and America, are both strong and engaged."

Those words obviously have less significance and relevance today, following the American decision unilaterally to disengage from the United Nations embargo on arms going into Bosnia.

I am worried about United States foreign policy. The House and the British people should be far more worried about that than about some hysterical argument inside the Conservative party about £200 million. It would be better if just one tenth of the energy expended today were devoted to considering the serious consequences of the Republican victory in the United States elections. To put Jesse Helms in charge of Senate foreign policy is like putting Attila the Hun in charge of child protection. What does that mean for the future of the Atlantic alliance and European policy in relation to the United States?

The Secretary of State for Defence tried to finesse that issue a few days ago by talking about a European-Atlantic partnership. That will not do. At this stage we must recognise that mere words will not solve the problem. Nor will the justifiable anger that the lives of British men and women could be put at risk by the short-sighted policies of the American Administration solve the problem.

To use an American expression, we should not get mad, we should get even. That means that we should recognise the need to build up the co-operation of the European Union countries with regard to foreign and security policy. We should also recognise—I say this as someone who has strongly supported the continuing NATO alliance—that the Western European Union should take on a growing significance.

The Gracious Speech refers to the Western European Union, to NATO and to security in a wide sense. We must be more realistic. The days of American multilateralism may be coming to an end. We will see more and more examples of global unilateralism from the United States. If Britain is to play a serious part, it must realise that, at this moment, Europe does not have the intelligence-gathering satellites or heavy airlift capabilities necessary to make a contribution in the Security Council or to our own continent's security. We depend too much on the world's only remaining super-power. If its foreign policy is driven by domestic considerations, so that it will invade Haiti but do nothing about Angola; by lobbies and pressure groups; or by the need to gather Cuban American votes in Florida by adopting a ridiculous policy towards Cuba, the rest of the world must develop collective security to make the UN an effective body, sometimes without the United States. That means recognising an irreducible minimum of British defence expenditure.

If Britain is to be an effective member of the Security Council, a serious player in the future defence and security of our continent, and to be able to punch above our weight—to use the words of the Foreign Secretary in another context—Britain must have not just diplomatic but defence and security capability.

Defence and security are much more than a matter of hardware or manpower. It is a question of how we engage politically in international processes. The statements in the Gracious Speech about the non-proliferation and nuclear test ban treaties would have much more significance if backed by Government action to make sure that the NPT review conference in 1995 is indefinitely extended. The big sticking point is the objection by a number of developing and third-world countries to the fact that not all nuclear powers have seriously observed their obligations under article 6 of the NPT. They cite in particular Britain and France, with continuing expansion of their strategic arsenals, and the Chinese nuclear tests, which do not follow the pattern of the United States and Russian reduction programmes. A serious commitment by the British Government to engage in negotiations to reduce our strategic nuclear weapons in the near future would achieve far more to ensure the success of the NPT review conference than much that other countries can do.

UN peacekeeping operations require far more serious consideration by the British Government. Reference to that issue has already been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who made a serious point about the role of UN peacekeepers in Somalia. Britain did not engage in that operation, presumably because it did not have the means. If Britain is to be a serious permanent member of the Security Council, it must make a much greater commitment to "Agenda for Peace", the policies of Boutros-Ghali and UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. The future of our defence and security depend on our European security and on our international security

through the United Nations. I hope that, during the next few years, a Labour Government will be able to put that process to good effect.

9.19 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): We welcome the opportunity to debate foreign affairs and security. Often, we debate defence against the narrow background of our national defence or of our industrial base. Of course it is right and proper for us to do that, but it is important, every so often and especially when we debate the Gracious Speech, to set our security policy in the context of our foreign policy. In the changed world in which we now live, defence and security mean something rather different. We need now to think of a wider approach to defence. We can afford to stand back a little and think of defence and security in a more philosophical and reflective manner.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, who spoke in his normal suave, urbane manner, is indeed the acceptable face of the Conservative party today, but even he stretched the point a little when he described the swindlers and fraudsters of the European Community as people who have "over-benefited". That is a rather new, nice word, and it is a tribute to his diplomatic skills that the right hon. Gentleman can think of such a conjunction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has made many memorable speeches. Today, he maintained his high standard in his new bipartisan approach. His forensic approach will demand a new definition from the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. We look forward to the jousting in the years ahead. It will be interesting to see the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) in his role as shadow Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary opposite my hon. Friend.

Eighteen right hon. and hon. Members have taken part in this wide-ranging debate, and many points have been made. Several trends are apparent, and I shall try to develop some ideas.

We are conscious that we are debating security and foreign affairs in a new world order. In the past five years, we have seen dramatic changes, yet the euphoria of those days has long passed. There is now one super-power and it is necessary to help people in the former communist bloc to improve their standards and quality of life and make the transition from the command economy to the market economy.

We always bemoan uncertainty, but certain things can be seen clearly. The first is that the transformation from communism will be long and complex. Certainly, it is not enough for western Governments and communities merely to pay lip service. We must do more to help those countries to transcend the gap. We need also to try to offer stability to the newly emerging democracies.

Those of us in liberal democracies have to meet certain challenges. The market economy, unbridled, is not a liberal democracy. If one is not careful, one creates underclasses, which negate the concept of free democracies. We must avoid that in our country and we must avoid exporting it to newly emerging democracies. If one goes to some of those newly emerging democracies, one can see that while some people do well in the nascent capitalist system, other people do not. They have lost benefits such as subsidised food and housing and proper health care—the up-side of communism, so to speak. We have to take that message on board.

Faced with that position, the west is lacking in leadership. That comes through time and time again and we have seen it this past week. The United States of America has taken a different line from the NATO allies. That has caused all sorts of difficulties. While the Opposition agree with many of the fine words in the Gracious Speech, we sometimes wonder how certain is the intent of those words.

We are obviously with the Government 100 per cent. in trying to promote a peaceful settlement in the former Yugoslavia. We join the Government in paying tribute to the men and women serving in our forces there. I regret very much the American decision of last week. It is not simply a matter, as the Foreign Secretary said, of two ships. There is the issue of intelligence. As the Foreign Secretary knows, the United Nations has no intelligence-gathering facilities of its own. We in Britain rely considerably on American satellite intelligence.

I have just returned from a defence conference in Washington. The view over there is that the Americans have stopped providing us and the United Nations with intelligence. That may be one of the reasons why the Foreign Secretary shares our view—I am sure that he has expressed it clearly to his American counterparts—that the American decision is wrong and, if pursued, could put at risk the troops serving under the United Nations. That point was also made at the conference in Holland earlier this week. We believe that the Government were right to make that point, but we hope that they are making it clearly to the Americans.

I often hear debate in the west about whether NATO has a role. It is interesting that I hear that question only in the west. I do not hear it in the east because people there are certain that NATO has a future. They know that if it had not been for NATO, we would not be in the position that we are now in. They know the effectiveness of NATO. The great challenge for us in the west is how to change NATO. It has to change, yet it must retain its effectiveness.

The Labour Government were instrumental in the formation of NATO. We have always stood by our commitment to it. We regarded it in the past as the linchpin of our defence strategy. We still regard it as such, but it has to change. It has to move with the world. It is a great pity that Her Majesty's Government have not taken the lead in pressing for changes in NATO. There have been movements in the past two weeks. We welcome late conversions, but I feel that the enthusiasm is not there. Surely we should take much more positive steps to bring some of the former eastern European Warsaw pact countries into NATO.

Partnership for Peace, which was seen by many as a stalling process, has turned out to be what we hoped it would be: a first step. I was greatly encouraged that when President Clinton was in Poland he said that it is a question not of "if" NATO is expanded eastward but of "when". We must take that debate a stage further. We already have the cells at Mons and at NATO headquarters. Things are beginning to happen. The Governments of the former eastern European countries are more reassured.

[Dr. David Clark]

We must take the debate a stage further for the following reason. I mentioned the responsibility that we in the west have for nurturing those democracies. I remember being most impressed by something that the late Secretary-General of NATO, Manfred Wörner said. He told me that he had been a politician in the German Parliament in the 1960s, when democracy was fragile—in the days before the European Union. He felt that one reason why democracy thrived in what was then West Germany was that it was part of the NATO framework. It was the experience of being part of a partnership with other democratic countries.

What was true for western Germany in the late 1950s and 1960s will be true for Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the near future. We must grasp that nettle and set up meetings with those countries—not merely partnership meetings—to discuss how we can take the process a stage further.

We must also be aware that a move is taking place across the Atlantic. The Brown amendment in Congress gives assistance to the Visegrad countries in particular. That is what we should be doing.

We should be seeking the criteria for NATO's expansion. Those must be based not on purely logistical or technical grounds but on geopolitical and philosophical grounds. We should be talking not about what is necessary and good for our defence but about what is good for the security of the west. That is the sort of approach that we need. I fear that many of the technical and military arguments are often used more for procrastination than genuine argument. We urge the Government to pick up that baton and run with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) mentioned the second reform of NATO, a development that we hope that the Government will pick up and run with. Last week's events—our experiences with the Americans—together with many others, point to the fact that we in Europe must take a much larger responsibility for the security of Europe. For too long, we have been too dependent on the United States. For too long, Europe has had its defence on the cheap, so to speak, and we have allowed the United States to shoulder a financial burden. It has made it clear that it is no longer prepared to do so.

We must start thinking about the defence architecture of Europe so that we can blend it in with NATO and fulfil our Maastricht commitments. We should not be in the rear, we should be in the van and I hope that the Government will accept that.

I have always been sceptical about the Western European Union and many hon. Members share that view. Having said that, we are in a new ball game. We have a new framework within Maastricht and NATO is changing. It is not beyond the ingenuity of man to reshape WEU and make it a meaningful defence arm for Europe.

I suspect that, before too long, we shall also have to consider another organisation that is much derided here in Britain—Eurocorps. France, Germany, Spain, Belgium are already there and I am certain that Poland will be in before long. We need to be in as well. We must do more lateral thinking regarding the shape of the defence architecture of Europe, and we hope that the Government will see through that part of the Queen's Speech.

There are one or two points that I could perhaps raise with the Secretary of State for Defence. I did not see any reference in the Gracious Speech to a Bill on the British reserve forces. The Secretary of State knows that there is a need to change the regulations affecting our reserve forces. In an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces—now the chairman of the Conservative party—said that it was the intention of the Ministry of Defence

"to enact a change in the legislation next year."—[*Official Report*, 12 April 1994; Vol. 241, c. 11.]

Do the Government intend to bring forward that Bill?

I can tell the Secretary of State that the Opposition would not be averse to such a Bill—we think that it is needed—as long as he does not intend to create a reserve force of unemployed people. There must be protection for people in employment, or the Bill would not be acceptable. If he can give us that assurance, the Secretary of State will have a fair wind with that Bill.

My hon. Friends have emphasised the need for international co-operation, whether on the arms trade, weapons conventions or whatever. We feel strongly that many of those problems can be tackled only through international action. Again, there are omissions in the Gracious Speech in that area. What about the chemical weapons convention? The Secretary of State has made great play of the fact that we were early signatories, but he knows that the convention cannot come into law until 65 states have ratified it. Why have we not ratified the convention?

I understand that it was the Government's intention to ratify the convention. If it needs legislation, I can assure the Secretary of State that he will not find the Opposition standing in the way of the ratification of that convention. It is important that we press ahead with it, and I hope that the fine words that we have heard in the past will come to be enacted.

Again, we know of the Government's original reluctance about a comprehensive test ban treaty. I have referred ad nauseam to the attitudes and words of various Ministers who were saying that it was unwise. We now have a position where the French, Americans and Russians have stated quite clearly that they want a comprehensive test ban treaty. We are caught up in the situation, and we cannot test because the Americans will not let us. Why do we not grasp the nettle, join the other four countries and try to persuade the Chinese to come in with us? We need a comprehensive test ban treaty, and again I can assure the Secretary of State that he will meet with no difficulty from the Opposition.

It is important that some movement is made on the non-proliferation treaty. If we can show the non-proliferation treaty signatories that we are making efforts to try to limit nuclear proliferation, and that we are also not testing our own weapons, that will be a bonus, and help to get more signatories. The Opposition would support any effort to get the non-proliferation treaty enacted, but again I would urge the Government not to escalate further. The Secretary of State for Defence knows that, with our Trident submarines and multiple warheads, there will be a considerable increase in the number of our nuclear warheads. Why does not the Secretary of State join the Labour party? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] He would be a very welcome member—but perhaps the party is not quite as broad a church as that. Why does he not

accept Labour party policy in this respect? He should say that the Government will not escalate the deployment of our Trident submarines and will keep the number of nuclear warheads at the same level as those commissioned for Polaris. That would be a positive step forward.

We live in times of great change. The Government have said many of the right words in the Queen's Speech, but we are worried that they will be found wanting when it comes to enacting them. We plead with the Government that now is the time, especially with vacillation across the Atlantic—although we must retain our links with the United States—for us to play a much greater part in defence policy making in Europe and also to play a greater part in the leadership of the UN.

9.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): Although I cannot accept the kind invitation of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) to join the Labour party, I would like to pay tribute to him for returning early from the United States for this debate. I believe that he flew overnight in order to take part, and I am sure that the House would wish to acknowledge that recognition of the importance of the occasion.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our intentions with regard to the reserve forces. We intend to publish a draft Bill on the reserve forces for consultation early in the new year. That will enable much important progress to be made in the next few months. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's indication that the Opposition would wish to join us in giving maximum support to the modernisation of the legislation involving the reserve forces, so that they can play an even fuller part in meeting the requirements that the country expects from them.

The hon. Gentleman also made a passing reference to the arms trade. I was rather sad that he did not use this opportunity to clarify the Opposition's policy, because, in a fairly typical contribution from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), typical of the so-called new Labour party, he sought to sound very disapproving of the arms trade, because of the mutterings from those on the Benches behind him, but, at the same time, did not feel able to condemn it. That would have been inappropriate, given the previous observations of the shadow spokesman on defence, the hon. Member for South Shields.

It is right to remind the House how unequivocal the hon. Member for South Shields has been in his support for the arms trade and for arms sales. Last year, in an interview with *New Statesman and Society*, the hon. Gentleman was asked his views and the article described how

> "He runs down his mental checklist. Sales to allies: no problem. Sales to friendly Governments such as Saudi Arabia: all right. As for British Aerospace's proposed sale of Hawk . . . "trainers" . . . to Indonesia, Clark is in favour. South-east Asia needs a stronger security system, he says, and Indonesia must be a part of it."

The hon. Gentleman offered no qualifications, nor did he specify that his approval was subject to other factors: he just gave an unqualified endorsement of arms sales to Indonesia, as well as to all the other countries about which he was asked.

Dr. David Clark: The Secretary of State may be aware of a letter, sent on 3 November 1993, from the Foreign Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). My right hon. Friend had asked the Government what assurances they had been given from Indonesia regarding the Hawk aircraft,. The Secretary of State replied:

> "We have sold Hawk aircraft to Indonesia in the past, and have no evidence that they have been used against the civilian population of East Timor."

That was the very question which my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) asked the Foreign Secretary earlier today. Let me repeat it: have the Government still no evidence that the Hawk aircraft have been used against the East Timorese? We would be willing to accept the Government's reassurance on that.

Mr. Rifkind: I did not notice any qualification of that kind in the answers that the hon. Gentleman gave in his interview in *New Statesman and Society*. We have no evidence of any use of Hawk trainers in East Timor. I plead with the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen to stop displaying a holier-than-thou attitude towards the issue. I am talking not about the hon. Member for South Shields, but about the hon. Member for Livingston, who, as usual, tried to play both ends against the middle and ended up disappointing every point of view on the spectrum.

Some important speeches have been made during this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) asked about the European dimension of defence. The Government strongly believe that, within the crucial framework of NATO, it is sensible and desirable to develop European co-operation. In the areas of collaboration, we have important projects such as the Eurofighter and the common frigate, but there are limits to the amount of co-operation that is possible, because, unlike the United Kingdom, a number of other western European countries still have state-owned industries, monopolies or subsidies in a way that makes competition, on which we insist, more difficult to achieve. But within that framework, we like to make progress in that way.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) asked me when 45 Commando could hope to return to the United Kingdom. We intend that, once the current exercise with the Americans in Kuwait is complete, it will return to the UK. That will mean some time in December, so it should be home in time for Christmas.

My hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) deplored the fact that the Government had indicated the importance that we attach to the European Communities (Finance) Bill, and suggested that that was inconsistent with parliamentary democracy. I must say with all due humility that any Government are entitled to make it clear that they will not continue in office if they cannot get the support of the House of Commons on a measure to which they attach importance.

Likewise, it is for my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow to decide for himself how he will vote, in the knowledge that, if the Government are defeated, they will not remain in office. For him to say that that is a denial of democracy or of the rights of Members to vote according to their conscience is not a valid or defensible position. I ask him to reconsider his view.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) was correct to emphasise the fundamental achievement of the European Union, which has helped ensure that war between the states of western Europe has become inconceivable. We hope to see that develop across Europe.

[Mr. Rifkind]

A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have commented on Bosnia. We have made it clear that we were concerned by the American decision, but, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, it is important to emphasise that the practical consequences of the American announcement are extremely modest. That is not just our view, but that of the Military Committee of NATO, which dealt with that matter and concluded that there was no good reason to doubt that the operation in the Adriatic could continue and be expected to be successful in the coming months.

May I emphasise two additional points with regard to that announcement? First, it has become fashionable for people to argue that the United States is losing interest in Europe and that therefore the NATO alliance will wither and disappear. The recent events in relation to Bosnia can hardly be described as a lack of American interest in Bosnia or Europe as a whole. There may be a difference of view about the appropriate policy to pursue, but that shows that the United States remains very interested in Europe's welfare, which we unreservedly welcome.

It is also worth remembering that the decision announced by the United States not to enforce the embargo in the Adriatic came about as a compromise, because the United States Government had reached the same conclusion as the British and other European Governments—that the lifting of the arms embargo was inappropriate at this stage and would do more harm than good. That was also the Bosnian Government's conclusion.

So it was because the American Government declined to accept the view of those in Congress who wanted the embargo to be swept away that Congress chose to try to enforce that relatively minor change with regard to the operational circumstances.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Has my right hon. and learned Friend noticed that, although the leader of the Liberal Democrat party made a great fuss about Bosnia, not only is he not present, but not a single Liberal Democrat is in the Chamber for the wind-up of this important debate on defence and foreign affairs, on which the Liberal Democrats pretend to place great importance?

Mr. Rifkind: It is indeed strange that the Leader of the Liberal party should have made no attempt even to be present at any time during this important debate, as far as I am aware. His right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) spoke, and told me that, sadly, he was unable to be here for the reply, but that is obviously a matter for him to explain in those circumstances.

Mr. Gapes *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must continue my remarks.

I hope that, in the weeks and months to come, those people in Congress who feel strongly about Bosnia, and who may wish to advocate the lifting of the embargo, try to find an opportunity to visit Bosnia, to see the work that is being done by the United Nations. I believe that that could have an important impact on the way in which they regard the matter.

Very few Congressmen who have expressed strong opinions on those issues have taken the trouble to go to the country, to meet the members of the United Nations force, to see the way that they have saved thousands of lives and are continuing to save thousands of lives, and to examine at first hand what the practical consequences would be if the embargo were to be lifted and if the United Nations were therefore to withdraw. I believe that that is the least that they owe the international community and the people of Bosnia—to go and see for themselves, and to discover whether they continue to hold the same opinion about the lifting of the embargo.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) was kind enough to make complimentary remarks about the defence costs study. We are at present in the process of consulting on many of the proposals, and involving ourselves in their early implementation.

Some of the changes will involve significant reductions in manpower. As a first step, as many as 80 Army officers of the rank of brigadier and colonel will be surplus to our requirements. We are seeking volunteers, as we would normally do in a situation of that type. It is always sad if we lose people of good quality, but that is an important consequence of the changes in the armed forces—to ensure that the maximum resources can be concentrated where they are most required.

Several hon. Members referred to the remarkable contribution that our forces have made in Rwanda. They will return on Sunday or Monday of next week, and they will do so having completed a remarkable job. About 615 people have been there since August. They have, during that period, been involved in vehicle maintenance, and bridge and road reconstruction. They have, as the Foreign Secretary said, cared for about 125,000 casualties, providing medical help where required, and they have been involved in the transport of supplies that are crucial for the well-being of the people of Rwanda. Not only the House but the country can be proud of what they have done in difficult circumstances, and I know that we shall all wish to pay tribute to them.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that I would comment on the middle east, a region in which there has obviously been remarkable progress in the past year. I had vivid evidence of that fact when I was able to fly from Tel Aviv to Amman direct—a 20-minute journey, which would have been inconceivable as recently as a few weeks earlier. That is a mark of the important changes that have occurred.

Gradually the foundations are being laid for a lasting peace settlement, which we hope will be acceptable to all the peoples of the region. We have witnessed the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan; we have witnessed the gradual winding down of the Arab boycott against Israel. We have witnessed progress in the talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which have led to the withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, and there is now the possibility of talks between the Israelis and the Syrians, which could lead to the resolution of one of the most difficult and intractable problems.

The United Kingdom is seeking to make a useful and important contribution to that process. We are working hard to support peace in the middle east, politically and economically. We are giving £75 million to the Palestinians, helping them to build their institutions and create jobs. We have supported the Palestine police by providing £3 million to help pay salaries, and with

training courses at Bramshill police college. A safe and secure environment will be vital to the success of those new operations. We are also ready to help set up the Palestine monetary authority. We want to help to add meaning and credibility to Palestinian autonomy.

However, I emphasise that the prospects of peace in the middle east are improved not only by adding strength to those welcome foundations but by showing resolve in deterring those people in the region whose agenda is one not of peace but of conflict. Whether it be through incidents of terrorism or other means, we know that there will be people who will continue to try to destroy the prospects for peace, and therefore the road to peace will be slow and difficult. The leaderships in the middle east, both Israeli and Arab, are determined to make progress and we shall give them our fullest support.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that what he has just said, as well as his recent visit, will be widely welcomed. Can he confirm that it is the Government's view that direct talks between Israel and Syria are the best way of furthering the peace process, as has been proved by the talks between Israel and Jordan and on other occasions?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, that must be desirable, and we very much hope that that will prove possible. We have seen that direct talks, whether between Israel and Egypt or Israel and Jordan, have the best prospect of resolving some of the most difficult problems and of building a climate of trust, without which the progress that we all desire cannot be fully achieved.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), and a number of other hon. Members, were kind enough to refer to a speech that I made earlier this week about the relationship between western Europe and north America. Most people in the House and on both sides of the Atlantic realise the continuing importance of the north Atlantic alliance and why, on matters of defence and security, NATO remains crucial to the well-being that we all require.

We are also conscious of the fact that in the post-cold-war world, as long as there is no direct threat to the security of western Europe, it will be increasingly difficult to create the same sense of enthusiasm if the Atlantic relationship is presented as if it is concerned only with defence and security issues. The common interests on both sides of the Atlantic transcend the issues of defence and security.

That is why I have suggested that we should try to create a new framework that incorporates the spectrum of common interests that bind together the peoples of both sides of the Atlantic ocean.

Mr. Patten: Before my right hon. and learned Friend concludes, I should be grateful if he would reflect on one point about foreign affairs that I made during my brief intervention. I requested whether, in the face of the apparently publicly disinterested views of the German presidency towards fraud, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary would consider asking for a special ministerial Council to consider the issue. Is the answer yes, no or maybe?

Mr. Rifkind: I think that my right hon. Friend will appreciate that ECOFIN has the main responsibility in that sphere. Therefore, my right hon. Friend's interesting suggestion should best be directed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—and I am sure that it will be drawn to his attention.

In the few minutes left, I wish to emphasise what I believe is necessary, which is to create a framework that will—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon had the answer that I am sure he wanted to hear—*[Interruption.]* If I may be allowed to continue.

The fundamental interests that bind the two sides of the Atlantic are, in the first instance, the defence and security considerations that we have been discussing. But other factors include the extent to which concepts such as the rule of law are fundamental to north America and western Europe, the economic arrangements, which are a fundamental part of our economic philosophy, and the cultural identity that is crucial to all the countries that follow from the European civilisation.

Increasingly over the next few years, there will be new threats to the western way of life that may not now be as apparent as might otherwise have been expected. We know that there is a resurgence of nationalism in parts of eastern Europe. We know that some people are attached to authoritarian ways of life. We know that the economic challenges to western Europe and north America will be profound.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) was right to emphasise the fact that, in the far east, there are countries with remarkable economic prospects. One only has to contemplate what has been achieved in Taiwan, Singapore or Hong Kong to speculate on what the mainland Chinese republic will be able to achieve when it finally puts off the yoke of communism and allows the opportunities that liberal capitalism provides to take forward its economic prospects.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Will the Secretary of State comment on the request made by the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) for a reference of the GEC bid to the MMC?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that, when matters of that kind are raised, a proper procedure is followed. The Ministry of Defence expresses its views to the Department of Trade and Industry. The Office of Fair Trading makes its recommendation, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announces his conclusions in due course.

I believe that the defence and security of the United Kingdom are in the hands of a Government who, for 15 years, have given the greatest priority to international security—this during a time for most of which the Labour party has been a unilateralist party committed to weakening our defences—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PRIVILEGES

Ordered,

That Sir Peter Hordern be discharged from the Committee of Privileges and Sir Donald Thompson be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

[Mr. Rifkind]

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Mr. John Garrett be appointed a member of the House of Commons Commission in place of Ms Janet Anderson under the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

PETITION

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd.

10 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The petition reads as follows:

"To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Humble Petition of the employees and friends of Jetstream Aircraft Limited sheweth that in our opinion the GEC bid for VSEL, if successful, would create a monopoly in warship building in contravention of the Government's stated policy of competition in defence procurement.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the President of the Board of Trade to recommend referral of the GEC bid for VSEL to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray, etc."

This petition was prepared last weekend in haste, with the full support of the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey). It was signed eagerly, too, by the people of Ayrshire, who strongly support Jetstream Aircraft. They do so in the belief that, in a world of competition, it is important that there be competition, particularly when taxpayers' interests are at stake. That is why my colleagues and I have great pleasure in presenting the petition to the House.

To lie upon the Table.

Northern Line

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10.2 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I should like first to thank a number of my hon. Friends who have shown a special interest in this matter but who cannot be here this evening. My hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) and for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) have taken the Trappist vows of the Whips Office, but that has not prevented them from using the influence that comes with association with that office to put the case strongly, in private, on behalf of their constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet has argued strongly for the commuters on the Northern line, while my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North and our colleagues the hon. Members for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) have argued strongly on behalf of their constituents who work for ABB—Asea Brown Boveri Ltd.

As the House will know, I am chairman of the all-party friends of the Northern line group. I should like briefly to explain the group's purpose. It is not that we are friends of the line as it is now, but we are friends of the line as we would like it to be. We do not seek to put a preservation order on the 1959 trains that run along the line; rather, we would like new trains in 1995.

It is not the function of the all-party group to back a particular option, nor is it for me or the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) to tell the Government that they must support ABB or the GEC option. I am quite agnostic about the technical merits of those two schemes. I do not claim any qualifications to enable me to decide between them, but I am determined, as are the other members of the all-party group, to improve the quality of service on the Northern line, which is used by many thousands of our constituents and hundreds of thousands of people every week.

This is the fourth Adjournment debate that I have instituted about the Northern line and London Transport. I hope that it will be the last, because the Government may shortly make a decision that could mean that we no longer have to have such debates. The present management of London Transport and the Government have to tackle the neglect of the past. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report of 1991 states:

"The deficiencies in the level of service are the result of chronic underinvestment in both new capacity and the replacement and renewal of existing assets."

In the 1960s, public transport was regarded as a declining industry and it was fondly imagined that the motor car could solve the problems of London. It was thought that urban motorways were the answer, and that London could afford to emulate Los Angeles. There was a failure to recognise that urban motorways generate more traffic and are a remarkable example, probably one of the few known to man, of "Says" law. The problems of London could never be solved no matter how many roads were built.

In the early 1980s, the Livingstone or locust years, the Greater London council decided to put the emphasis on lower fares rather than increased investment. It is one of the ironies of London politics that those who argue for a strategic authority for London fail to realise that the pro-road policies of the GLC in the 1960s and early 1970s

and its low investment policies in the early and mid-1980s exacerbated the problems that London Transport has today.

The result of the failures and follies of the past is that, today, London's transport system suffers from old trains and antiquated signalling. The Northern line seeks to run into the City and the west end. In the short term, that has been of some assistance, because the City was a particular victim of the recession; but just as it was a victim of recession, so will it benefit from the continuing upturn in the economy. It has been said that at least 10,000 new jobs will be created in the City over the next few years. That means that pressure on the Northern line will become greater.

It is a pleasure to see that many more tourists have come to London this year than ever before. Those tourists arrive in the west end and at the south bank complex after the joy of travelling on the Northern line. Business men and tourists will be disgorged at Waterloo from Eurostar, leaving a train designed for the 21st century and boarding one that was designed in the 1950s and runs on a track that was designed for the 19th century. Of course, it may be said that the Northern line will not move people about much quicker than Eurostar, but we must hope that Eurostar will arrive on time and that trains on the Northern line of the future will arrive somewhat earlier than they do today.

Those of us who listen to London News radio occasionally hear the phrase, "On the Northern line, service is back to normal." What does "service is back to normal" mean? It means trains that are 35 years old, which date from 1959, the year of Harold Macmillan's great election victory. It means signalling that is near the end of its useful life, track that is scarcely the most modern and a dot matrix system that is certainly not infallible in the information that it gives customers. It means embankments close to collapse and a drainage system that is scarcely adequate.

Earlier this year, a train was derailed at Edgware, just outside my constituency. That was followed by the collapse of the embankment between Colindale and Edgware and people had to go by bus rather than by train. So we have a system which is tolerable, at best, and which all too often is liable to suffer from one problem after another.

Of course, it would be churlish not to admit that there have been some improvements. We have seen the new station at the Angel built at a cost of £70 million and a number of stations are being refurbished at the southern end of the Northern line. Better stations may be a useful start, but they are scarcely enough for the passengers on the Northern line.

We have to look at the problem of London Transport in general. The MMC report said that London Underground Ltd. sees the need for an average expenditure of between £700 million and £750 million a year for the remainder of the decade, excluding the cost of new lines and extensions. We should remember that in 1994-95 expenditure is forecast to be £584 million.

Two issues will be determined in the next few weeks. The first is the level of funding for 1995-96. I recognise that there have been problems on the railways, but I do not believe that the signalmen's dispute should be used as an excuse to raid the budget for London Transport. The signalmen's dispute was an one-off factor—something for which the contingency reserve exists rather than an excuse to redirect resources from London Transport to the railways.

If we are to have any redirection of resources within the transport budget, the sensible solution would be to redirect resources from road to rail. There is recognition that public transport has an increasing role to play in curbing the problems of pollution and congestion in our cities.

Of course, it is true that London Underground is enjoying a better 1994-95 than anticipated. For example, the proceeds from bus privatisation have been better than expected a year ago. It is also true that London Underground has had success in cost control and detection of fraud, but the Treasury must recognise that most of the improvements have been due to the initiative and hard work of the management and the men and women who work for London Underground.

What incentive would there be for those people to produce a better performance if they found that the Treasury took all that money away and gave it to some other part of the transport sector? It would be quite wrong to claw back the money that London Underground has generated for itself back to the Treasury. I accept that where we have enjoyed better receipts from the privatisation of buses there may well be a different argument, but there must always be the incentive for the management of London Underground to improve its performance and those extra resources must be powered into the underground rather than being used to shore up some other part of the transport budget.

The second issue which has to be determined very soon is the future of the Northern line itself. In March 1994, London Transport was invited to go out to tender to discover whether trains could be provided for the Northern line under the private finance initiative. We know that very competitive quotations were received from both GEC and ABB Transportation. Both those United Kingdom manufacturers of trains are short of work and, therefore, have been willing to quote very competitive prices.

The tenders fulfil all the criteria of the private finance initiative. Indeed, the policy of no train, no pay, is at the heart of what is proposed. That can only be good news for the passengers on the Northern line. If both ABB and GEC are told, "If you don't produce a train, you don't get paid for that day," there is every incentive for them to improve the level of maintenance. One of the worst things suffered by passengers on the Northern line is to go to Hendon central station at 10 past 7 in the morning and see the ghastly notice, "First train not in service". They know that that is probably due to a defect in maintenance. If the manufacturers are told that if their trains are not in service they will not be paid for that day, they will ensure that every train runs on time. That will benefit the customers of the Northern line and my constituents.

I hope that on Budget day my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will announce, in the public expenditure side of his statement, that he has given the go-ahead to London Underground to sign a deal, be it with either ABB or GEC—that is irrelevant. It is essential that a deal is signed, as it would give a boost to the private finance initiative; it would give a boost to whichever train manufacturer was awarded the deal—at a time when the industry throughout western Europe is suffering from a lack of orders; it would give a further boost to London's

[Mr. John Marshall]

economy; and it would mean that many tens of thousands of people who travel on the Northern line every day could look forward to a very much better journey than they enjoy at the moment.

Such a decision would be welcome on both sides of the House and I look forward to the hon. Member for Streatham confirming virtually everything that I have said this evening.

10.16 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on his success in introducing this vital debate for Londoners. I am grateful to him for inviting me to speak. It may never happen again, especially after some of his rather provocative remarks earlier this evening. However, it should be recorded that he and I have fought shoulder-to-shoulder in this long campaign on behalf of 1.25 million Londoners. I am sure that we all hope that it is now close to a favourable decision. I want to put on record the stalwart support given to the campaign by my hon. Friends the Members for Hampstead and Hampstead (Ms Jackson) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche).

I want to make three brief points. I congratulate all the parties that have contributed to the progress so far in this project. I include in that the Treasury, which, after a certain amount of pushing and pulling, gave the go-ahead to this innovative approach. We all sense that the Department of Transport has consistently given a fair wind to the scheme. The British train builders should also be congratulated on the way in which they have risen to the challenge. I especially congratulate London Underground Ltd. on the extraordinary efficiency with which it has dealt with the procurement and evaluation process. It processed four tenders and whittled them down to two in just four weeks, which is no mean feat and would bear emulation elsewhere.

I strike a cautionary note. We all know that we shall shortly see the benefits of the private finance initiative. However, its value would be negated if London Underground were to suffer any commensurate loss in its non-PFI funding in the aftermath of a positive outcome. To take away with one hand what has been given with the other through the PFI would be to rob the public sector of any future incentive to participate in such initiatives. It would be helpful to have the Minister's assurance that there is no such intention in the Government's approach to the project.

Thirdly and finally, I recognise that the Minister is unlikely to tell us the outcome this evening. It would be nice, but unlikely. But in anticipation of a favourable decision, I hope that when the good news comes it will be regarded not as the end of the process but as the beginning of a continuous series of improvements on the Northern line. The real win for the PFI is not simply that we have a project that is value for money, but that it can be the impetus for wider benefits for all Northern line users. That means more and better services, attracting more passengers and generating the higher revenues needed for further investment—further investment especially, as the hon. Gentleman said, in track and signalling which are in such urgent need of renewal on the Northern line, but also, dare one hope, in extensions of service, not least to my own dear constituency of Streatham where the extension of the Northern line was first promised us as long ago as 1926 and is still anxiously awaited.

10.20 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I join the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on having secured his fourth debate on the prospects for and future of the service delivered by the Northern line. He is a doughty chairman of the all-party friends of the Northern line group which, in itself, is a unique achievement. I do not know any other line that has managed to attract such amity, affection and support.

You may not know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I fear I know only too well: that my hon. Friend is also good at getting me out at ungodly hours of the morning to enjoy the delights of Golders Green station. I fear that the only disappointment that we have ever experienced on such occasions is that the service has always been perfect. He has been dying to have something fall out of service or break down, but the service has always behaved impeccably.

My hon. Friend is indeed a good friend, but I do not want to underestimate his real contribution to the service on the Northern line. As the constituency Member of Parliament for a number of the stations and many thousands of Londoners who use the line, my hon. Friend has constantly harried and chivvied, argued for and supported the service that his constituents get. He has been a strong advocate of its improvement, as, on the other side of the river, has been the hon. Member for Streatham, who I am delighted to see in his place.

As the hon. Gentleman suggested, the credit for a tremendous improvement in the way that the Northern line currently operates goes not to me or to the Department, but to Dennis Tunnicliffe and the team at LUL who have done a superb job during the past few years in getting rid of the misery line tag that was always attached to the Northern line.

I had some figures just the other day which showed that in the year to date the Northern line has topped the league for the number of scheduled trains in customer service during peak hours—98.8 per cent. in service. That is very good and it is against the background of the acknowledged difficulties in the service in terms of the age of the rolling stock and, more particularly, the delicacy of some of the signalling and power supply equipment. It is a tribute to a management who have got down to the task and to every single one of the men and women who work on that line and who have done very well in turning it round.

One gets little of the flavour nowadays that the real reason why the first train is out of service is that no one bothered to get out of bed. I do not get that feeling any more. It was sometimes the case on the old nationalised railways, but it certainly is not here. The line's history is as my hon. Friend pointed out. The decades of under-investment are embarrassing to both sides of the House. The schedules for London Transport generally and for London Underground show that, in 1970, investment in LT as a whole at 1994-95 prices was £59 million. By 1979, the outgoing Labour Government were spending at the rate of £195 million a year.

That sounds a lot, but, as the hon. Member for Streatham has often pointed out, it is nowhere near the amount needed then and doubly needed now, to keep the system in an adequate state of repair and to ensure the continuance of the concept that Dennis Tunnicliffe defined as a decently modern metro. That is an incoherent description in some respects, but we all know exactly what he means.

The investment levels of the past few years in London Transport and London Underground have been staggeringly high. In 1992-93, it was £832 million; in 1993-94, £846 million; and in 1994-95, it will be £999 million. The Government are doing their best to remedy the deficiencies of previous decades, but no one is in any doubt that the mountain to be climbed is extremely high.

In short, that is our challenge. Investment is three times what it was in the early 1980s, and allows us to effect real improvements in certain parts of the service. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South was right to consider the Angel, but that one station cost £72 million—and we have not touched on the stations at the southern end of the Northern line. I see in his place my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), who takes a great interest in these matters on behalf of his constituents. He knows the state of some of the stations from the Oval southwards, which are in great need of repair—but against the background of more important priorities.

By common consent, the taxpayer is making a record contribution on the basis of historic comparisons. Once the sale of London Bus subsidiaries is completed, the proceeds will allow London Transport to invest in excess of £100 million this year. That figure is more than LT anticipated because, as my hon. Friend said, the sale proceeds so far have been extremely encouraging. We have not quite reached the end of that exercise.

Also, fares cover costs. As far as I am aware, we are recovering a higher proportion of system costs than any other metro system in Europe—which means that every penny contributed by the taxpayer goes straight into investment rather than funding a shortfall on profit and loss. It is clear that if we want further to accelerate investment, we must look to the only other source of substantial capital—the private sector. My hon. Friend was right to look to the private finance initiative to make even further progress.

In that regard, I cannot properly speculate on the outcome of the present competition. The two bidders are in the course of having their individual bids assessed by LT, and it is important that that exercise is conducted with the utmost even-handedness. That is clearly as it should be. The Department, myself and London Underground are making every effort to ensure that that process is completed and we await a final proposal from LUL.

I must enter the sole cautionary note that approval will be given only if the deal that is presented to the Government represents good value for money and transfers a significant risk to the private sector. The Government never have been in the business simply of borrowing money from other institutions in the United Kingdom. The one thing that any Government manage fairly competently in comparison with the private sector generally is borrowing money at pretty fine rates. What has to be present in such a deal is far more than merely an arrangement for leasing. That is what the participants in the exercise and the bidders fully understand.

I am confident that the private sector will be able to deliver a package which will be to the benefit of all. That will mean, of course—I hope that there is all-party agreement on the desirability of this—that, assuming that the outcome were favourable, we would certainly see replacement of the nearly 40-year-old rolling stock on the Northern line many years before it would otherwise have been affordable by a Government of any complexion, if we are to be realistic and as we are able to speak in a sense of all-party agreement on such matters.

We should look for ways in which we can use the private finance initiative further to advance the cause of accelerating that re-investment in a system in which decades of under-investment are presently in evidence. Therefore, I am happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that the private finance initiative never has been seen by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor merely as a substitute for public finance. Of course, there might be occasions when it would be entirely appropriate for that to be the case, but we have a marvellous opportunity which will serve the interests of manufacturers and of London Underground, the operator, and, perhaps most importantly, the users of the line and the taxpayers who fund its investment and improvement. It is surely a very rare event when that juxtaposition can take place.

I welcome the debate and the opportunity to put those remarks on the record. I trust that the House will join me in hoping that the outcome will be favourable.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 18 November 1994

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (FINANCE)

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. Secretary Portillo, Mr. Jonathan Aitken, Sir George Young, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory, Mr. Anthony Nelson and Mr. David Davis, presented a Bill to amend the definition of "the Treaties" and "the Community Treaties" in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 so as to include the decision of 31st October 1994 of the Council on the Communities' system of own resources and so as to remove a spent provision: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next, and to be printed. [Bill 1.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—[*Mr. Dunn.*]

Question again proposed.

Home Affairs and Environment

9.34 am

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I welcome the opportunity of this debate on the Loyal Address to highlight both the Government's achievements on law and order over the past year and our plans for the future.

At the outset of the debate, I want to extend the warmest welcome to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in his new responsibilities. We have crossed swords in the past on the environment and I look forward to our forthcoming tussles on law and order. I pay this tribute to the hon. Gentleman: his particular political skills are especially suited to the Opposition Front Bench. I hope that he has every opportunity to use them there for many years to come.

This year's legislative programme contains important Bills dealing with criminal justice and the environment. The first is a Bill to create a new criminal cases review body, as the Royal Commission on criminal justice recommended. I hope very much that we can carry through that important measure with all-party support. The new body will be independent of both Government and the courts. It will investigate alleged miscarriages of justice and, when necessary, refer them to the court for review. The Bill will set out the criteria for referral to the court. The new body will have powers to commission investigations by the police and others, and to gain access to relevant material. I should stress that the new body will actively supervise all such investigations. It will keep applicants informed of progress on their cases and provide them with full explanations when it is decided not to refer cases to the court.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I was glad to hear that the new body will have the power to commission investigations by others as well as the police. Will the Home Secretary elaborate on that point?

Mr. Howard: Well, it will depend. We shall publish details as soon as we can. The hon. Gentleman, who has taken a long interest in those matters over a period of years, will have looked carefully at the consultation document that we issued last year. When the investigation was originally conducted by the police, the investigation under the supervision of the new body will be carried out by the police, although not necessarily by the same force that carried out the original investigation. When the original investigation was carried out by customs officers,

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for instance, it will normally be appropriate for customs officers to carry out any further investigation, again under the supervision of the review body.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will introduce an Environmental Agencies Bill to improve, in particular, the effectiveness of our system of pollution control. As he was intimately involved in working up those proposals when I was Secretary of State for the Environment, I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is now bringing them to fruition.

From the moment when I became Home Secretary, I was determined to challenge the politically correct orthodoxies that too many people in prominent positions have held for far too long: the attitude that criminals are not responsible for what they do; that punishment is a dirty word; and that protection of the public comes a long way down the list of priorities. My task is to provide our country with the system of criminal justice for which it yearns, and to challenge and overcome those deep-seated and deeply entrenched attitudes. It is abundantly clear that those attitudes are deeply entrenched on the Opposition Benches.

When I proposed my 27-point plan in the autumn of last year, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) dismissed it as a "gimmick". But the then chairman of the Police Federation knew better. He described it as "first class" and

"a tremendous help in the fight against crime".

There could be no clearer example of the gulf between the parties than that.

Of course, the Opposition recognised that their views were completely out of tune with the public mood, so they resorted to a shameless attempt to camouflage those views during the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. The dilemma was at its most acute for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, who had adjusted his party's rhetoric on law and order. "Tough on crime" was the new pitch, yet he knew perfectly well that his party simply did not agree with him.

In October, I received a letter from the Norwich Labour party, which makes my point:

"This General Committee strongly opposes the Criminal Justice Bill."

It continued:

"The Criminal Justice Bill . . . represents a direct attack on the human and civil rights of working people."

It concluded:

"This General Committee demand that the Criminal Justice Bill be withdrawn."

That is the authentic voice of the Labour party.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield was thus caught on the horns of a dilemma. For months he dithered, then he decided—to abstain. That is the real message from the Labour party on crime—abstain on crime; abstain on the causes of crime.

The moment that the Bill left the Chamber and went into Committee, of course, the true intentions of the Labour party became clear. As usual, the Liberal Democrats were its allies. On issue after issue, both parties sought to obstruct, undermine and wreck the central provisions of what is now the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

I shall take but two examples. First, the Act gives the courts powers to detain persistent juvenile offenders and to give the public the protection that they need. Both the Liberal Democrats and Labour said that they supported that, yet they both attempted to dilute the power drastically in Committee and to remove it altogether in another place, by removing clause 1 of the Bill.

Secondly, on the right of silence—

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Why did the right hon. and learned Gentleman resist the Lords amendments that would have ensured that secure training orders could be put into place straight away, as they could have been applied in local authority facilities before private facilities were set up?

Mr. Howard: That would not have been the effect of the Lords amendment. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. He has come to them relatively recently. Had he been present for our debates on such matters during the past year or so, he would realise that the track record of local authorities in providing that accommodation leaves a great deal to be desired. Local authorities throughout the country—the most recent case was in the north-east and I cited that example when we last debated those matters—absolutely failed to live up to the commitments that they had made to make the accommodation available, so I fear that the right hon. Gentleman's question is based on an entirely false premise.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): The Home Secretary will be aware that about a dozen youngsters under the age of 16 are in Hull prison because there is no secure accommodation for them. Secure accommodation on Humberside, which led the country, is crowded. What extra facilities and money will he give to local authorities so that they can fulfil their statutory duties?

Mr. Howard: As the hon. Gentleman knows, or should know, that was made public some time ago. We set out our plans clearly—Home Office and Department of Health plans—on financing the provision of local authority secure accommodation, but we believe that a separate regime needs to be provided for persistent young offenders. That is why we have provided a secure training order and will provide secure training centres.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Does the Home Secretary recall that in February 1991 his predecessor responded to campaigns by many people, including many Opposition Members, and promised to provide precisely those places to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) referred? That would have ended the scandal of youngsters aged 15 and 16 being held in adult prisons because there was nowhere else for them to be held. The Government's failure to provide funds in the intervening years and to support local authority requests has resulted in the continuation of that scandal.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in the way that the Labour party is often wrong. Labour Members say that local authorities—not central Government—should be given certain responsibilities. Then the local authorities, especially those under the control of Labour

and the Liberal Democrats, fail to discharge those responsibilities and, with the gall that the hon. Gentleman just displayed, blame the Government.

It is the responsibility of local authorities to provide the accommodation. During the months that we have debated such matters in the House, well-documented examples have been produced. Leicestershire was one example; I cited the local authorities in the north-east and gave the House chapter and verse when we last discussed the matter. Although central Government have made painstaking efforts to encourage local authorities to provide the accommodation, they have persistently failed to do so, especially when under Labour and Liberal Democrat control. That is the truth of the matter and it is about time that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) acknowledged it.

Mr. Michael: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made those assertions in the past. They are as untrue now as when he first made them. Will he examine the record again and admit to the House that what he said was not true, local authorities have not been provided with the resources, their applications have been frustrated by central Government and it is central Government's failure to keep a promise made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor in 1991 that is the real scandal?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is talking twaddle. On the last occasion that we looked into the matter, when we discussed the part played by those authorities in the north-east, I gave the House chapter and verse. I gave the dates of meetings on the matter, the precise date of the commitment made by those local authorities and the date of the meeting when they reneged on that commitment. That is all on record in *Hansard*. Since that debate, we have not heard a peep out of the hon. Gentleman or any of his hon. Friends to challenge those precise facts and details, which were placed on record at that time.

Mr. McNamara: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I must make progress, but I shall give way once more.

Mr. McNamara: I was listening to that interesting exchange. We have done all those things on Humberside and we have all that accommodation, but we still have the same problem and young people under the age of 16 are still going to prison. When will we get the money to expand our facilities, so that we are able to meet our statutory requirements?

Mr. Howard: I answered that question. We made clear the arrangements that are in hand to provide extra finance from the Home Office and the Department of Health to ensure that that accommodation is made available.

The right to silence is the second example. I have lost count of the number of times when ordinary policemen have told me, "Please do something about the right to silence." They are sick and tired of professional criminals smirking in the interview room, secure in the knowledge that the jury will never find out that they refused to answer questions that an innocent person would certainly have answered.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act provides freedom of information for juries. The innocent have nothing to fear from the changes. The guilty may well have cause to regret them—and so they should. I want the guilty to be convicted and I am prepared to take the necessary action to achieve that. The message from the Opposition parties is, "Carry on clamming up."

Mr. Mullin: As I pointed out before, police officers charged with perverting the course of justice are the people who use the right to silence most regularly.

Mr. Howard: If there were any truth in the hon. Gentleman's remarks, I should expect him to be one of the greatest enthusiasts for the change that I am proposing. I look forward to him reflecting on that question and telling the House later, if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, that he has changed his position and unreservedly welcomes that measure in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.

Those attacks were not the only ones to be made on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. During its passage, demonstrations took place to protest against its provisions. As has become all too common, a violent fringe used those legitimate demonstrations—the cover of peaceful protest—to wage war on the police. Just as predictably, a Labour Member of Parliament blamed the violence on the police. Indeed, when the violent demonstrators laid siege to the House, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) said:

"Parliament deserves to be laid siege to over this Bill."

What an utterly disgraceful remark. Yet we heard not a peep from the Leader of the Opposition. There was no rebuke or disclaimer; only an embarrassed silence.

All the efforts of the Opposition parties have miserably failed. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act is now on the statute book, entire and intact. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is. It is as we wanted it to be on the statute book.

I recognise that there is a great deal more to be done. Early in the new year, I shall publish a working paper setting out the framework of our policy on law and order. At its heart will be a resounding reaffirmation of the simple principle that proper punishment should follow crime as surely as night follows day. That is why I have embarked on a fundamental review of the place of punishment in our criminal justice system.

I started with cautions. One of the reasons why criminals were not being brought to justice through the courts was that too many were not reaching the courts at all, even after they had been apprehended. They were receiving only a caution from the police. Of those cautioned or convicted for indictable offences in 1993, more than two fifths—in fact, 41 per cent.—were cautioned. And that, I repeat, was for indictable offences. Sometimes offenders were not brought before the court until they had been caught four or five times. The link between crime and punishment had become attenuated to a totally unacceptable extent.

The new circular on cautioning that I have issued will ensure that serious offenders, and those who ignore a caution and reoffend, can expect to be brought to court. Cautioning continues to have its place. For many first offenders, it works. But fresh guidance was needed, to ensure that discretion was not used in unacceptable ways. In the nine months following the issue of draft guidance, there were 14,000 fewer cautions than in the same period last year.

Inevitably, most offenders who receive punishment are punished in the community. I have been concerned to ensure that the public really do have confidence in the

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adequacy of community sentences. I have already published new national standards for consultation, and they will be introduced in their final form early in the new year. The public do not want offenders sent on holiday, either at home or abroad, as part of a sentence from the court. They want offenders to repay their debt to society. The new standards reflect the fact that there will and should be a range of different activities for different types of offender. But they make it quite clear that no activities should simply be dressed-up forms of recreation. There is work—hard work—to be done in communities. I want to see offenders doing that work. They should put something back into the community as reparation for the crimes that they have committed.

However, the new national standards will not be enough on their own. Early next year I shall publish a Green Paper that will suggest ways in which the courts can be given far more influence on the implementation of the community sentences that they pass. The first essential is to ensure that local probation services have available a full range of activities so that the court is given as much flexibility as possible. The second is to allow courts to specify in greater detail precisely what offenders should be required to do. Those vital reforms to the system of community punishment will take time to introduce, but I believe that they will do much to re-establish public confidence in the validity of the system.

However successful we are in strengthening community sentences, prison will always play a vital part in the criminal justice system. It is the only punishment suitable for serious offenders and for many repeat offenders. Many victims of serious crimes want reassurance that the perpetrators are safely behind bars for a lengthy period so that those victims can rebuild their shattered lives.

Prison brings other benefits. While inside prison, offenders cannot commit further crimes against the community and many offenders are put off from committing further offences by the threat of prison. So for many reasons, prison can indeed be said to work. I want it to more effective still in the future, and that is why I am proposing far-reaching changes to our prison regime.

First is security. The safety of the public and of prison staff must be paramount. I have always made it clear that what happened at Whitemoor was both extremely serious and totally unacceptable. That is why I appointed Sir John Woodcock, a distinguished former chief inspector of constabulary, to carry out an independent and thorough inquiry into exactly what happened. I want to learn all the lessons which can be learned, so that everything that can be done is done to make sure that nothing like it ever happens again.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Has the Home Secretary received the report on Whitemoor prison, and when will it be made available to the House?

Mr. Howard: I have not yet received the report. I shall make it available to the House as soon as I reasonably can. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the matter is entirely out of my hands. It is an independent inquiry, conducted by Sir John Woodcock. It is important that he has the time that he needs to carry out the thorough and full investigation to which I have just referred.

If prison is to be effective and if public confidence in our prisons is to be restored, action is required in three other areas. The first is temporary prison leave. As the House will know, I have been conducting a thorough review of the system of leave from prisons. In too many cases, the system has been abused. I have come to the conclusion that it needs to be tightened up. I can announce to the House today changes in the system that are likely to lead to a reduction of about 40 per cent. in the amount of leave granted. I have placed full details of the new arrangements in the Library.

The new system will have a number of important features. First, with immediate effect, a much more rigorous risk assessment will be carried out before any temporary release is permitted. The safety of the public must be paramount. Secondly, there will be no automatic right to temporary release, which will be permitted only in certain carefully prescribed circumstances: first, leave on specified compassionate grounds; secondly, leave towards the end of a sentence to assist prisoners in reintegrating into the community; and finally, leave for training, education or work experience designed to help in prisoner rehabilitation. That form of leave will not be available to the most dangerous prisoners—those in category A or B prisons—and will be considered only when suitable courses are not available within the prison. My longer-term objective will be to restrict releases in that category to an absolute minimum by providing more facilities inside prison.

Thirdly, I am very disturbed by the number of occasions on which prisoners abscond when on temporary release. I have therefore decided to introduce a new offence designed to make breaches of licence while on temporary prison leave a criminal offence for the first time.

Prison governors will have an overriding duty, in considering any release, not only to ensure the safety of the public but to maintain public confidence in the prison system. The necessary training for the full introduction of the new arrangements will be completed early next year. I intend to review the new system by the end of next year to see whether any further changes are needed.

The second area for action is prison conditions. As I have said many times, basic conditions in prison should be decent but austere. I attach great importance to both. That is why slopping out has been virtually phased out. That is why there are no prisoners three to a cell designed for one, when just seven years ago there were over 5,000 of them. But austerity matters, too. There has been a great deal of public anger at reports of lax conditions and privileges handed out as a matter of course. I share that anger. So I shall soon announce a new system of privileges and sanctions. Under that new system, privileges will have to be earned by good behaviour and will be removed for bad behaviour. I believe that the new system will be a powerful influence for change for the better in our prisons.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied that the qualifications required to be a prison officer, and the training that officers receive when they are first employed, are sufficient to achieve the rising standards that we all seek in our prisons? Will he reflect on the fact that, time and again, reports on prisons suggest that they are disgracefully dirty? A work force is

there that should surely be given pride in itself and in its accommodation by having much higher standards of cleanliness enjoined upon it.

Mr. Howard: On the first of my hon. Friend's points, it is important that, as we move towards a new regime, the training required to enable that regime to be implemented effectively is given to prison officers. I acknowledge that additional training will be required.

Cleanliness of prisons is always remarked on by the chief inspector of prisons in his reports. Sometimes he commends a prison for its cleanliness; on other occasions, as my hon. Friend rightly says, he will criticise a prison for lack of cleanliness. I very much agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks and I hope that there will be continued improvement in that area.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): All the announcements that my right hon. and learned Friend is making today will be welcomed by my constituents, who want more punishment and less forgiveness for crime. One suspects, however, that many of those ideas do not have the support of many of the people in the services that my right hon. and learned Friend is discussing. For example, the announcement on temporary prison leave was leaked in *The Guardian* this morning in advance of the announcement to the House. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure me that there will be an inquiry into the leak, and that he will root out those in the prison service who do not support those reforms?

Mr. Howard: I can confirm that there will be an inquiry into the leak. As for my hon. Friend's general point, I think that there is general understanding in the prison service—*[Interruption.]* I note that this is a matter for jesting on the Opposition Front Bench—important questions about conditions in our prisons and about the extent to which austere regimes are run there are apparently matters for jest among Opposition Front Benchers. The country will take due note of their reaction.

To answer my hon. Friend again: I am laying down the policy that the prison service will follow, and the prison service accepts that it will follow that policy.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied that manning levels in the prison service are adequate to cope with the changes? Has he any thoughts about the sort of people who are recruited to the prison service? Could more be done to bring in people who have served in the armed forces, who are likely to bring to the service the new dimension that would give my right hon. and learned Friend the positive reaction that he seeks?

Mr. Howard: I understand and have some sympathy with that point. The ratio of prison officers to prisoners has improved steadily and dramatically in recent years. I do not think that there can be any reasonable concern over general manning levels. I have a good deal of sympathy with my hon. Friend's point about the background from which new prison officers could be recruited.

I come finally in this section to drugs and prisons. There is no doubt that there is far too much drug taking in our prisons. I am determined to do all that I can to deal with the problem. That is why I shall shortly be introducing new prison rules, made under the new powers in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which will require prisoners to provide urine samples for drug testing. I hope to announce the introduction of a new regime of drug testing shortly, and I have no doubt that it will make a major contribution to dealing with that serious problem.

Of course, drugs are a problem not just in prisons. They are a problem throughout society, and the Government have always recognised that. That is why we have acted to increase the maximum sentence for trafficking in hard drugs to life imprisonment, and it is why we introduced tough powers to seize drug traffickers' assets. But if we are to tackle the problem effectively, we need a comprehensive approach—in the producer countries, at the ports, in the schools and on the streets. We need education, treatment and tough punishment for pushers. All those are being pursued.

Last month my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House gave that effort fresh impetus with the publication of the Government's new strategy document. I can assure the House that we shall continue the campaign unrelentingly. We know just how destructive drug taking is for our whole society.

There should be no doubt at all about the determination of the Government in one respect: legalisation of drugs is certainly not the answer. It may be the view of the Liberal Democrat party, but it is not the view of the public or of the police, and it is most emphatically not my view.

Mr. Beith: I hope that the Home Secretary will not forget, however, that it was the view of the current Chief Secretary to the Treasury, which means that it must be a matter of legitimate debate.

As to whether cannabis might be legalised, the best solution is probably the one that we have advanced, which is to get a royal commission to consider aspects of drug policy, including whether legalising the possession of cannabis—now decreasingly an act leading to convictions—would be a dangerous signal leading to further drug taking, or would be helpful.

Mr. Howard: Many matters are legitimate subjects for debate. That does not get away from the fact that it was the right hon. Gentleman's party conference that voted to legalise cannabis. I have no doubt that he is deeply embarrassed by that, but such was the view of his party.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: It is also the hon. Gentleman's view, I think.

Mr. Banks: I apologise for missing the earlier part of the Home Secretary's speech, but how does he see the fact that about two thirds of all police forces are handing out large numbers of adult cautions to those found in possession of small amounts of cannabis for personal use? In the Metropolitan police area, about 5,800 such cautions were issued last year, so clearly the police feel differently about the issue.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's conclusion does not remotely follow from his premise. Had he been here earlier, he would have heard me refer to the guidance that I have issued on cautioning. That guidance applies to all offences, in just the same way as it applies to offences of possession of cannabis. The guidance recognises that it will often be appropriate, for a first offence, that a caution be administered. That is what is happening in the Metropolitan police area and elsewhere. It happens for

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offences of possession of drugs and for other offences. The guidance also makes it clear, however, that repeat offences should not be the subject of cautions, and the police are implementing the guidance. So the possession of drugs is not being treated differently from other offences.

Many criminals start on and persist in a life of crime because they calculate, sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously, that the risks of crime are small in relation to the potential rewards. I have taken a number of steps to increase the risks that they run, but I believe that it is right that action should also be taken to reduce the rewards. That is why I propose that the existing powers to confiscate the proceeds of crime should be greatly strengthened, as has already been done for drug trafficking and terrorism.

For criminals who engage in a series of crimes, the courts will be able to assume that all property that has passed through a defendant's hands in the previous six years came from crime and will be able to confiscate its value. It will no longer be possible to avoid paying the confiscation order by serving a term of imprisonment in default. I very much hope that a private Member's Bill can be used this Session to introduce those important measures. We shall give every help in its drafting. I hope and expect that it will receive widespread support so that it can be on the statute book as soon as possible.

However successful we are in combating crime, the victim will always be with us. It is essential that we have a properly funded, efficient method of marking society's concern at injuries to the victims of violent crime. By any standards, we have such a system. It is and will remain the most generous in the world. Indeed, last year more than a third of all compensation paid out by state schemes across the world was made available to British victims of crime.

The new scheme that we have introduced will remain extremely generous by any international comparison. Under its provisions, 60 per cent. of all beneficiaries will get as much as or more than they got under the old scheme. But it is a matter of fact that costs under the old system were likely to have trebled to £500 million a year by the year 2000—double the likely cost at that time of the new scheme. As usual, the Labour party has tried to have it both ways. It attacks the new scheme but refuses to say whether it would restore the old. As the House knows, the procedures that were followed in the introduction of the new scheme have been challenged in the courts. The divisional court ruled in our favour and last week the Court of Appeal ruled by a majority against us. We were given leave to appeal and we await the result of the final judgment of the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords.

We have also helped victims in other ways. The Government gave Victim Support funding for the first time, and that funding has grown rapidly to its current level of £10 million. That will enable Victim Support to provide new arrangements in all Crown courts by the end of next year designed to make appearing in court as a witness less of an ordeal. By abolishing old-style committal proceedings, as we have done in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, we shall ensure that victims are spared unnecessary court appearances.

I am also acting to make sure that pre-sentence reports include a section that takes account of the effect of the crime on the victim. For victims of serious crimes, reassurance is best provided by the knowledge that the perpetrator is behind bars and that victims' concerns will be taken into account in any decisions to grant release on temporary licence. That is why I intend to set up a telephone hot line from next month to allow victims to communicate their fears about an inmate to the governor of the prison concerned. In all those ways, the Government are demonstrating by their actions their determination to safeguard the interests of victims, and we shall continue to do that.

Mr. Beith: How will victims know that a release is being considered?

Mr. Howard: They do not need to know that. All that a victim needs to communicate is his concern. The only purpose of the hot line is to enable victims to register their concern with the prison authorities. At the moment, victims complain that when they wish to pass information to prison authorities they do not know which number to ring and are often passed from pillar to post and given a series of telephone numbers. It is difficult for them to get the information to the relevant people. The only purpose, limited but important, of the hot line is to enable victims to transmit concerns to the prison authorities who will take them into account.

Victims can register their concern at the outset, on sentencing. If the governor is later considering the issue of temporary release, he will see that concern and note that it is some years old. That will give him the opportunity to ask for checks to see whether the concern remains and whether the victim still lives in the same place. It is a method of ensuring that information about victims' concerns reaches the relevant authorities.

Of course, the best way of helping victims is by reducing their number. The latest figures clearly show that the police are achieving some success in that direction. There has been a record fall in recorded crime generally; burglaries are down by well over 100,000; and car thefts are down by over 130,000. There are a number of reasons for that, such as the greater use of closed-circuit television and improved car and household security.

I pay tribute to the police for their increasing success in targeting known criminals. Rather than waiting for a crime to be committed, by which time the trail may have gone cold, the police are increasingly pro-active. They are taking the initiative, taking the fight to the criminal and turning the tide, and in that they deserve and need all our support.

In my first speech in the House as Home Secretary I laid great stress on the importance of building the strongest possible partnership between the police and the public. Without that, we cannot hope to achieve what is possible in preventing crime and bringing criminals to justice. In September, I launched a new campaign, "Partners against Crime", which is designed to take matters further. It has three components, the first of which is neighbourhood watch. There are now 130,000 schemes across the country covering 5 million households, and Crime Concern has set a new target of 200,000 covering 7.5 million households by the end of 1996.

The second component of the campaign relates to neighbourhood constables. Special constables have an indispensable role in helping the police, and I have raised

the recruitment target to 30,000 by the end of 1996. Until now, they have not always been able to request that they serve in their own communities, but chief police officers have agreed that that restriction should be removed. In future, an increasing number of areas will be served by their own neighbourhood constables who will have all the powers of police constables.

The third component is street watch. At Glenfield near Leicester, where the scheme already exists, it has been found that it not only helps to prevent crime, but directly strengthens the sense of community spirit. As Dr. Ken Russell, a former parish councillor, put it:

"We found people talking to each other who had never spoken before. There were instances of people who fell out and never spoke to each other who now do. Its achievement in terms of community spirit is tremendous."

[Interruption.] We note the attitude of Labour Members to real attempts by the community to deal with crime. Jacqueline Price, the local neighbourhood watch co-ordinator, added:

"Caring for each other comes naturally once the scheme is set up. The co-ordinator becomes aware of the vulnerable and the elderly in the road."

It is typical of the Labour party that it should pour scorn on that initiative by volunteers. But it supports an initiative in Sedgefield involving paid wardens merely because it is controlled by the local council. There could be no clearer evidence of the gulf between our two parties.

During the past year, the Government have successfully piloted on to the statute book what is by any standards one of the most far-reaching pieces of criminal justice legislation since the war. The messages contained in that legislation will enhance the ability of the criminal justice system to redress crime, bring criminals to justice and significantly reduce the fear of crime, so improving the quality of life for many members of society.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The Home Secretary will be aware that one of the biggest problems in virtually every constituency is that many thousands of people, especially the elderly and women, are afraid to go out at night. Will the Government's actions enable those people to go about their lives in the way that they are entitled to, now and in future?

Mr. Howard: I thought that the words that I used might not be greeted with universal enthusiasm in the Labour party. The words that I have just used were not mine, but those of the Police Federation, in setting out what it thought would be the effect of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. It thinks that by significantly reducing the fear of crime, the Act could improve the quality of life for many people. I hope that it will do so for those to whom the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) referred. It is important to do all that we can to fight the fear of crime, which keeps the elderly as prisoners in their homes.

One of the most important achievements of street watch, which is so derided and mocked by the Opposition, as we saw again a few moments ago, is that members of street watch accept as part of their responsibilities going out at night to escort elderly, vulnerable people who want to visit friends or relatives at the other end of the town but are afraid to do so on their own. They are happy to do so when they are escorted by members of street watch. That is a practical way to reduce the fear of crime among vulnerable people and it will improve the quality of their lives. I hope that the hon. Member for Burnley will support my efforts to achieve that objective.

Mr. Rowe: My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned volunteers. Will he reiterate his view that organisations that have worked with young offenders, many of whom could otherwise be described as children, should continue to use volunteers to create worthwhile occupations for such young people and rehabilitate them? Will he work with us to extend opportunities for such work?

Mr. Howard: There is a role for people in such work and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his long association with the voluntary movement. I agree with him, and the thrust of my earlier remarks, that there is great scope for voluntary effort, confirms that. I know that my hon. Friend shares that view.

The reaction of the Opposition parties to the legislation in the previous Session has shown them up in their true colours. They are soft on crime and they always will be. When they talk endlessly about the causes of crime, they come perilously close to making excuses for it. They will never understand that and that is why they cannot be trusted on law and order. That is why they occupy the Opposition Benches, as they will continue to do for many years.

10.19 am

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I thank the Home Secretary for the compliments—which I think were full-hearted—that he paid me at the beginning of his speech. I look forward to many debates with him across the Dispatch Box. My only sorrow is that I shall miss the clashes and occasional insights that the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) achieved in debate.

One reason that I am happy to be reacquainted with the right hon. and learned Gentleman is because it reminds me of some of his skills; for example, his skill with the scissors and paste in recycling old speeches and announcements. Not a single thing that he said today was new. Indeed, I could point directly to large chunks of his speech that he made in our debate on the Gracious Speech on 23 November last year, and also in his speech at the Conservative party conference last month.

The Home Secretary has made the announcement on home leave three times during the past two weeks. I note from his smirk that he accepts what I say. When I came fresh to the issue, I was astonished to discover the laxity in the conditions for home leave and temporary release, and the way that the matter had been allowed to drift by his Department.

Until six months ago, no proper records were kept of the numbers taking home leave and being granted temporary release. I had always assumed that it would be an offence not to comply with the conditions of home leave, the most significant one of which should surely be to return at the end of it. It is no wonder that a large number of people are absconding when there is no penalty if they do not return. Therefore, we give the proposed measures to deal with that our full support, but they come rather late.

Mr. Howard: If the Opposition have been concerned for so long about laxity in the conditions for home leave and temporary release, will the hon. Gentleman refer me

[Mr. Howard]

to a single occasion on which the Leader of the Opposition, when he was shadow Home Secretary, asked me to tighten the conditions?

Mr. Straw: I shall do my best to provide the Home Secretary with an answer. I am aware that he is preparing himself for opposition, so I understand that he forgets that it is a Conservative Government who have been in charge for the past 15 years. He also forgets that some of the failures of the system remain buried within it for a long time, and it is difficult to discover negatives. I note that he did not demur for a moment from what I said about the lack of monitoring by his Department and the extraordinary fact that it has not been an offence—and still is not—to break the conditions of home leave.

I hope that there will be some serious debates in the Chamber about important criminal justice matters. The right to silence is one of them. My party supports the majority view of the royal commission. I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman takes a different view. Sometimes, Conservative Members speak with forked tongues on the issue. They want to abandon the right to silence for common criminals, but when serious accusations are made against senior members of the Conservative party, the first thing we hear them cry is that those people are innocent until others have proven them guilty, and that they are entitled to their right to silence.

Has the Home Secretary once complained about the fact that Lady Porter has exercised her right to silence throughout the hearings at Westminster city hall? Has he once complained to the Secretary of State for Employment about standing up and claiming that the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) had the right to silence in the face of the accusations made against him? Has he written to the Employment Secretary about that?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman completely misrepresents the position. Of course it is true that someone is innocent until proven guilty. That has always been the position under our law and it remains so. That is not affected in the slightest degree by the changes that we are making to the right to silence. People will, quite rightly, continue to assert that someone is innocent until he is proven guilty, but that has nothing to do with the point that the hon. Gentleman tries to make, or the changes that we are making to the law.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friends will have noted a significant omission in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's intervention. He did not say a word about whether he approved or disapproved of Lady Porter exercising a right to silence. We shall continue to ask him questions about that.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman said that he hoped for a debate on criminal justice issues, but instead he resorts to throwing muck. That is his policy.

Mr. Straw: I have followed the investigation at Westminster with great care, and I have attended the proceedings twice during the past month. I would not describe that as muck. Very serious allegations have been made, and the Conservative party, at national level, has exercised double standards.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The hon. Gentleman referred to a couple of cases in which people have exercised their right to silence. He then commented on that and drew inferences from it. Does he agree that all the legislation has done is to allow a court to comment on the exercising of the right to silence and to draw inferences from it? He appears to be agreeing with the legislation. Perhaps he should adjust his comments accordingly.

Mr. Straw: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his dexterity. As he knows, the issue is rather more complicated than he suggests. If it were not, the majority of the royal commission recommendations would have to be dismissed, because the Conservative party did not agree with them. There is a serious issue of whether and at what point the right to silence should be abrogated. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) dealt with that point at the time. When I discussed the matter with the Crown Prosecution Service, I was told that it felt that pre-trial disclosure by the defence was much more important. I support that, but I understand that it is not in the legislation.

I want now to deal with the question of a criminal cases review authority. As the House knows, the Gracious Speech contained no specific reference to any criminal justice measure for England and Wales. There was simply a delphic reference to "further measures" relating to law and order. A large number of reports from the Law Commission have not been acted on by the Government. I would have liked to hear the Home Secretary say that some of them would be the subject of legislation during the current Session. One important one concerns the absurd bar on prosecutions for murder when the victim dies more than a year and a day after the attack. That matter has much exercised my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn).

If the Home Secretary is prepared to consult us in advance about the contents of measures that would implement Law Commission reports, we stand ready to co-operate in ensuring their passage through the House. We now know that the words in the Gracious Speech—

"further measures of law reform"—

embrace a Bill to create a criminal cases review authority, as recommended by the royal commission.

By all accounts, the Bill's inclusion in the programme was a close-run thing. Just 10 days ago, the Home Secretary's representative on earth, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), briefed the press that the Bill might be left out in this Session of Parliament. With that possibility in mind, I wrote last week to the right hon. and learned Gentleman saying that we stood ready to agree a timetable for the Bill, provided that there was prior discussion and agreement on its contents. That offer still stands, and I hope that something positive comes from it.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield told the House on Wednesday, we have long urged legislation on a review authority. We backed the Home Affairs Select Committee's 1982 report, and we produced our own detailed report to that effect in 1990.

It is probably accepted across the Chamber that public confidence in the criminal justice system in England and Wales has rarely been lower than today, because the public do not sense that it deals effectively with those who are guilty, or has adequate safeguards for ensuring that those innocent of crimes are not wrongly convicted and spend years behind bars, unable to clear their names.

Notorious miscarriages of justice, such as those involving the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six, and less celebrated cases, prompted the establishment of the Runciman royal commission. The common characteristic of almost all miscarriages of justice that were later put right is that the pursuit and investigation of evidence to establish innocence was by journalists or supporters of the prisoners—often in the face of great resistance by those running the system. Without the extraordinary tenacity of, for example, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)—who was outrageously and ignorantly abused for years as some pro-IRA crank—the Birmingham Six might still be in gaol.

There has been almost an inbuilt, institutional reluctance to recognise that our criminal justice system, so often held up as the best in the world, and unquestionably containing many admirable features, could have failed so comprehensively in some cases. The result of those failures was not only the incarceration of people for crimes that they did not commit, but the fact that those guilty of them have continued to walk free.

The establishment of an independent review authority in place of the work of Home Office officials and ministerial discretion is a major step in the right direction. Of itself, it will not be a magic wand. How it operates, whether it will be seen as independent and what powers it exercises will be of critical importance. I am glad that the Home Secretary acknowledged some of those points.

We shall need to examine in detail some aspects of the authority's operation—not least, the system for the supervision and execution of investigations into miscarriages of justice. In our judgment, there will be cases in which it will be essential for public confidence that such investigations be independent of the police.

Of course there are resource issues, and we do not resile from those. The authority is likely to be overrun in its initial stages by a large number of applications—many of which may be without merit. If the system established can command public and professional support from the outset, so that, when the authority says no to an application, everyone understands that that is a fair judgment and means no, that should save resources in the short run and not expend them.

On Wednesday, following the extremely effective speech of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the House witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of the Prime Minister threatening his own colleagues with political extinction if they dared to vote against a Bill to increase Britain's contributions to the European Union. In doing so, the Prime Minister implicitly accepted that his party would suffer ignominious defeat in the event that he called a general election. After all, if the Prime Minister were confident of victory, it would hardly be a threat. He knows that the British public have lost all trust in his Administration and that he cannot regain it. The public were lied to about tax, deceived over crime and cruelly double-crossed over the Government's attitude to the victims of crime.

I am a devil for punishment, so I spent the weekend before last reading every speech made by Conservative Home Secretaries to each Conservative party conference since 1979. It was a numbing experience, but worth it. Virtually every year, there was stomach-churning rhetoric about how the Tory party claimed to be on the side of the victim and of the police, and how Britain's streets would be safer once Conservative policy had worked.

As the years rolled on, there was an increasing sense of desperation, as successive holders of that great office realised that their party had blown it. Overall, crime has doubled since 1979. Crimes of violence, which engender the greatest fear, have risen even faster—in the case of robbery, they have increased by 340 per cent. over 15 years, rising last year as well. Although the rhetoric has remained largely the same, the policies pursued have shown no similar consistency. They lurch from one wheeze to another.

One year, the public are told that prison does not work; the next, that prison does work. When the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) was Home Secretary, he said:

"Prisons are an expensive way of making bad people worse."

The present Home Secretary launched a specific attack on that view on 22 November, and did so again today. When the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) was Home Secretary, his Department issued a press release celebrating a reduction in the number of young people given custodial sentences. The current holder of the office implies that his policies are not to be judged by whether the prison population decreases. That is in total contrast with the views taken by his predecessors.

Is it any wonder that the public are confused, and no longer believe a word that they are told by Conservative Ministers? Why should the public have any confidence, when even the Home Secretary's own colleagues do not? Writing in *The Guardian* last September, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley said of the current Home Secretary:

"I do not know what he is doing. He is going to make a lot of bad decisions if he is not careful."

Never was the right hon. Member for Mole Valley more prescient. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's one and a half years as Home Secretary have been littered with bad decisions—none more so than in respect of the criminal injuries compensation scheme, on which the right hon. and learned Gentleman was humiliatingly overruled by the Court of Appeal last week.

The Home Secretary's approach to that scheme speaks volumes about the way that the Conservative party has broken the electorate's trust. The House will be aware that the central issue in the court judgment, which found that the Home Secretary behaved unlawfully, was whether he was entitled to use the powers of the royal prerogative to amend the scheme when legislation had been passed in 1988 but not activated meanwhile.

The Master of the Rolls held that the Home Secretary had

"acted unlawfully and abused his prerogative or common law powers".

Revealingly, the legalities of the compensation scheme were not an issue for the Tory party in the 1992 general election. Before any election, the Conservatives publish a campaign guide, such as that which I hold—which was published before the 1994 European elections. In view of the position adopted by the Home Secretary in the Court of Appeal, I wonder whether he has read the guide published for the last general election. It stated that the compensation scheme was one of the most generous in the world and

"has been placed on a statutory basis, giving victims who suffer significant injuries an automatic right to compensation for the first time".

[Mr. Straw]

Note the use of the present tense, with no suggestion that the statutory provisions had yet to be activated. If that text is to be believed, those provisions were already giving automatic rights to victims at the time of the guide's publication. But that was wholly untrue.

The Secretary of State has some explaining to do. Why were palpably untrue statements about the scheme, which would have been vetted by Ministers and their advisers, included in that election guide and made by Tory party members then? Why was the scheme's cost simply a matter for self-congratulation in that campaign guide, when criticisms made now about its cost applied then with equal force?

The Home Secretary told the House a few minutes ago that, if the scheme continued unreformed, its cost was likely to rise to £500 million by the year 2000. That is not what the 1994 guide told us. It said that the cost of the scheme would rise from £164 million in 1993-94, not to £500 million, but to £570 million by 2000. I want to know who is telling the truth. Is it the Secretary of State or the Conservative campaign guide, which Conservative leaders keep telling us is an authoritative document?

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Neither.

Mr. Straw: I suspect that my hon. Friend is probably right.

I have had work carried out on the costings contained in the Conservative campaign guide, by the statisticians in the House of Commons Library. They tell me that the Home Office's calculations were based on a straight-line extrapolation of previous trends, and assume that the number of cases resolved in each year rose by 9 per cent. and that the value of each settlement rose by 5 per cent. plus inflation.

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman understands how compound interest works, he will know that those assumptions, which amount to about a 17 per cent. compound increase each year, do not remotely produce a three and a half times increase in the cost of the scheme over six years. I can see that he is looking perplexed, and I am not surprised, because the calculations in the guide, and the ones that he has used, do not fit with the assumptions of his own statisticians.

Let us assume for a moment that the figures quoted in the guide are correct—an increase from £164 million to £570 million over six years. Even if we make allowance for a 5 per cent. plus inflation increase in the value of awards, it means that, as a matter of policy, the Secretary of State now expects serious crimes of violence and the applications arising therefrom to continue to rise year in and year out at not less than 15 per cent. each year, because to achieve a rate of increase of three and a half times over six years requires a 23 per cent. compound interest rate.

Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that he must accept as a matter of policy, for the figures to have any meaning, that violent crime will continue to accelerate at a double-digit rate for the next six years, each year?

Mr. Howard: The answer is no, and I am astonished that, given the amount of work that the hon. Gentleman has clearly put into the matter, he is not aware of this simple point. The remarkable fact is that there is no statistical relationship between the number of applications under the scheme, or the amount paid out under the scheme, and the increase in violent crime.

If we look at what has happened over the 30 years during which the scheme has operated, we find that violent crime has increased by 500 per cent., that the number of applications under the scheme has increased by 3,000 per cent. and that the amount paid out under the scheme has increased by 40,000 per cent. So there is no relationship, as it happens, and as can be clearly and demonstrably established, between the number of violent crimes and the amount paid out under the scheme, which demolishes the assumption on which the whole of the hon. Gentleman's rather rickety edifice was based.

Mr. Straw: It scarcely demolishes the assumption at all. What it shows is that there are virtually no sustainable assumptions of any kind in the Home Secretary's calculations.

Mr. Howard: One can extrapolate.

Mr. Straw: But it depends—if the Home Secretary knows anything about extrapolation—on which period he uses. He is assuming that it is an upward-rising trend. How does he take account of the fact—he claims that awards are going up year by year—that, in fact, awards between 1991-92 and 1992-93 went down by 3,000, not up?

The Home Secretary does not understand the figures. He has no idea how they were arrived at. He failed to explain the difference between the fact that the Conservative party campaign guide quotes £570 million, while he quotes £500 million. Does he wish to intervene on that point? Or are we to say, "Well, it could be £500 million or it could be £570 million. Take your pick." What is the answer? Which one is accurate?

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I want to hear from the Secretary of State, not the organ grinder.

Which one of those two figures is an accurate estimate? The answer is that the Secretary of State does not know. If he wants to restore any credibility to his already tattered reputation when it comes to helping the victims of crime, he must provide details of the assumptions behind his calculations, and at long last own up to the fact that they include an assumption that violent crime will continue to rise by a double-digit element each year for the next six years.

Over the past year, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has achieved the remarkable feat of offending just about everyone involved in the criminal justice system: from the police, prison officers, justices' clerks, probation officers and lawyers, to the victims in whose name he claims to act. A period of quiet reflection would surely have been in order. Instead—we were not laughing at the issue of the victims, but at him and at the way in which he tried to pretend that he was concerned about them—he has cut the most important scheme to help victims by half.

Even some of the Home Secretary's former friends on the right of the Tory party are deserting him. This is what the noble Lord Tebbit said in "Panorama" in discussing the causes of crime, in May this year:

"I think you have to approach from a direction which some might say is almost a Labour party direction, of saying: What are the causes of crime? Why are there so many people engaged in crime? As well as, What do you do with people when they commit crime?"

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's big idea of "Partners against Crime" fails to grasp the real meaning of partnership, which should not just place the onus on the individual to prevent crime, but should also involve all the main agencies of the community and the criminal justice system in a common fight against crime. He is happy to steal Labour's language on crime prevention, but not our prescription. He has failed comprehensively to implement the key recommendations of his own Department's report—the Morgan report—which would have placed a statutory duty on local authorities, in conjunction with the police, to develop community safety and crime prevention measures. What is missing from the Gracious Speech and from his speech today is the promise of legislation to create that new statutory duty and partnership.

During the passage of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, Labour highlighted a series of gaps in the law, which have become increasingly problematic as the fear of crime has escalated. In many high-crime areas, new, private security companies have knocked on doors, offering night-time surveillance for the cost of a couple of pounds a week. In some cases, they may be legitimate businesses staffed by highly trained security guards, but one investigation after another has exposed another side to that business.

One senior police officer told us of a firm owned by two partners, one of whom had a long record of fraud, while his partner had a record of violence. In another case, the person knocking on doors hinted that his company could take no responsibility for what happened to a home that was not under his protection. The public have no way of knowing whether what they are being offered is genuine security or whether they are being drawn into a protection racket.

The police, who are very worried about that, have no power to act. I am very sorry that, so far, the Government have rejected our proposals to give interim powers to chief constables to provide some regulation of that area. The right hon. and learned Gentleman, I understand, has rejected the idea of statutory regulation, yet responsible and established companies in the private security industry join us in demanding such regulation to protect the public.

On the issue of walking with a purpose—of vigilantes—I want every member of the community who is able-bodied to recognise his or her responsibilities to other members of the community. I do not want to see anybody walking by on the other side, leaving matters to the police, because the police can work effectively only if they have the full support of the community and of politicians.

Some of the schemes that have been suggested must be examined in careful detail. The Secretary of State should be as aware as we in the Labour party are of the fine line between people who are organised as members of the community and who become vigilantes and of the very serious problems that can be caused by people, who sometimes have no training and may have criminal records, who can go and buy a uniform from a theatrical costumier and set themselves up as security men and offer themselves as parish constables. The Secretary of State is apparently willing to allow that to continue without any regulation at all. It is wholly unsatisfactory. That is why people are very worried indeed about the current situation.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman really must not confuse what are completely separate issues. He should know that we have agreed with the Association of Chief Police Officers a set of guidelines under which every street watch scheme should operate. If the schemes do not operate in conformity with those guidelines and if they do not operate with the co-operation and under the direction of the police in their area, I would not approve what they are doing, and they would not come within the scope of street watch.

Mr. Straw: I notice that, despite my generosity in allowing the Secretary of State to intervene, he never answers the key question. The key question is why is he letting the security industry carry on in a totally unregulated way. He seems content to allow that to happen and to allow cowboys and all sorts of people with criminal records to set themselves up as security firms. There is no regulation at all. It is part of, I gather, rolling back the frontiers of the state. Even the regulation of law and order is ineffective under this Government.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition stated so clearly that we will make a lasting impact on crime in this country only if we are both tough on crime and tough on its causes. We have to move away from the false choice between punishment and prevention. We need a criminal justice system which works and inspires confidence in the public; one which deals with offenders more effectively and ensures that the penalty is appropriate to the crime.

But, at the same time, we need a national strategy to stop crimes being committed in the first place, and such a strategy needs both to tackle the underlying causes of crime and to ensure that action is taken now to reduce offending. There is no excuse for offending, and individuals must be responsible for their own behaviour; but it is a foolish Government who do not see that, if children grow up in a society which offers a poor education, little hope for the future and no prospect of a steady job, they are more likely to drift into offending.

Indeed, after a long period of education, even the Secretary of State has now accepted our analysis of the nature of crime. We congratulate him on this small beginning, for he told the Institute of Directors in April 1994:

"Failures in the home, at school and in society at large do not cause crime in the sense that sunshine melts snow . . . but clearly these failures do create conditions in which crime and law breaking can thrive."

Mr. Howard: Of course they do.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State says, of course they do. I am very glad to have that on the record. That is exactly what we have been saying for 15 years, and what he has been denying for 14 and a half years.

It is Opposition Members who have the vision and the policies to tackle crime. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has today delivered the tired speech of an

[Mr. Straw]

already discredited Home Secretary. There can be no grounds for complacency about the appalling levels of crime in our society.

Last year, in the debate on the Gracious Speech, the Prime Minister said that all western countries had experienced a similar rise in crime to England and Wales. This month, the Home Office produced figures which conclusively gave the lie to that claim.

The Secretary of State's own Department's figures show that, in the five years between 1987 and 1992, recorded crime in England and Wales rose by 44 per cent.—the highest increase of any of the countries mentioned in that survey. The only record on crime which the Government can claim is that crime in Britain under the Conservatives has risen further and faster than in any other industrialised country surveyed by the Secretary of State's Department.

We have heard nothing—

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I am just coming to the end of my speech.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I am just coming to the end of my speech.

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has twice in his speech, at different points, referred approvingly to the recorded crime figures. He did so just a moment ago and he did so much earlier in his speech when he referred to the increase in violent crime. May we then take it that the hon. Gentleman accepts the validity of the recorded crime figures, and will he therefore join me in paying tribute to the police for the fact that the recorded crime figures up to the 12 months at the end of June 1994 show the biggest fall in 40 years?

Mr. Straw: There is a huge debate to be had, as the Secretary of State would know if he had any intelligence, about the underlying validity of the crime figures. [*Laughter.*] Of course there is, and he knows there is. "The British Crime Survey", which was published on the same day as the figures he has mentioned for the previous two years, told a rather different story about what has happened to crime.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. "The British Crime Survey" indeed gives a different picture. One respect is that it shows a much lower increase in violent crime over the period referred to by the hon. Gentleman than the figures he used earlier. He cannot have it both ways. Either he accepts the recorded crime figures for violent crime, which is why I put the question to him, or he accepts "The British Crime Survey", which shows a very much smaller increase in violent crime over that period. On which does the hon. Gentleman rely?

Mr. Straw: The survey also shows a much larger increase in overall crime. If crime is going down, our party is the first to welcome it. That was made clear by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. If it has gone down by five percentage points in the past year, it will take another 15 years before it approaches anything like the level it was when the Conservatives came to power. I do not believe—

Mr. Jenkin: It was going up.

Mr. Straw: It was going down. If the hon. Gentleman had the sense to read his previous leaders' speeches, he will notice that, at the 1979 general election, a charge was not made with any force that crime was rising—because it was not. That is the truth of it. It will take 15 years of this progress to get back to the level of crime as it was when Labour left office. The Secretary of State must be living in a world inhabited by no one else from this country if he does not believe that there is the deepest anxiety about crime, the fear of crime and the Government's failure to tackle it in each of the past 15 years.

We have heard nothing in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech today to convince us that he has any serious understanding of the nature of crime in society, or any real policies to tackle one of the most serious problems facing this country today. The Government have little strategy for dealing with crime, and few policies to reassure a public who are deeply concerned about a breakdown in law and order. This Government have failed the country, and they have failed the victims of crime. The nation and the victims of crime deserve better, and they will get better from Labour.

10.56 am

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I welcome the Gracious Speech, for a number of reasons. Politics in this country at the present time is in a very strange state. Since we do not have masses of legislation going through the House this year, perhaps both main parties and the minority party of the Liberal Democrats may be able to think about their policies and get them right long before the next general election. With the current changes of policy in all the major parties, the debate within those parties over the next year must ensure that we get the policies right and in line with the wishes of the public, which will be good for everybody. I also welcome the fact that, because there is not too much hyperactivity this Session, we may debate the major issues which affect people, of which law and order is obviously one.

I want to make a number of comments on the environment and on other parts of the Gracious Speech. I wish that the Government would produce an edict stating that no playing fields should be wiped out and sold without Government approval, because at the rate playing fields are disappearing in my constituency and around this country, it will take five or 10 years to buy them back, even if the necessary money from the national lottery is available. It is no good talking about competitive sports when local authorities, schools, institutes of higher education and ex-polytechnics in particular are still selling off playing fields.

I have always felt and still feel that planning law in the country is a developers charter. If a developer is turned down by a local authority, in most cases he has the right of appeal to the Department of the Environment, but if the development is approved, people in the region, whose environment will be affected, have no right of appeal to it. I still think that that is wrong and that something should be done about it.

I am glad that the Gracious Speech does not mention local government reorganisation. My experience is that all local government reorganisations that have been undertaken by Governments of all colours have been disastrous. I will vote for no form of local government reorganisation anywhere unless people in the region have an opportunity to agree to it in a referendum; I would mention that to the Whips or anyone else who wishes to hear my views.

I am concerned that there is still the movement of so much policy towards centralisation. That matter overlaps with law and order. In the past five years, 25 per cent. of local magistrates courts have been shut. They are being centralised. I do not want the Government to be a centralising Government. I want local magistrates in place who know the region and have a feel for what is happening. I do not want people from a long way away who have no idea of what is happening.

I should like to compliment Brent local authority, my own borough, which is Conservative controlled. Last year, no one would have believed that it would be one of only five Conservative-controlled boroughs in London—miracles still happen in our society. People there are wise. It is rumoured that recently undertaken research shows that people in Brent, North have the highest IQs in the country. An amateur may have undertaken the survey, but I was impressed when its results were mentioned to me. The high IQ of Brent residents was shown in the results last year. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is a fair man and would accept that.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): Is my right hon. Friend willing to note that the London borough of Brent, when run by the Labour party, was known to be the worst local authority in the country? Last year, under the control of the Conservatives, the borough won among the largest number of charter marks for the quality of its services, but it was condemned universally, including by Opposition Members, for the fact that its services were the worst known to man.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I agree with my right hon. Friend. Under Labour control, Brent had to have prayer meetings to ensure that we could live through the days. Now we have hymns of triumph from all the churches and people in the borough.

I should like to mention three things about Brent council. First, it has won the "Best Parks in London" award. Secondly, the *Local Government Chronicle* said:

"Brent has transformed itself into an organisation whose slogan 'Simply the best' is now justifiable."

Thirdly, it gives me great pleasure to say that the average local tax bill of Brent households was reduced by 60 per cent. between 1900—*[Interruption.]*—Sorry, between 1990 and 1994. It would have been even more obvious if I had gone back to 1900. My message to the Government is that one of the big reasons we won in Brent was that we reduced the council tax. If we are to win the next general election, the Government had better start reducing taxes soon instead of waiting for that general election.

On education, I welcome the new Secretary of State for Education, who was appointed last July. She is doing a good job. We are letting schools settle down. After all the revolutions in school arrangements and the curriculum, the Secretary of State should stroke teachers the right way, cut the heavy curriculum and allow, as we are allowing, 20 per cent. of time in primary schools and 40 per cent. of time in secondary schools to be taken up with what schools want to do. I welcome that.

I am concerned about another issue in relation to education. I have always supported voluntary schools and the right of parents to send their children to schools of their religious denomination, whether the schools are Methodist, of which there are still a few in the country, Church of England, Catholic, Muslim or Jewish. Something that is happening will threaten the right of parents to have fares for journeys to the nearest denominational school paid. That threat exists in Brent and that is why I am bringing the matter to the attention of the House.

I have also brought the matter to the attention of the Secretary of State. In the middle of last year, Brent local education authority sent a statement to schools. It said:

"Because of the broadly-based and comprehensive nature of Brent's religious syllabus, the LEA takes the view that its schools can provide adequately for children of all denominations and are therefore deemed to meet the criteria of suitable schools. It is recognised, however, that there may be exceptional cases where the circumstances are such that children will not be able to benefit from education given in a non-denominational setting, and in those cases, free transport will be provided."

An alteration followed which said that, if a sibling was at the school, an automatic factor would be attached.

I remember the Education Act 1980 and the battle over the right of parents to be paid the travel costs, over two or three miles, of their children to their nearest denominational school. The Government overruled what I wanted and introduced a proposal that was not satisfactory, which was taken out in the other place.

Mr. Straw: I was following the right hon. Gentleman's speech with interest. Had he organised the other place to take out the part of the Bill that he objected to as a Minister?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I claim privilege on that.

Mr. Jenkin: The right to silence.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: Yes, that is rather good. The proposal was taken out in the other place after a great battle. Since then, we in this country have presumed that a parent has a right to have his child's travel costs to the nearest denominational school paid over the two or three-mile limits. The new proposal puts that at risk. The idea that there is a syllabus that will fit Muslim, Jewish, Catholic and Church of England parents drives a horse and cart through the question of parental choice of voluntary school.

Last July, I went to see the previous Secretary of State on this matter. Since last July, I have written a letter to the present Secretary of State. This week, I have been in contact with the religious denominations, particularly the Catholic denomination. The Secretary of State should issue a ruling immediately, before other authorities say the same, that says that Brent's interpretation is wrong. Ordinary parents will not be able to afford to send their children to denominational schools if they have a large family.

I have with me figures from one of the schools that I received this week. I shall give them once I find the right piece of paper. I am not used to having so many pieces of paper. I shall give the figures not through the use of mirrors but from memory. More than 40 children lived

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

beyond the three-mile limit for one secondary Catholic school. Of those, about half were siblings, so they were allowed travel costs immediately. Two children appealed and they are being paid. The rest are paying their own travel costs, as far as we can find out.

In every surgery that I hold, parents come in who cannot afford to pay and may possibly have to withdraw their children from denominational schools. The average cost is about £5 a week. The cost of bus fares is high. That they should have to pay is wrong and something should be done about it.

I have found the figures that I wanted. Forty-four children this year lived more than three miles from the school. Nineteen were siblings, two appealed and, presumably, 23 have to pay their own costs, some of whom come from large families.

The second major issue which I wish to raise is one to which I have referred before and which is mentioned in the Gracious Speech—China and Hong Kong. I declare an interest in that I was in the East Indies fleet when Hong Kong was reoccupied at the end of the second world war—*[Interruption.]* I had better stress that it was the second world war. I said at the time that as the nationalists, or whoever was in control at the time, were our allies, we should have given Hong Kong back then. The age of colonialism had passed and we should have given Hong Kong back immediately, but we did not. If China had cut off the water for two days, we would have had to capitulate, and it amazed me that first the nationalists and then "Red" China did not take such action.

For 140 or 150 years we did nothing about democracy in Hong Kong. There were no direct or indirect elections, but in 1984 we signed the joint declaration agreeing to hand over Hong Kong in 13 years. We then immediately started changing Hong Kong's constitution in respect of representation: in 1985 we introduced indirect elections and in 1991 direct elections. If it was not a breach of the letter of the declaration, "Red" China and I interpreted it as a breach of the spirit of that declaration. Since then, there has been aggro between ourselves and China.

China will be a major power. Indeed, the 19th century was the century of Britain's power; the 20th century was that of Europe and America; and the 21st century, into which I intend to survive, will undoubtedly be that of China. We should not endanger our relationship with Red China in any way. I respect the Governor of Hong Kong. We served as Ministers for Northern Ireland—I was the Minister of State when he was an Under-Secretary. I have always had a good relationship with him, but we should reassess our relations with China by saying that we were wrong and that it is up to that country how it proceeds. That would be good for Britain.

Mr. Tony Banks: The right hon. Gentleman has gone from Brent to Hong Kong in one easy move. I am surprised that he should defend the totalitarian regime of Red China which is guilty of appalling abuses of human rights and that he should criticise the Government and the Governor of Hong Kong for introducing a modicum of democracy into that Crown colony, something that has been greatly welcomed by the people there.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: The debate on the Gracious Speech can range widely and I take advantage of that. I am not a nit-picker; nor would I call the hon. Gentleman a nit-picker, but the debate is wide ranging. There are times when hon. Members can range widely instead of being masters of paperclips. I shall take up what the hon. Gentleman said.

We signed a treaty to hand over Hong Kong on a certain date, and it will happen. China could take us over in two days, but it has not because Deng believed that the British kept their treaties. However, Deng then said that we had broken the treaty by introducing changes. If I sign a treaty to buy a house and then do not buy it, I am in the wrong. I believe that the Chinese are morally right in this instance. Perhaps the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and I will go to China to represent different political views.

I hope that democracy will improve in China. I believe that it will, but it will not be helped by tension between us and China. It is far better for us to influence something that will be permanent. As I understand it, China has said that it will not "ride the through train" in this respect because it believes that the British broke the treaty. I have surveyed the world and brought the hon. Member for Newham, North-West to his feet. It is always a privilege to listen to him.

The future of the Government and of this country depends on economic revival. That revival can be achieved only by putting more money into the pockets of the people. That is the difference—possibly not as wide as it once was—between the Conservative party and the Opposition. I hope that, in the two years before the next general election, we all—inside and outside the House—will reassess our policies to ensure that there is a clear choice between the parties. That must be good for democracy. We should spend the intervening period not in legislative hyperactivity but in debating the main issues affecting society.

11.15 am

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I intervene in the debate only to refer to that part of the Gracious Speech which relates to the Government's pledge

"to introduce a Bill to tackle discrimination against disabled people".

The problems of disabled people involve all Departments of State, but the Prime Minister's reference on Wednesday to the Government's promised Bill talked of it as one only about discrimination in employment, access to goods and services and the establishment of a National Disability Council. There was no mention of any urgent action to improve access for disabled people, whether to issue proceedings or attend a hearing or sit on a jury, to the vast majority of our courts, both civil and criminal, that were designed to exclude them.

Nor did he say a word about the appalling record of the Home Office in employing disabled people. The latest figure I have seen gives the percentage of disabled people employed by the Home Office as 0.3 per cent., one tenth of the 3 per cent. quota called for by the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, and the worst of any Department of State. There has been no word of criticism of that by the Prime Minister, for which no doubt the reason is that 10 Downing street's record is even more deplorable. There is not one disabled employee there.

So far as is known there will be no plans in the Government's Bill for improving their own performance, whether at the Home Office, the Department of the Environment, in Downing street or anywhere else in Whitehall, yet even at the Department of Health the percentage of disabled people employed is only 0.7 per cent. Nor will the Bill cover transport or education or establish the Disability Rights Commission for which the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill I drafted in January 1992 provides. Instead, there will merely be an advisory council which disabled people are already calling a "talking shop". That is why the "Rights Now!" campaign, so admirably served by Victoria Scott, dismisses the Government's approach to unfair discrimination against disabled people—many of whom, of course, are the victims of serious crime—as "piecemeal, partial and pathetic."

Much the best guide to the provisions we can expect in the Government's Bill is to be found in the consultative document "Disability—On The Agenda", which they published in July. The proposals in that document were a travesty of those put forward in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

The Government's determination to preserve the status quo by restricting legal protection against discrimination to the maximum possible extent comes through in every page of the document as their main concern. Its negative attitude reflects a total failure to understand the realities of disabled living and the way in which discrimination piles handicap on handicap in disabled people's lives.

Where the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is comprehensive, enforceable and effective, the Government's proposals are none of these things. Their narrow definition of disability excludes many disabled people now experiencing discrimination at its most intense—for example, people with non-symptomatic HIV or those with histories of mental illness. In addition, by excluding firms with less than 20 employees, they would give legal protection to discriminate to employers of one in three of this country's work force.

To make matters worse, the consultative document seemed to make it plain that the Government want now to scrap the 3 per cent. employment quota, thus removing a form of protection which the law already provides. Can the Government's intentions in regard to the quota scheme be clarified in the reply to this debate? The Minister will, I know, appreciate that the future of the scheme is an issue of huge importance to Britain's 6.5 million disabled people, and their concern to hear a clear statement of the Government's policy ought to be met in this debate.

Can we also be informed before this debate concludes to what extent the Home Office and the Department of the Environment have been involved in the drafting and contents of the Government's Bill? How did their voices compare in influence with that of the Treasury? Can we be told today what the Government's estimate is of the cost of the Bill they will very soon be introducing? They must have made an estimate and this House is entitled to know what it is.

The problems of an inaccessible environment were not created by disabled people, but by the societies in which they live. I readily acknowledge that they are problems which cannot be resolved overnight by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, so ably promoted in the last Session by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) after winning a place in the private Members' ballot, but that Bill would at least establish a legal framework for the more expensive requirements to be staged in over time.

The crucial purpose of the Bill, as it relates to the environment, is to enshrine in law the need for equal access, and to provide a viably phased programme for its achievement. Even the inadequate "rights" now offered by the Government would be outside the reach of most disabled people, since no legal aid will be available and the Government oppose the establishment of a commission, similar to the Equal Opportunities Commission, with strategic enforcement powers, for which the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill provides. Their consultative document offered disabled people second-class "rights" as compared with those given by this House to women under the Equal Opportunities Act, and to victims of racial discrimination by the Race Relations Act 1976.

Why are the Government still resisting comprehensive civil rights for disabled people? Their consultative document gives four principal reasons for opposing the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. First, they say that, when I drafted the Bill and commended it to Parliament, I did so without consultation. That is not true. I consulted very widely about the Bill, not least with employers; indeed, I consulted just as widely as I did before commending to this House the four new cash benefits I introduced for disabled people and their carers, including the mobility allowance and the invalid care allowance, when I was Minister for the Disabled from 1974 to 1979.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood took the consultative process further when he inherited the Bill from me a year ago. He will, I am sure, agree that it is not for Ministers to accuse us of failing to consult. There were over 1,000 responses to their consultative document, but they are not prepared, as the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) told me in a recent parliamentary reply, to publish a single one of them. Where, after drafting it, I found criticism of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, I discussed their concerns openly with its critics and in several instances, amended the Bill to take account of legitimate criticisms.

By contrast, all of the responses to the Government's consultative document have been brushed under the carpet at Richmond house. Is it not disgraceful that the taxpayers, more espécially disabled taxpayers, who paid for the Government's glossy consultative document, are not allowed to see any of the responses made to it?

Were any of the responses in favour of the Government's extremely shabby tactics in opposing the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? In 30 years in the House of Commons, I have witnessed only four personal statements of unreserved apology for misleading the House, three of them concerning that Bill, the first being when Robert Hayward, then the Member for Kingswood, talked it out on 31 January 1992 after explicitly promising not to do so. I doubt very much whether any of the public responses to the Government's consultative document approved of that or whether the Government had much, if any, support for their proposals.

My point today, however, is to ask why the Government cannot publish the responses to their consultative document so that Parliament and the people we represent will know what the respondents have said about them. In particular, why cannot they be straight with disabled people? Everyone knows that they and their

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

organisations, without exception, back the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and it must be very unlikely that any of the other respondents, with the possible exception of the Institute of Directors, gave their approval to the Government's alternative. Never was there a clearer case of honesty being the best policy since hiding the truth will not help the Government. They will know from the responses of disabled people and their organisations to the consultative document that they want the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, the whole Bill, and that they will bitterly resent and relentlessly oppose any attempt to offer them any counterfeit version of the Bill.

The Government's second principal reason for opposing the Bill was that it has the defect of vagueness. They put great emphasis on what they call its "vague definition" of disability. But in the view of some eminent lawyers, the Bill deals far more clearly and coherently with unfair discrimination against disabled people than what they describe as the Government's "patchy and half-hearted proposals". The fact is that the definition adopted in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, founded as it is on actual examples of discrimination in disabled people's lives, is at once fairer and more workable than the Government's heavily criticised alternative.

The Government's third main reason for opposing the Bill is that it would be too costly. Their consultative document repeated the bogus claim that the Bill would cost £17 billion to implement. I give the House but two glaring examples of their grossly distorted costing of the Bill. By assuming that all existing buildings would require full access, they added £6 billion to the costs of compliance and by assuming that full access to public transport would have to be arranged within five years, they just as perversely added another £5 billion. Numerous other examples could be given of their utter disregard for easily ascertainable facts in order to inflate th actual cost of the Bill.

Yet the most obvious omission from the Government's calculations is any recognition of the financial benefits that would accrue from giving equal rights to disabled people. For example, they totally ignore the estimate by Touche Ross of a loss to Britain's travel industry, due solely to lack of access for disabled people, of £22 billion. The Government include only one side of the balance sheet—the investment—and ignore the financial returns.

The costs of excluding disabled people from industry and society are very high: in loss of markets to businesses, avoidable state expenditure on expensive, segregated provision and on social security benefits, as well as in lost taxes. The cost to the state in avoidable social security benefits and lost taxes alone is estimated at £5 billion.

In the United States, they have found that giving disabled people full civil rights, not least better access to the built environment, turns tax users into tax payers, giving them more money to spend on goods and services and creating more jobs. They have also found that, far from piling new costs on industry, action to end unfair discrimination against disabled people is in fact pro-business. Who can really doubt that the same would happen here?

The other fundamental error of the Government's approach to costings, as Caroline Gooding of the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation has eloquently pointed out, is that it treats the costs of including disabled people in public provision differently from those associated with able-bodied people. It is regarded as quite normal for the providers of services to make efforts to enable their customers to enjoy those services by installing escalators in shops, amplification at meetings and so on. But provision for disabled people—lifts at stations, induction loops at concerts—is treated differently, as a "special" and abnormal expense. Together with many millions of other people in this country, I believe that "normal" provision should now include the needs of disabled people.

Fourth and finally, the Government object to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on the ground that it is too wide ranging. They prefer, as the Prime Minister told me at an hour-long meeting about the Bill in February 1993, what he called "piecemeal reform". But he is demonstrably wrong. The problems of discrimination against disabled people, not least in the employment field, cannot be solved in isolation. As one big employer with more experience of running a major private enterprise than the Prime Minister put it to me recently:

> "To end discrimination in the labour market, you must not only protect disabled people there but also achieve equality of access for them to transport and training, among many other facilities and services."

In his view, "piecemeal change" in this policy area is an attempt to divide the indivisible and a total waste of parliamentary time and tax payers' money.

That is why I must now warn the Government that their approach is doomed to failure. In demanding full citizenship, the disabled people of this country are backed by a clear majority of MPs, including, much to their honour, many Conservative MPs, and by a huge majority of the British people. They know that, without equal rights, disabled people are doubly disabled. The handicapping effects of their disabilities are made even harder to bear by gratuitous social handicaps for which there is no moral justification. And the overwhelming mass of responses to the Government's consultative document will have insisted that what is morally unjustified ought no longer to be legally permissible in Britain.

11.33 am

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I welcome this opportunity to comment on the Gracious Speech. It contains some good Bills, and I shall mention a few that I particularly welcome.

I am glad that the pensions legislation is to be dealt with at last, together with the whole question of the Maxwell affair. We have all had cases in our constituencies of pension funds where the company concerned has been taken over or gone bust, and the pensions have been left in a bad state. I welcome the Government's move, and shall support it strongly.

I also welcome the move to deal with dangerous mental patients. Although my constituency does not cover Broadmoor, patients from Broadmoor regularly come to Reading. Last Christmas, two such patients came to acclimatise themselves to the outside world in the middle of the Christmas rush. They were given a meal in one of the smarter restaurants, during which they asked to go to the loo, and then disappeared. Much more care must be taken in dealing with dangerous patients who come from

places such as Broadmoor. People in Reading feel particularly sensitive about that matter, because such patients are regularly taken to Reading.

I welcome the channel tunnel link. I had the good fortune to go under the tunnel last week. [HON. MEMBERS: "Through the tunnel."] One can go through a tunnel as well as under the sea. Anyway, I went on the train to Brussels, which was a great experience. It is an impressive engineering feat, and I congratulate all those who have been involved. I think that it will be a great success. It will encourage people once again to start thinking about using the railways, which is important. As I represent a railway town, I believe that the more we can do to use the railways, the better.

Mr. Tony Banks: I trust that the hon. Gentleman will declare that boondoggle under the channel in the Register of Members' Interests. Did he notice that, had the train been going as slowly on the other side of the channel, in France, as it was in the United Kingdom getting to the tunnel, the journey might have been some 45 minutes longer? It is only because the French have got their act together that the journey is now so speedy to Paris and Brussels.

Sir Anthony Durant: First, the Register of Members' Interests says that we do not need to register such trips, as all hon. Members have been on them. On the more serious point which the hon. Gentleman raised about the speed of the train, he is right. The train travelled at about 100 miles an hour from Waterloo station to the tunnel, and then at about 180 miles an hour on the other side of the channel.

The reason is that, although we have improved the track—it is not that bad—it has too many curves and trains cannot travel at more than 100 miles an hour, so we have a job to do. We may praise the French, but the terminus at which we arrived in Brussels is not yet finished, so there are things to be done on the other side as well. Let us be fair to those who are developing the channel tunnel link.

I welcome and strongly support the Bill for disabled people that will be introduced, although I shall not follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on that issue. I also support the Bill for job seekers.

May I make a general comment about the Gracious speech? The press have greatly criticised the fact that there is not much in it. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson): I do not know what the press expect from this place. If the Queen's Speech contains too many measures, we are criticised on the basis that it is too radical and disturbing, and that people do not want all that change. When we are to have a quieter Session, the press say that it is too quiet. I do not know what they want—perhaps simply to write rubbish. I support all the worthwhile measures in the Queen's Speech.

My main reason for speaking this morning is to deal with the Bill on environmental agencies. I welcome the Bill in general but am worried about two aspects. First, it might create more bureaucracy. I hope that the new agency will not be bureaucratic, but I am worried that it may be another type of quango, which could create more bureaucracy. Secondly, I am worried about the abolition of the National Rivers Authority. I have seen the draft Bill, and concerns have been expressed to me as chairman of the all-party group on inland waterways about the whole issue of navigation. Commercial and private users are worried about navigation. It is mentioned in the draft Bill, but it is not clear who will be the navigation authority.

When legislation was introduced to privatise the water industry, there was great concern about navigation and the use of waterways. The original Bill was withdrawn. A second Bill introduced the National Rivers Authority, which has done a remarkably good job. Lord Crickhowell has been a very energetic chairman, and has done a most useful job. The NRA has been quite a success. It has developed more waterways. Many have been reopened and improved—water quality has improved.

Now the NRA is preparing, at long last, for salmon to come up the River Thames. It is preparing the necessary sluices so that the salmon can jump into the next reach. There are signs that, if salmon are put back in the river, it may well work, although we are in the early stages and the most difficult problem is pollution at the river entrance. We hope that that will be cleaned up and I hope that in time we shall see salmon fished off the pier here. Perhaps one or two Members will be able to get their supper by putting out a line.

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend will know that one of the clauses in the 17th-century statutes of apprentices was that they should not be forced to eat salmon more than a certain number of times each week. The fish was so plentiful in the Thames at that time that it was forced upon people in indentured labour. I am sure that my hon. Friend is looking forward to the day when we might enjoy the same restriction.

Sir Anthony Durant: I look forward to seeing my hon. Friend on the Terrace with his line out, getting his supper. Samuel Pepys was well known for buying salmon from a stall right by the River Thames. I hope that that will come in my lifetime.

The National Rivers Authority set out to develop an overall strategy for navigation and to get through licences, orders, byelaws and statutes to control tightly navigation on rivers under its jurisdiction.

Work on locks has gone ahead remarkably well. Hon. Members may be interested to know that there are 40,000 boats on the NRA section alone—that is only 800 km of the inland waterways. On the remaining waterways, many of which are controlled by the British Waterways Board, there are another 30,000, so boating is a big leisure industry.

The industry wants the new Bill so that we can establish a national licence. Those involved in the waterways world have pressed strongly for that. They want a national licence, like a car tax, the proceeds of which would go to waterways throughout the country. At the moment, if I wanted to go to Reading down the Kennet and Avon canal, I would have to get a separate licence after I had gone through one lock on the Thames to enable me to get on to the canal. That situation deters people from travelling on a general circuit around the waterways. I hope that we will try to establish that licence.

We must try to improve the standards of boats. There have been some very bad accidents on the River Thames, and the NRA has worked hard to improve the standards.

[Sir Anthony Durant]

I hope that the navigation policy will be based on river catchments. That is the basis for our present water policy, and it would be advantageous if we continued on that basis.

Our waterways are a national heritage. At last, we are developing them and using them for leisure. I hope that the new agency will not deter that development, as it is so important to those in the leisure industry.

Mr. Gummer: I assure my hon. Friend that the new agency will take over all the National Rivers Authority's responsibilities. I intend—I believe that it will also be the intention of the new agencies—to ensure that all that good work is carried on, and that work done on licensing and the like is brought to fruition.

Sir Anthony Durant: I am grateful for that news from my right hon. Friend.

Waste management is another element of the Bill. I have to declare an interest, as I am the political adviser to the National Federation of Demolition Contractors, who face major problems when dealing with waste. We are getting into great difficulties over infill and land reclamation. Infill has been our means of dealing with waste, and is something that the new agency will be able to tackle. It is a major problem for our society.

I know that the Bill will encourage recycling. In Reading, we collect papers, bottles, tins and even clothes for recycling. Usually the clothes go to Oxfam or some similar charity. I welcome that policy, and hope it will be increased.

The demolition industry prefers to deal with waste on site by using a crusher, but it has been running into problems with local authorities which have to license each crusher. The net result is that many demolition contractors abandon the use of a crusher, although it is the best way to proceed, and use heavy lorries. Lorry movements cause the main environmental problem.

We need a policy on waste. I know that that is included in the Bill, and I welcome that fact. I am sorry that the London waste regulation authority is to be abolished by the Bill, and I hope that that will not deter us from establishing a policy on waste, which would be welcome.

I welcome the Gracious Speech, which contains some good Bills. There is much in it for us to tackle, and the public want most of it. I hope that it will go through smoothly and happily.

11.46 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I shall mention the environmental issues that the hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) mentioned in the latter half of my speech. I shall start with the Home Secretary, not least because I am always puzzled by his claim to be crusading against the leftist political correctness that suffuses—he believes—the penal and justice system over which he presides.

The Government have been in office for 15 years. If there is an excess of left-leaning political correctness that is soft on crime, no one else can be blamed but the people who have been in charge for the past 15 years and have introduced a succession of criminal justice Bills each of which altered the mistakes made in the previous one. That is not a convincing role.

When I listened to the part of the Gracious Speech in which Her Majesty prayed that

"the blessing of Almighty God"

might attend our counsels, I thought that the Home Secretary had been left out completely. I thought that he must be so distrusted in his handling of Bills, after what happened to previous legislation, that the Government did not dare to let him have any in this Session, or that if they did, they had certainly not mentioned them in the Gracious Speech. Later that day, we learnt that the criminal cases review authority legislation would be introduced in some way or another—that was disguised in a general statement about law reform measures. The legislation is important and it is generally agreed that it should be introduced. I am surprised that those four words could not have been squeezed into the text of the Gracious Speech.

We shall want to study that legislation, but it is even more important that we study the commitments behind it. For the review authority to be effective, it will have to have the resources to deal with a very large number of cases and investigations. A large number already come before the Home Office. On the Home Office side, there will be some saving in resources because its officials have to consider the cases. I am not suggesting that those same officials should merely be transferred to the new authority—that would not give the impression of an authority approaching the subject in a new and independent way. There will be a saving in another column, however, which will help in part to ensure the necessary resources. It will be important to ensure that the authority has those necessary resources.

That legislation was included in the Gracious Speech. Other Bills were not included—not even disguised under the title of law reform. One Bill that should have been included so that the Home Secretary could justify his actions publicly was a criminal injuries compensation Bill. The right hon. and learned Gentleman got into a mess in the courts because there is already statute law on the subject, which he chose to ignore. He set out a wholly different compensation scheme. If he is firm and clear about his intentions, he should have brought a new Bill before the House to set out his scheme, which we could have amended, challenged and questioned in detail. Instead of offering the victims of crime a proper system of compensation, with whatever modifications he can justify, the Home Secretary is offering merely a chatline on which victims can make representations to prison governors—which they can do now, in any case—without any knowledge of whether the person detained is likely to be released or is under consideration for release.

Instead of helping the victims of crime in the area where they most need it—with financial resources to cope with the consequences through a system of compensation—the Home Secretary offers an illusory benefit. He is simply offering them the sort of thing that one gets to complain to if there are too many traffic cones on the motorway. One rings up somebody, but it has no effect whatever.

The Home Secretary has confirmed to me that there will not be a system for telling the victims of particular crimes that the person who caused them such suffering is about to be considered for release. Therefore, any representations that they make may be years out of time for their relevance to a particular inquiry. Victims may not realise that the possibility of release is coming up

sooner than they anticipated, and they had better get on the phone pretty quick if they are to have any effect on it. It is not a serious proposition that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is offering the victims of crime and, at the same time, he is doing them considerable harm with the changes that he made to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which he has not been prepared to bring before the House.

A further piece of legislation that could be brought forward to fill the gap left by the Post Office privatisation was referred to by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw): the regulation of the private security industry. It is simply not acceptable that someone can walk out of Wormwood Scrubs, buy a dog, get a uniform and set up as a security business.

Mr. Dobson: He could steal a dog.

Mr. Beith: Indeed, and he could steal a van to put the dog in. He would then be in business, and he could go knocking on people's doors saying, "I am in a position to help you with your security, and I cannot guarantee what might happen if you do not subscribe to my security scheme." That can happen, and the police are worried.

Even beyond that utterly criminal approach to security, there are areas of genuine anxiety, that what ought to be police work is being done increasingly by private security firms. There is a legitimate place for the private security industry. It would not be an efficient use of resources to have police constables doing entry and exit searches, and that sort of thing. But the more we bring the private security industry into basic police work, the more we offend against some of the essential principles that make us have the kind of police force we do.

If all we are looking for is protection, we could pay a private security firm to act as a bodyguard for us, individually and collectively. What we are paying the police for is something different: security under the law. That must not be threatening or intimidating to the innocent. It must not be arbitrary, and it must not favour one group over others. It should involve particular care for the vulnerable, and should allow and encourage civilised life to go on. That is why we pay trained, professional, disciplined and accountable police officers. They do not simply go fire-fighting on crime, but they are actively involved in crime prevention as well.

Therefore, the area of work for private security firms should be more clearly defined, and the good private security firms should be protected from those who moved into the area on the basis of either very low pay or even the employment of people with criminal records.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): In south Yorkshire, few private security firms pay more than £2 an hour, and some pay as low as £1.80 an hour. The quality of trained work force that one can get at that pay is extremely low, and people who are paid at that level are not able to deliver the professional security needs that private companies want. Should not part of the regulation process involve training and pay too?

Mr. Beith: It is clear from any examination of the training standards of security firms that levels of pay as low as those referred to by the hon. Gentleman are likely to lead to standards that are so low that they fail any proper regulation system. There should be such a system, and legislation to deal with it.

While the Gracious Speech lacks pieces of legislation, we are still coping with the consequences of last year's Gracious Speech, and the legislation that it introduced. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act itself has had no immediate effect, other than the production of demonstrations against itself.

The Police and Magistrates' Courts Act is already having considerable effects. Police authorities are being set up, and in respect of both appointments and budgets, many of the problems that we foresaw are happening. On appointments, the elected representatives do not know who was on the list and who was crossed off by the Home Secretary. There is considerable anxiety at the tendency for the people whom the Home Secretary recommends on the list which he sends back to include a significant number of known Conservatives and Conservative supporters.

There is also a tendency—this underlines the same thing—in some police authority areas for the Home Secretary's returned list to be concentrated on those parts of an area where the Conservatives are strongest. I have heard claims in respect of that in the Thames valley, Buckinghamshire and Salisbury area. The Home Secretary's lists, in so far as we are able to find out who is on them, might well be used to try to frustrate the decision of electors in the composition of elected local authorities in the areas concerned.

There is a considerable row in Cambridgeshire, where the Conservatives dominate the three-person selection panel, although they are in the minority on the local authority. One panellist has been appointed by the Home Secretary and, with the help of magistrates, the Conservative group got its leader appointed as the second panellist. Of course, those two between them choose the third panellist, so they are in a position to overturn the political balance that was decided by the public at the ballot box last year.

The Home Secretary sent back a preferred list of 10 to the authority, which the authority challenged. There is no system of appeal and no way of going behind the decision of the Home Secretary in his choice of people which, again, included several well-known Conservative supporters. Fears that the system would be used by the Home Secretary as a means of trying to insert his political choices despite the views of the voters are proving justified.

At the same time, the initial budget projections put out by the Home Office for the new police authorities caused such anxiety that the Home Office had to think again on them. As a result, most police authorities have no idea what sort of budget they can set when they come into office in a matter of weeks. The stewardship of the Home Secretary in an area of legislation that he has already introduced is just as worrying as the legislation itself.

I now refer to the environment aspects of the Gracious Speech. Everyone attaches a great deal of importance to the environment legislation in the Gracious Speech. That is a good thing in principle, but it could go badly wrong if the legislation is not properly drafted.

There is a danger that the amalgamation of the three responsibilities that will create the environment protection agency will make it weaker than the sum of parts. The draft management statement suggests that the agencies will be under strong central Government control with no

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real local subsidiarity and without some of the independence that the National Rivers Authority has shown.

There are considerable fears that the relationship established when the NRA was created—a gamekeeper-poacher split—will be undermined within the new system because the draft management statement gives considerable strength to the opinion of the regulated parties, the polluters themselves, and puts considerable emphasis on the need to minimise the burden on industry. Fears are being expressed that the new body simply will not be as resilient as the old one, far less a more effective body, because it combines several elements.

There was talk earlier of the possibility of legislation on national parks being tacked on to the environment Bill that will be introduced this Session. It is not clear—since the Bill has not been printed—whether that is to be the case. There is continuing agitation to get the new legislation for national parks on to the statute book.

In my constituency, the legislation will come at a time of considerable tension in the national parks. But that is all the more reason why we want to see the new legislation coming forward to ensure that the people who live in the parks get proper protection. The problem in my constituency was, to some extent, created by the Council for the National Parks itself, which ill-advisedly organised a visit by Mr. Chris Bonnington, who gave people the impression that he wanted to remove the Army from the national park. Since the Army has been a significant contributor to the conservation of a large part of Northumberland throughout the many years that it has been there—far more than the national park—there was considerable local opposition, which undermined the good relationship that has been built up over the years between the Army, the national park authority and the local community. That is a reminder that people who live in a national park often feel left out of consideration, both by the authorities and by outside interests. That must be put right, but I do not know whether we shall proceed with the matter in the current Session. Surely we cannot go on waiting for ever to deal with the reform of national parks legislation.

There are, of course, other areas of relevance to the Home Secretary that we ought to consider in the Queen's Speech, but unlike the Bills that I have already mentioned, I had no expectation that they would be included in the Speech. I refer to constitutional reform, a fair voting system, freedom of information legislation and devolution. There should also be measures to deal with the morass of appointed bodies that the Government have created in their time in office. None of that was likely to be forthcoming, and it will not be until we have got rid of this Government.

I tried early in the debate to give the Prime Minister the opportunity to make it crystal clear that he would create for us the chance to hold a general election so that we can get rid of the Government and respond to the strong feelings that people have that the Government have been around for too long. I can report that the by-election in my constituency yesterday resulted in the Liberal Democrats holding a seat and the Conservative candidate polling 26 votes—a microcosm of the problems that the Government would face were they to go to the country now.

Many people felt that they did not want to hear another Queen's Speech emanating from this Government. Once they had heard it, it gave them even less confidence in the idea of keeping the Government in office.

12 noon

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I am grateful, as in previous years, to be called to speak in this debate. Despite some remarks by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), I welcome the appearance in the Queen's Speech of a disability Bill. I am sure that by the time it reaches the statute book it will deal with many of the concerns which, I am well aware, exist in the House and in my constituency. Those concerns were greatly stirred during consideration of the wide-ranging private Member's Bill in the previous Session.

I also look forward to Parliament taking further action on the way in which absent fathers are assessed for maintenance by the Child Support Agency, particularly taking into account arrangements made for the matrimonial home and legitimate travel costs.

After about four years I speak now having left my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—an event that achieved the most extraordinary publicity. Among other things, it elevated me overnight to the doubtful description of "a senior Tory", and I was even given a foretaste of my obituary by being profiled as "man in the news" in *The Times*. It has been a great privilege to work for four years through some difficult times with one of the greatest of our Foreign Secretaries. Throughout I have received from him nothing but courtesy, kindness, an ever-open door and that magnetic combination of spontaneous words and wit, which I shall greatly miss.

My leaving had nothing whatever to do with my right hon. Friend or with any issue of principle in foreign affairs. After four years, I wanted to regain the freedom of comment and action that the role of the Foreign Secretary's Parliamentary Private Secretary restricts.

Although privatisation measures appear in the Queen's Speech, I greatly regret the abandonment by the Government of plans to include the privatisation of the Royal Mail, and the effect that that may have on the future direction of policy. On the issue itself, few dispute that the Royal Mail requires a great deal more money and freedom for its work force—I include management in that; I do not separate the two—to compete with rivals at home and abroad and to put its services, including the postman's round and the uniform national pricing system, on a sounder financial footing, and to be able to expand its services. The crucial argument concerns whether that should or could be done with Treasury-guaranteed taxpayer's money and with Ministers and civil servants inevitably deciding how much, thereby being involved in the management. Or whether that should be done with private money, raised by commercial borrowing, shares and so on—including share holding by the work force. Should it be run with wings unclipped and with a minimum statutory regulatory framework?

Since 1979, the right way of tackling such challenging questions has been resolutely pursued through privatisation. That way, along with our union reforms, has proved of fundamental significance to our long-term economic strength. No Labour Government would have created such successes as the National Freight Consortium, British Airways, British Aerospace, Rover or

British Gas, or—most significant of all in the Royal Mail context—would have presided over the privatisation of the former Post Office telephone network, in the form of British Telecom.

I clearly remember—I was living in Somerset at the time—the bitter opposition to the privatisation of the telephones; the twisting of the facts; the playing on the fears of rural people; and the dire warnings of wholesale closures of public phone boxes. The reality, including far more working public phone boxes, has proved so different, with more efficient services and massively expanded expensive technology. Because commercial freedom and competition work, it now costs only 10p for three minutes on a Sunday to call anywhere in the United Kingdom.

To coin a phrase, who would have thought it? The answer is: Conservative Governments did, and acted on it. Some things have been less successful, notably some ridiculous salaries in the water and electricity sectors, but the overall economic and social benefits of such reforms so greatly outweigh the disadvantages, that many countries look to Britain for inspiration and the Labour party is in total confusion as to which approach to adopt. Some Opposition Members are aware that there can be no going back to the memorable old days and are intent on ditching clause 4 to prove the fact. Others want to enshrine clause 4 and reverse privatisations wherever possible.

Mr. Gummer: Would my hon. Friend care to add to his litany of successes? Often, when Ministers take groups of business men abroad, gaining large contracts for Britain in the water industry and in telecommunications, they bring back jobs for British people; and some of the most successful businesses in that area are the privatised industries, which are winning orders throughout the world, but which would have been blocked in that endeavour under nationalisation. Is not it sad that that success cannot yet reach every part of the United Kingdom—for instance, in the water industry?

Mr. Martin: My right hon. Friend ably buttresses my arguments.

Referring to the Government's handling of the Royal Mail issue, I should note in passing the seeming lack of relish on their part—with notable exceptions—for the task of persuasion that was undoubtedly required inside and outside Parliament. Sometimes I thought of the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

"If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

Certainly not those of my hon. Friends who scuppered the right policy and with it the right future for the Royal Mail. We should leave to Labour and the Liberal Democrats the false assertion that there is an inherently unresolvable conflict between profits and the needs of the community—the idea that free enterprise and the free market cannot provide services, even Crown services such as the Royal Mail, and even BBC services—in the public interest and for the benefit of the public.

Britain now has an economy firmly based on low inflation and steady growth. Since 1979 we have gained many more thriving, internationally competitive businesses. There is more home ownership; there are greatly improved standards in social services, health care and education. That has not happened by magic; it will not be sustained by magic either. Lower taxation meets the needs of profitable businesses, great and small. We need maximum employment, minimum regulation, privatisation, sensibly restrained public expenditure, and smaller, competent and consistent government. There is no running out of ideas or of policies to be based on them in all that.

I firmly reject the fashionable view that after 17 or 18 years in office by the next election the Government will inevitably lose when the electorate votes for a change to a Labour Government. We have heard that sort of claim before, in previous Parliaments. Only defeatism can defeat us. Certainly, neither Opposition policies nor Opposition personalities will, as they come under the intense spotlight of general election conditions. Under the Prime Minister's leadership—and all talk of challenges to his leadership is for the birds—we shall surprise the pundits again not only nationally but in Portsmouth, South.

12.9 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I shall speak on just one aspect of the Gracious Speech, the proposed criminal cases review authority, because for some time I have taken an interest in this matter. I resent what the Home Secretary said at the end of his speech when he suggested that in some way the Labour party was soft on crime. I speak as someone who has been burgled on more than 20 occasions and mugged twice. In the past 10 days, neighbours on either side of me have been burgled. The Conservative party represents rather leafier areas than Labour tends to represent and we suffer more than most Tory constituents from crime and are under no illusion about the effects of crime or what needs to be done to remedy the problem.

I give the criminal cases review authority a guarded welcome. It is long overdue, but the extent of my welcome will be tempered by the small print which we have not yet seen. I have some major reservations about what it is likely to contain and I shall later elaborate on that.

The Home Secretary started his speech by saying that the investigations would be carried out by the police and others. I am sorry that he is not in his place to clarify that, because it is crucial to the credibility of the organisation. Who are the others? When I asked him, they turned out to be customs officers. I had hoped that they might be people who were unconnected to the police who, as even the Home Secretary must have noticed, have been a source of problems in many of the most celebrated miscarriages of justice.

Earlier this year, the Home Secretary issued a consultation document on the proposed criminal cases review authority to which I and many others and organisations which take the issue seriously responded. I do not think that many of them have suggested that only the police should be responsible for investigations in this area. There is no doubt that to be credible and effective, which is surely what we all want, the organisation will need to have a dedicated force of investigators to carry out inquiries where it is thought inappropriate for the police to do so. I shall shortly elaborate on that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, some people have suggested that the Home Secretary's heart does not appear to be entirely in this proposal. I understand that in October he told a private meeting of Police Federation officials that it would not appear in the Queen's Speech unless he came under

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further pressure. Only a week or 10 days ago, his officials told the press that it would not be in the Gracious Speech, and it was not.

I read press reports to the effect that the proposal would be placed in the Queen's Speech at the last minute, so I was surprised to see only a reference to

"further measures of law reform."

At the end of his response to the Gracious Speech, the Prime Minister said that the further measures referred to a criminal cases review authority and it was only then that I knew for certain that one was proposed.

I do not understand the Home Secretary's reluctance on this issue. I am aware that it will not win many votes in the saloon votes of Folkestone and Hythe, which is where most criminal justice policy seems to be formulated nowadays, but such a body has long enjoyed the support of people of all political persuasions and many distinguished people who are connected with the criminal justice system. Such a body was first suggested by the distinguished judge Lord Devlin as long ago as the late 1970s and the Select Committee on Home Affairs unanimously recommended one after its inquiry into miscarriages of justice in 1982. Sir John May's inquiry, which was set up by the Government, recommended it as did the royal commission, which was also set up by the Government. The Lord Chief Justice has been so concerned about the fact that we have not heard about it recently that he has taken to issuing appeals in the media to find out what has happened to it.

In the past seven years I have three times moved new clauses to criminal justice and courts and legal services Bills to introduce such a body. I did so once in coalition with the former Conservative Member for Harborough, Sir John Farr—one of the less likely political alliances in this place—and the last occasion on which I did so was on 28 March this year, along with two of the Home Secretary's hon. Friends, the Members for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) and for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend). Therefore, such a body has always enjoyed all-party support.

The body's main features are, first, that it should be composed of persons with an inquiring frame of mind and a track record of scepticism towards official versions of events. With that in mind, it should be chaired by someone of the calibre and integrity of Sir Ludovic Kennedy. Secondly, it should not be dominated by lawyers, because they have been part of the problem and not part of the solution, although there are many honourable exceptions. I say that with respect to those of my hon. Friends who are distinguished lawyers.

Thirdly, the body must have the power to summon persons and papers and to conduct its own investigations and commission its own experts. Fourthly, as I have already said, it must not depend solely on police officers. When the Prime Minister referred to it in his speech two days ago, he said that it would be independent of the Government and the courts. I welcome that, but it must also have the capacity to be independent of the police. I cannot stress that too strongly. It would contain an absolutely fatal flaw and we would all be wasting our time if we set up a body as toothless and useless as the Police Complaints Authority. I have seen the PCA referred to as a model for the new criminal cases review authority, but it is a model of what not to do. The best thing for the Police Complaints Authority would be to wind it up. I would not advise anybody with a complaint against the police to go to it: I would advise them to take a civil action in the courts.

It is no part of my argument that there are not plenty of honest police officers. I know that there are because I have met many of them in the course of my inquiries over recent years. I acknowledge that the Guildford Four and the Birmingham case were eventually brought to an end by honest, professional investigations conducted in the Birmingham case by Devon and Cornwall police and in the Guildford case by Avon and Somerset police. I accept that on many occasions properly supervised police investigations are appropriate. However, one would have to be blind not to notice that in many instances the police have been the cause of the problem. To this day, even in relation to celebrated miscarriages of justice that have long ago been accepted by the courts, a large number of policemen have failed to face reality. I am sorry to say that in many police forces it is an article of faith, even among intelligent officers, that the Birmingham and Guildford people are all guilty. One can hear that whispered where two or three are gathered together.

The only person whom one does not hear that whispered about is Judith Ward and that is because many people involved in that case knew from the outset, or at least for many years before she was released, that she was innocent. Two years ago, the Select Committee on Home Affairs went to Northern Ireland and we interviewed a deputy chief constable of the RUC. I said to him, "RUC intelligence on the IRA must be far better than that of the police on the British mainland, so you must have known all along that they had the wrong people in some celebrated cases." He said that he had never been involved in the Birmingham or Guildford Four cases and could not comment on them. However, he had been involved in the Judith Ward case and was able to say that she had been framed—that was his word—by West Yorkshire police. He added, "The irony is that when we were alleged to have done something wrong a few years later they sent over the West Yorkshire police to investigate us."

I know that many Conservative Members accept that there is a problem with the police. It does not suit them to say so out loud very often, but around the time of the releases, between 1989 and 1991, at least 30 of them, including several members of the Government and one or two members of the Cabinet, discussed the issue with me. Whatever they may pretend in public, they know that there is a serious problem and they would be unwise not to face it.

The Birmingham Six case was the subject of at least three police inquiries, which cost millions of pounds. It was clear that the early inquiries did not try very hard. That might be a problem for the new authority if it is to be solely dependent on the police. Even though the Devon and Cornwall police ultimately carried out an honourable and professional inquiry, I well remember their first stab at it. Two superintendents, Mr. Essery and Mr. Reay, came to the House to interview me and it was absolutely clear that they had no intention of impartially examining any new evidence.

Mr. Essery waved a file at me that he said contained dirt on the new witness, an ex-policeman. I remember him telling me that people were queuing up to contribute to it, as I am sure they were. I told them, "I do not think you two gentlemen are trying very hard. If you don't try

harder, we will all be back here in two or three years' time going through it again." And we were. One great satisfaction was that when they came back, they were led by the chief constable, Mr. John Evans, who did a proper job. Mr. Essery was sitting sheepishly at his side.

I regret to say that police investigating cases of alleged miscarriages of justice too often see their role as being to discredit new evidence and new witnesses. There is also a problem, which we should acknowledge, of police forces being riddled with freemasonry, especially in the detective squads. Those who have been down some of the alleyways that I went down during the Birmingham and Guildford investigations know that almost everyone involved in those cases, up to the level of chief constable in some cases, is a mason. That is deeply resented by officers who are not.

Only a week ago, a policeman who is not a mason telephoned me and said how deeply resentful he and similar colleagues feel about the way in which the promotion system and other matters are manipulated by those officers who are masons. Indeed, a couple of years ago I was at the classical music counter in Virgin Records when the chap behind me—an intellectual looking chap with spectacles—said, "Mr. Mullin, I want you to know that you have a lot of support in the Metropolitan police." When I scraped myself off the floor, he told me how angry he and many of his colleagues were at the way in which the masons carved up promotions.

Another Metropolitan police officer sent me a colour photograph of the Lodge of the Manor of St. James, the top Scotland Yard lodge, showing senior officers in their aprons. I have kept that photograph as a souvenir. If we want the new organisation to be credible, we cannot have one lot of masons investigating another lot of masons. That simply will not wash with the outside world.

Mr. Tony Banks: On behalf of many hon. Members, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work in bringing so many cases of blatant injustice to public awareness and to a resolution. He has performed a wonderful service for the whole country. On the question of masons, I think that a former Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis said that membership of a masonic lodge was incompatible with being a serving police officer. Can my hon. Friend tell us Commissioner Condon's view? Does he share the attitude of his former colleague?

Mr. Mullin: When Commissioner Condon came to the Home Affairs Select Committee, I asked him that very question, but he did not give a helpful answer. A memorandum in circulation, written by a former assistant commissioner—Mr. Laugharne—says that officers who wish to retain the respect of their colleagues should consider carefully whether they should be masons. I regret that the masons' response to that was to set up the Lodge of the Manor of St. James, which suggests a certain self-confidence.

I want to raise two outstanding cases of what I believe to be miscarriages of justice. If these cases are not resolved by the time the new authority is set up, they will be among the first to arrive on the desk of whoever is in charge of it. They show the scale of the problem. The first is the Carl Bridgewater case. Four men—one of whom is now dead—were convicted in 1977 of the tragic murder of Carl, a newspaper delivery boy.

It is obvious to most sensible people who have examined the case that it has entirely collapsed and that, should the Home Secretary refer it back to the appeal court, it will quash the convictions. The appeal court used to be a problem, but it has cleaned up its act considerably in the past few years. The problem is, the Home Office has not and neither have the police. The case is now going through its fifth or sixth police inquiry. All of this has cost millions of pounds of public money. If people say that it will be too expensive to have independent investigators on the new body, I will tell them that it will be a great deal cheaper than the present fiasco of the police inquiries. It is absolutely clear that they are intended to obstruct progress, not to achieve it.

The police currently investigating the case are deliberately dragging their feet. The foreman of the jury that convicted the men has called for the case to be reopened. One of the forensic experts employed by the latest police inquiry, who submitted his report 12 months ago, has written to the Home Secretary asking what has been done with it. It clearly shows that the case should be referred back to the appeal court, yet still there is no sign of progress.

The second case that illustrates the folly of leaving these matters to the police is that of Brian Parsons, who was convicted of the murder of an old lady at Axminster in Devon. The case is of particular interest because the force involved is Devon and Cornwall, the very force that conducted the investigations that brought an end to the Birmingham and the Darvell brothers cases. We might expect, therefore, that that force at least might take seriously the possibility that a miscarriage of justice could have occurred, even on its own patch. Regrettably, that is not so. The case against Mr. Parsons was based mainly on forensic evidence—fibres from woollen gloves were found in the pocket of an overcoat and in his car.

From the outset, many people have voiced serious doubts about the case and recently, as a result of the efforts of a local television journalist and an assiduous solicitor, a much more likely candidate for the murderer has been identified. Indeed, a sworn statement has been obtained from a witness who names the murderer. I have good reason to believe that officials in the C3 department at the Home Office are impressed with the new evidence, but what has happened? The case has been handed back to the Devon and Cornwall police for review. They are doing everything possible to head off even an inquiry by an outside force. Instead of investigating the new evidence, they are busy discrediting it. They are doing everything in their power to avoid having to make available the forensic evidence for independent examination.

Sadly, the officer in charge of this so-called review is Assistant Chief Constable Keith Portlock. I say "sadly", because he led the inquiry that vindicated the Darvell brothers. On that occasion, he was investigating another force. This time, he is investigating his own force, and is making no secret of the fact that he sees it as his duty to maintain the conviction of Brian Parsons at all costs. What is more, he is being particularly brazen. It is not hard to see why. If Mr. Parsons is innocent, the fibres from the gloves that led to his conviction were obviously planted by a Devon and Cornwall police officer—and that possibility is too awful for Mr. Portlock to contemplate.

[Mr. Mullin]

I cannot emphasise too strongly that this is how a force with a reputation for integrity, and which has already conducted scrupulous inquiries into two miscarriages of justice, behaves when it comes to protecting its own. I say again that it would be folly to place sole responsibility for the conduct of investigations in the hands of the police, however closely supervised. It is essential that the review authority has its own dedicated force of investigators entirely independent of the police, who can be relied upon when there is reason to suppose that the police are not trying hard enough.

One of the Home Secretary's objections to the deployment of independent, dedicated investigators is the cost. The two or three inquiries into the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six cases, and the five or six inquiries into the Carl Bridgewater case, cost millions and millions of pounds. If the Home Secretary is interested in public money, he will save a great deal by employing independent investigators. That will avoid repeatedly going over the same old ground.

Until now, it has been an unfortunate feature of miscarriages of justice that one stands a better chance of securing a release if one can attract the attention of a television company or journalist. Although it is right in a democracy that they should have a role to play in investigating miscarriages of justice, that cannot be a matter of satisfaction for those whose job it is to preside over our legal system.

The criminal cases review authority will provide a chance to repair the damage to our criminal justice system and to restore confidence. It is in no one's interest for that body to be as ineffective as the Police Complaints Authority. If the Government are unwilling to deal sensibly with the issue, I hope that a future Labour Government will make the necessary amendments.

We sometimes forget the victims of crimes where there has been an alleged miscarriage of justice. It is a cruel deception on victims to prolong wrong convictions, when victims must witness all the facts being rehearsed week after week and are reminded of the tragedy that befell their loved ones simply because we decline to face up to inconvenient reality. It is in everyone's interest that we face up to that issue once and for all. I hope that we shall do so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I remind the House that the wind-up speeches are to commence at 1.30 pm. Eight more hon. Members hope to catch my eye, so perhaps they will bear that timing in mind when making their speeches.

12.31 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): It is interesting to follow the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), because he has a great reputation for his assiduous campaigning. It is good to see him welcoming the general concept of the review authority, but he will be disappointed if he expects the authority, or even himself, to discover a conspiracy behind every case. Sometimes, he appears to do so.

I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute, because it enables me to record my general optimism at the Government's resolve and policy direction as set out in the Gracious Speech. A good deal of nonsense has been spoken about the Government's lack of direction or loss of nerve. That is so much rubbish. Anyone who believes it should carefully study the Gracious Speech, in which they will find confidence, coherence, direction and resolve across the broad spectrum of policy.

The only lack of direction in this place is to be found in the Labour party, which often does not seem to know where it is going, where it stands or where it is coming from. When it comes to Labour defining its driving ideals, it cannot even agree what they are not.

Today, we are considering mainly home affairs and the environment. The Gracious Speech stressed that a priority was

"tackling drug misuse, drug trafficking and organised crime at home and abroad."

Drugs and crime go hand in hand. One begets the other, and both thrive together. The Government and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary have been firm in not listening to the siren voices of those who preach drug legalisation.

The Labour party, or at least most of it, shows commendable sense in that area. But that sense evaporates when one turns to the Liberal Democrat benches. Indeed, Liberal Democrat Members themselves appear to have evaporated. They seem to be led now by fantasies about drug taking and hazy dreams of armchair anarchists and part-time hippies, reflecting the extent to which their party has been taken over by a new and rather weird brand of fanatic.

Drug legalisation is the grossest form of social irresponsibility. Even to attempt to make the case respectable does untold damage to the work in drugs education, and undermines the efforts of police, teachers and parents. I hope, therefore, that the promise in the Gracious Speech will translate into a triple attack on drugs: stronger anti-drugs education; better international co-operation to break the activity of the distributors, and the criminal syndicates behind them; and tougher laws and better enforcement at home.

We need to build on the very firm resolution already shown in the Government's legislation, with trafficking now attracting life imprisonment as a maximum sentence, and the confiscation of assets. It is excellent to see my right hon. and learned Friend today addressing confiscation, and extending it to other areas of criminal activity as well.

Evidence that I have been given, by local police and by teachers in my constituency, shows that the drugs problem is considerably worse than the official statistics tend to indicate. There is no doubt that a very high proportion of crime is drug-caused. It is a question not just of the habit demanding cash and therefore crime being committed to feed the habit, but also of the collapse of responsibility and judgment which so often accompanies a drug-induced state. A good deal of crime is carried out while under the influence of some form of drug.

Mr. Jenkin: Perhaps that would explain the state of Liberal party policy.

Mr. Merchant: One sometimes wonders in what sort of haze some of that policy has been dreamt up.

Were any drugs to be legal, both those effects would still, of course, be present. Legalising drugs would not do anything to alter those facts. The argument that legalisation would somehow transform cause and effect is vacuous in the extreme. By definition, easier access to drugs would extend the problem and that would almost certainly mean that more people would be attracted and involved. We have enough social problems as it is. Why on earth pursue a policy that would clearly create more?

A tough line on drugs, on the other hand, would help roll back the problem, just as it is doing already with crime generally. The sudden fall in crime rates in most areas is not unconnected with the impact of recent legislation. In my constituency, latest figures show a drop in crime overall of 21 per cent., and for some crimes the drop is even higher—by 35 per cent. for non-domestic burglaries and by 29 per cent. for car thefts. Nothing is more welcome to the public. I believe that we will see those figures improving steadily as some of the more recent policies that my right hon. and learned Friend outlined, such as the attitude to bail, to cautioning and to sentencing, come fully into effect.

I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will stick resolutely to the line he charted last year, which he outlined again in his speech this morning. The howl of demonstrators, egged on by some sections of the press, should not divert attention from the very real strength of support he enjoys from law-abiding citizens.

I therefore hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will soon move to introduce his planned new system of prison discipline with privileges being earned rather than being of right. I trust, too, that he will take firm steps to ensure that prison rules are properly maintained and enforced. Prisons should not be places for parties, drugs and sex, any more than places of intimidation, violence or fraud.

All those abuses must be stopped by a rigorous application of measures based on firm regulation. My right hon. and learned Friend referred to the need to remove lax conditions, and I especially welcome the implementation of drug testing in prisons to help combat that problem.

Clearly, action against crime generally remains a top Government priority, and I warmly welcome that. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will also ensure that police manpower is increased in areas such as my constituency, where it is needed. I also hope that he will press ahead with his plans to help finance more closed-circuit television schemes, because those have proved to be a most effective deterrent and can be provided comparatively cheaply when set against the dramatic impact that they can have in many urban areas.

The Gracious Speech also announced legislation to put into effect the promise to create a new, integrated pollution control system. I shall end by referring to that system, but in a specific way that affects my constituency.

The thinking behind the integrated pollution control system is that one cannot separate one form of pollution from another; that the quality of the environment and society in general is dependent on the maintenance of high standards in all areas. Indeed, the Royal Commission on environmental pollution backs that thinking strongly.

I shall refer briefly to environmental pollution linked with the channel tunnel fast rail link, since another important announcement in the Queen's Speech was the intention to legislate to enable that rail link to go ahead. I strongly support that. As far as I am concerned, the quicker it is built the better.

I say that from an environmental point of view and not because I am particularly keen on seeing that huge infrastructure project blossom. Indeed, I rather question whether the tunnel itself and all the associated investment—huge investment—will turn out to be the best use of resources. I could certainly think of a better way in which to spend the vast amount of money involved, but I shall not pursue that argument. I recognise the reality of the tunnel having been built, and therefore that it must be used.

However, at present, of course, it is an inadequate reality from the environment viewpoint. It is inadequate because huge Eurostar trains are roaming through my constituency on quite unsuitable commuter tracks. Primarily, the trains are unsuitable because they cause noise, vibration and disturbance to hundreds of my constituents, because they disrupt busy commuter services, which are vital for the health of the capital, and because they are so clearly out of place on those lines. It is rather like landing jumbo jets at the local airfield. Of course, they are also unsuitable for the operators and the passengers. The sooner the trains get their dedicated line, the sooner they will be out of my constituents' back gardens.

In the meantime, my constituents are disturbed and have no guarantee of compensation. The argument that they choose to live by the rail line and therefore deserve the trouble is fatuous. When they moved there, there was no prospect of a tunnel, let alone extra-long super-express trains with a particularly annoying new noise at either end as the power car goes past—twice, in effect.

It is as if someone were to move near a single carriageway and see it transformed at a later date into a motorway. In that case, of course, my constituents would get compensation, and it is good to see that the Royal Commission on environmental pollution recommends that the Government should look very closely at awarding proper compensation or insulation grants for those in areas facing road and rail noise in the day time, even if it is from existing roads and railways. That is specifically set out in the report.

I hope and believe that there is a quicker way to reach that objective. It should be reached via the review of the noise insulation regulation for railways, which I hope will be completed soon. Through that, the Government could include in their legislative programme this year measures that would overcome the difficulty faced by people living by the track. The Government could assure them of compensation in the years between now and the time at which the new dedicated link comes into operation.

I hope that Ministers will consider that closely, and ensure that my constituents, whose lives have been badly disrupted by the new venture, will be assured of the compensation they deserve.

12.45 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I shall try to be brief, but I must observe that it is ridiculous that half the time of the debate will be taken up by Front-Bench spokesmen. The time for Back-Bench Members is abridged accordingly.

[Mr. David Trimble]

The Gracious Speech does not contain any legislation on electoral law. I had understood from the normal post-election review, which the Home Office carried out, that it would introduce some comparatively minor amendments to electoral law. I am sorry that they are not included in the programme for this Session. It may be that they have been held back to take account of issues that Liberal Democrat Members feel particularly strongly about. If so, that would be a good thing. I notice that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to fair voting systems. No doubt he will consider that the current farcical antics in Dublin are a good advertisement for proportional representation.

Some prisoners were transferred from England to Northern Ireland in September. I shall not return to the spectacularly inept timing of that transfer, from which I exonerate the Home Secretary. The real scandal involved the selection of the persons to be transferred. I should like the Minister to comment on that.

I understand that the Home Office consulted the Northern Ireland Office about who should be transferred, and that the Northern Ireland Office sent its man down the wings in the Maze to speak to the leadership of the Provisional IRA, who selected who should come over. I should like that issue to be followed up. The scandal involves the fact that the effective decision about who should be transferred was taken not by the Home Office but by the officer commanding Provisional IRA prisoners in Maze prison. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that as well.

The arrangements under which prisoners are transferred are somewhat dubious. As I understand it, prisoners have been treated as being on extended leave from England, and are still subject to the English prison regime. That is not a tenable position. One person involved in the administration of the prison service in Northern Ireland said to me, "What will happen at Christmas?" Come Christmas, the normal home leave arrangements in Northern Ireland will operate.

Northern Ireland prisons will be virtually emptied. Everyone will be on home leave except those who have been transferred from England, for whom the arrangements will not apply. That is not a tenable position. Nor is it tenable to say that prisoners are on extended leave from England, as I understand that the intention is that those prisoners are to serve the rest of their sentence in Northern Ireland. Sooner or later, this device will be challenged in the courts, and it may prove to be unsustainable.

A problem exists, and it should be tackled. The problem would not exist were it not for the differences between the prison regimes in Northern Ireland and in England. That applies to a number of points, which I shall not deal with in detail, as I have discussed them before and will discuss them again. It is safe to observe, however, that there should be a broad correspondence between the nature of the prison regime in England and the nature of regimes elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The Home Secretary referred to national standards. That was fine, but are they genuinely national? They should be. They should apply not only throughout England, but throughout the United Kingdom. Failure to have a broad correspondence between the regime in one part of the UK and that in another will lead only to problems.

In this Session, we shall consider, as we do annually, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973. There have already been calls for part or all of that legislation to be repealed in the light of what we cannot at the moment be sure is anything more than a temporary ceasefire. Clearly, this is an area where we should hasten slowly.

I note that the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act is undergoing one of its five-year reviews. In light of the ceasefire, it would perhaps be appropriate to delay the review until the position becomes clearer. Certainly it would be better for the review to be carried out on a broader basis. It is well known that we have argued for some time that the anti-terrorism legislation should be consolidated—instead of there being two pieces of legislation, there should be a single Act. Clearly, the extent of that Act would have to be reviewed in the light of the present situation.

There is a strong argument for moving some parts of the legislation into ordinary law. Curiously, one of those parts was mentioned by a number of hon. Members, who referred to private security firms and the need to regulate them. Private security firms are regulated on a statutory basis in Northern Ireland, but under emergency legislation. It should be done under ordinary legislation, and the statutory arrangements in Northern Ireland could be applied to the rest of the United Kingdom, thus taking care of the problem.

One issue that has attracted considerable attention is the Government's proposal to introduce legislation to establish a criminal cases review authority. I am glad that such an announcement has been made, and that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has said that the review authority will cover Northern Ireland as well as England and Wales, and will have among its members people with knowledge and experience of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. I am especially glad that the legislation will be inclusive, and that the Northern Ireland Office's suggestion that there should be a separate authority or individual reviews in Northern Ireland has fallen by the wayside.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) mentioned the difficulties that arise when one force or group of people in a particular area try to investigate their own cases. The problem is especially acute when dealing with a small and closely knit professional body. Clearly, those connected with the legal system in Northern Ireland are a small and closely knit group of people. That is often a strength, but it does mean that people are sometimes not completely objective. Consequently, we were of the opinion, and recommended to the Northern Ireland Office and the Home Office, that the best approach would be to extend the remit of the review authority to Northern Ireland. We are glad that that is to be the case.

We also believe that the review authority should be able to call on the practical resources of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and other investigative resources in Northern Ireland, and to do so with regard to cases arising in Northern Ireland or in England and Wales. There is a lot to be said for bringing in outside minds that will be able to consider cases freshly. In addition, the expertise that exists in Northern Ireland might be of benefit in

dealing with cases that have arisen in England and Wales. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South reinforced that point.

Northern Ireland has not had as many cases of alleged miscarriage of justice as England and Wales, but, sadly, the worst is still unresolved—the case of the UDR four. Three of the four have had their convictions quashed, but unfortunately there is the continuing injustice of the imprisonment of the fourth, Neil Latimer.

I am sure that some hon. Members will recall the Adjournment debate last Session secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). More than 150 hon. Members stayed for a debate that commenced after midnight, thus reflecting their concern about the case. That debate was many months ago, but the Secretary of State said at the time that he was considering a further referral of the case back to the courts in Northern Ireland. He has not yet made a decision, but I wish he would. I wish that he would have the courage to grasp the nettle, because an injustice has been done.

I understand that one reason for the delay may be the nature of the new evidence that my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone placed before the House on that occasion. Although it may not be admissible in court, and although there may be some difficulties in getting it into court, an obvious solution would be reference to the royal prerogative of mercy, which should be exercised in the case so that this long injustice does not continue.

I will not comment on other cases in which a miscarriage of justice has been alleged in Northern Ireland, except one. Some of those campaigning about the case, most unfortunately, have suggested that the Northern Ireland courts, in their interpretation of the law with regard to common purpose, have either done something unusual or have behaved inconsistently. I will not refer to the facts of the case, save to say that the suggestions about the application of the law by the Northern Ireland courts are quite wrong. It does not help the case for people to make quite unjustified reflections about the courts of Northern Ireland.

The section of the Gracious Speech dealing with environmental matters refers to the proposal to establish environment agencies for England and Wales, and for Scotland. I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you anticipate my next comment. Why has Northern Ireland been omitted? The need there is just as great. Reference was made to the National Rivers Authority. The need is just as great in Northern Ireland as elsewhere.

In 1990, the House passed the Environmental Protection Act. We are still waiting for equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland. Why can we not establish agencies on a United Kingdom basis? The need is there, and there is no reason why we cannot proceed. We have a good example in the criminal cases review authority, for which inclusive legislation will be introduced. We need to have inclusive legislation on environmental matters as well. We should not be subject to the delays and vagaries of the Northern Ireland Office, because there are particular problems with environmental protection in Northern Ireland. The same Department is supposed to promote development and to protect the environment.

Much of the problem in Northern Ireland stems from the fact that we do not have a worthwhile system of local government. That matter should be remedied, and I would have liked to deal with that point. In view of the time, however, I shall conclude and give other hon. Members a chance to speak.

12.56 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I shall follow the admirable example set by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and be as brief as possible. I shall enlarge rapidly on the point I made when the Home Secretary generously allowed me to intervene in his speech.

There is ample evidence that well-motivated volunteers have a major role to play in the prevention of crime, the rehabilitation of criminals and the support of victims. One of the principal reasons why we do not have far greater involvement of the enormous pool of potential volunteers is that Government agencies are still far too reluctant, whether in the criminal justice system, in the national health service, in the social services or in education, to open their doors and to learn from the excellent examples, which are plentifully available, of the value of volunteers, not in substituting for, but in extending, the reach of professionals. I very much hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will take back that message.

I now turn to environmental matters. I believe strongly that the Government must look again at blight. Blight is an intolerable and oppressive injury done by the state every year, often to hundreds and hundreds of families. In the case of the channel tunnel rail link or the building of a motorway, blight may hang over families for 10 years, 20 years or more. In our present inadequate system, a narrow band of people are fortunate enough to have their houses bought by compulsory purchase, whereas the house values of others are, beyond peradventure, destroyed by public works.

We must consider that matter again. I have raised the matter twice, and on both occasions, the Government have said that any solution that I suggested would distort the market. The Government distort the market all the time, whether by planning restrictions, the social security system, the national health service or whatever. There is no such thing as a pure market, and it is an illusion to imagine there is.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider again the restrictions on building houses outside village envelopes. I suspect that there is not a constituency in the country where the conflict between green belt and urban development is more acute than in mine. The present restrictions on planning permissions overcrowd village envelopes, distorting and changing the nature of villages and overloading roads that are incapable of carrying an increased volume of traffic.

The time may have come to make it easier for farmers, for example, who are constantly encouraged to diversify and take themselves out of production, to acquire planning permission for two or three houses, albeit large houses with large gardens, and to return to the tradition of country house building for which this country was famous in the past, but which has now become virtually a thing of the past.

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

On water resources, I hope that the new environmental agencies will take seriously the importance of retaining, restoring and cleaning up rivers. Kent has one of the last remaining chalk streams in the south-east of England, which is constantly at risk from increasing water extraction. It is much easier to retain a river than to get it back. I am glad to say that an effort has been made in part of Kent to restore the Darenth river to some extent, but those artificial restorations are not as good as the original river.

I welcome the legislation which we are to introduce for disabled people. May I draw attention to two matters that have occupied much of my time since I came to this place? The first is Lifetime Homes. Last week, I had the privilege of attending the opening of a 128-unit estate of Lifetime Homes owned by the Joseph Rowntree Trust.

The title "Lifetime Homes" came from the report of a seminar that I organised with the Helen Hamlyn Foundation five years ago in the university of Kent, when we suggested that it would be better and cheaper in the long run if the housing stock in this country were not constantly narrowed, with steepened stairs and steps up to the front door, as now happens, but if houses were designed with a level access, wider doors to allow wheelchair access, and shower rooms on the ground floor, so that someone incapable of going up the stairs could nevertheless enjoy that kind of washing.

I am delighted to say that the Joseph Rowntree Trust took on that banner, ran with it and has now produced, for less than £500 for the extra facilities for a one-bedroomed house and less than £800 for a two-bedroom house, a whole estate that can be used with equal ease by elderly people, disabled people, young mothers struggling with buggies and shopping, and teenagers who have temporarily damaged themselves playing a game or falling off a motorbike.

We need that kind of housing. Builders are sympathetic to some extent, but will not build them because they say that, unless all their competitors are forced to build to those standards, they are at a competitive disadvantage. I hope that the disablement Bill will at least pay attention to the possibility of extending the M-regulations, or something like them, to the building of new houses.

The second issue which I hope will be taken into account, and about which I believe my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has made encouraging noises to directors of social services, is the old chestnut of direct payments allowing disabled people to command their own budgets and buy their own services at their own hand.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must realise that Kent does not want the local government review to be referred back. Kent has enough problems trying to cope with the channel tunnel and its offshoots. It is being divided and distorted by continuing debate on the local government review. The Local Government Commission for England report was accepted with a sigh of relief, and we felt that we could once more get on with the business of making Kent prosperous. Now we hear rumours that it is to be referred, and I strongly disapprove.

There will be other opportunities to discuss the channel tunnel rail link, but I disapprove of the proposition that the safeguarded route should become a licence to print money for whoever builds it by charging well over the odds for wayleaves to cross it. That would be a scandalous misuse of a monopoly position, and should not be allowed. The electricity, gas and water companies and so forth should not be held to ransom by the people who suddenly become the owners of that great advantage. I shall raise the question of Boxley long tunnel again on another occasion.

I firmly support the increase in the European Union budget. I must point out to those of my hon. Friends who disapprove of it that, when we were last responsible for our agricultural support system in this country, it cost us 1.2 per cent. of gross national product. Last year it cost 0.4 per cent., although that was partly due to the fact that GNP has increased so much. The increase was partly a result of the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Export Trade, who is never in the House or the country long enough to attract the respect and support that he deserves for his enormous efforts in helping to export British goods.

The estimated additional costs to the United Kingdom of the Gulf conflict alone were £2,434 million. The idea that, by spending £75 million next year to remove for ever the threat of a conflict in Europe, we would be wasting money, is absurd.

Mr. Gummer: Before my hon. Friend leaves that subject, does he agree that, in his constant quest for new jobs and more investment in Britain, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Export Trade would have no chance whatsoever if we were not an active member of the European Union? Companies invest here because that opens the whole European market to them and their future expansion.

Mr. Rowe: That is an enormously powerful argument, as 50 per cent. of our trade is with the European Union.

I promised that I would sit down rapidly, and so I shall. We should pass the European Communities (Finance) Bill, to increase the European Union budget, and put the money into a separate account until the EU can demonstrate beyond peradventure that it is taking serious action to diminish the fraud that is attracted to that budget in exactly the same way as fraud is attracted to our social security budget. When Governments make large sums of money available, they will always attract fraud.

There is no reason why we should not take a much more active part in preventing fraud in the European Union, and no reason why we should not honour our engagement to assist the Union's growth and development in exactly the way that the Prime Minister suggested.

1.8 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Like the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), I am sorry that there was no mention in the Queen's Speech of changes in electoral law. Whether I would want the same changes as the hon. Gentleman is not clear, but I had hoped that we might have the opportunity to consider some of the proposals made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). It is a tragedy that in a so-called democracy so many people are disfranchised in that way. The kind of Bill presented by my hon. Friend would have enabled the enfranchisement of many of those people.

I was also sorry to see in a thin Queen's Speech that the opportunity was not taken to review the Race Relations Act 1976. Hon. Members will know that there is increasing racial harassment and violence in my constituency, and there would have been time in the next Session of Parliament to introduce legislation to tackle those evils effectively.

That would also have provided an opportunity to take on board the recommendations of the Commission for Racial Equality in its second review of the workings of the Race Relations Act. The Government recognise a need for monitoring employment practices and the importance of contract compliance in terms of the legislation against discrimination in Northern Ireland. If that is recognised in terms of religious discrimination, it should be recognised in terms of racial discrimination in this country as well.

I also hoped that the Government might have included in the Queen's Speech measures to deal more effectively with domestic violence. We know that domestic violence accounts for an enormous proportion of violent crime. I welcome the initiative which the Home Office recently took in its short-lived campaign which built on the success of both the Association of London Authorities and Edinburgh city council in their campaign for zero tolerance.

I had hoped that we might have had some assurance from the Government that they will continue that initiative by giving some guarantees on the future security of the funding for refuges in this country. I believe that that would make one of the most significant contributions towards tackling the problems of domestic violence.

I would also have hoped that there might have been some review of the situation faced by victims of domestic violence whose immigration status depends on that of their husband. So many victims of marital and domestic violence are trapped with a choice between deportation or enduring continuing violence. I hope that the Home Secretary will give some attention to that matter.

In view of some recent correspondence which I had with the Home Secretary, I hoped that we might have seen some proposals for changes in the immigration laws concerning the Home Secretary's powers where he deems someone to be a threat to national security. I do not want to go into the details of the case over which I was involved in correspondence with the Home Secretary, but it is not justifiable in a democratic society to give the Home Secretary powers to incarcerate and imprison someone without any recourse to the courts on the basis of the Home Secretary's assertion that somebody is a threat to national security. There ought to be some means of accountability through the courts and some mechanism for appeal.

I shall also refer to my concerns about the emergency services. I hope that we might get an assurance from the Government that, when the standard spending assessments are announced in the next couple of weeks, they will give some guarantee on disregards in SSAs with regard to the rising costs of pensions within the fire and civil defence authorities. Unless that is done, there is a real prospect that we shall face dramatic cuts in the cover provided by fire and civil defence authorities in the next financial year.

I am also sorry to see that there was no commitment in the Queen's Speech to honour the commitment given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he was Home Secretary that there would be a police authority for London with some elements of democratic accountability. That commitment has the backing of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, and is also supported by the Metropolitan police deputy commissioner who is senior vice-president of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

I hope that the Home Secretary will acknowledge that, in London, the Labour-controlled councils have led in the development of working partnerships with the Metropolitan police to tackle crime. More than 30 community safety groups have been established by boroughs with the Metropolitan police, promoting joint local authority and police initiatives, sharing information and, in some cases, seconding staff.

The Home Secretary has merely established a new body, appointed by him, to provide advice on planning, thereby setting up yet another toothless quango. Londoners will continue to be precepted for the costs of the Metropolitan police, but they will remain without a directly elected authoritative body that can oversee the policing of their city. That arrangement will continue to offend against the basic principle of no taxation without representation.

As for the environmental protection agency, there may be some difficulties with the mix of regulatory and operational functions. In the area of waste regulation, I am fearful about the removal of any democratic accountability, such as obtains in the waste regulation authorities. I hope that that will be examined in some depth when the Bill comes before the House.

The Secretary of State for the Environment will know of my concern about the inadequacy of planning arrangements and inquiries in respect of incineration processes. I hope that he and the President of the Board of Trade will again review the planning regulations, especially in the light of the evidence that has emerged in the interim report by the United States Environmental Protection Agency on the problems of dioxins and furans, many of which result from the combustion of municipal waste.

This is a serious issue. In a letter to me, the Secretary of State said that he believed the planning process was adequate to deal with it, but the former director of public health on Bexley health authority and the chief environmental health officers of Bexley and Greenwich do not share his view. They do not, for instance, think that the planning inquiry into the proposal by Cory Environmental Ltd. adequately considered health and environmental issues, and they are doubtful whether the process will give enough weight to those issues next time.

I wanted to raise a number of other subjects, but I shall end now in the hope that Conservative Members will also speak briefly, thus allowing my hon. Friends a chance to contribute.

1.16 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I, too, will try to be swift, although I do not share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) about the "thinness" of the Gracious Speech. I do not think that a Conservative Government need prove their ideological machismo by bringing acres of legislation to the House. On the contrary, Conservatives should welcome a light legislative

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

programme. Good government is not necessarily about legislating; it is about good administration, and we certainly have good government.

Although I share many of the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) about the failure to include the privatisation of the Royal Mail in the Gracious Speech, I do not think that privatisation is the defining issue for the 1990s. It has caught on around the world and been implemented by Governments of left and right everywhere. The fact that we cannot privatise the Royal Mail now is purely testimony to the small size of the Government's majority and to the willingness of the Labour party to remain stuck in the past. But it will be privatised at some stage, to its benefit and the benefit of its customers.

Privatisation is not the issue that will win us the next election. I am reminded of the slogan put to an American politician—"It's the economy, stupid." The British economy is in a stronger position probably than at any time since the war. We have an export-led recovery with strong growth and falling unemployment. These are the ingredients of electoral success for the Conservative party in the years ahead—provided we clothe our economic policy in the right rhetoric so that people understand why our economy has become so successful.

We have established an excellent economic and monetary framework. I am afraid that it has little to do with convergence criteria or the exchange rate mechanism with which Ministers sometimes confuse it. Indeed, it is the antithesis of economic and monetary union, and we should explain it in those terms as a classical, nationalist, monetarist policy. We should take the lead in Europe and explain to other European countries that that is how Europe will become prosperous.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) that I welcome the Queen's Speech. Every pearl has a grain of sand and although the European Communities (Finance) Bill will get my support, it being a matter of confidence, it would be wrong to suggest that we can afterwards put the money in a separate account and wait for the European Union to sort out its fraud as my hon. Friend suggests, because under European law we will be obliged to hand over the money for which we have legislated.

When we put the economy in perspective and continue to explain the beneficial effects of the good administration of this good Government, we can tack other issues on to our programme to set out our stall towards the next general election. Those other issues include deregulation and social security reform and, of course, crime and punishment, which is perhaps one of the major issues and of great concern to my constituents.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: No, because I am short of time. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary deserves praise and encouragement for what he has achieved so far during his term of office. It is unfair of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) to complain that 15 years of Conservative Government are to blame for the state of law and order. On the contrary, that is due to the difficulty faced by Home Secretaries in implementing declared Conservative policy. The resistance to that throughout the law and order establishment has been one of the main obstacles, and confronting that false consensus and breaking it so that Conservative policies can be carried out is now the Government's objective. I thoroughly support that.

One has only to consider the cases that every hon. Member must face in his constituency to realise the depth of frustration felt by so many of our constituents. I have a letter from a constituent, an elderly lady who was burgled by a yob as she was asleep. He came up to her room and when he woke her, he fled with her carving knife and family treasures, which cannot be replaced. When the matter came to court, the yob was let off, despite the fact that he had committed a number of offences and caused thousands of pounds worth of damage. His only punishment was to agree to pay £5 a week compensation. That old lady faces that yob on the streets of her village every day because he lives there, and she has to suffer his taunts.

When faced with such cases, one has great sympathy with victims who feel that the balance between victim and criminal needs to be redressed. I urge the Government to continue to implement a policy of tougher sentencing. Many people despair when they hear the powerful lobbies that criticise the efforts of the Home Secretary and the Government. Those bodies complain that the prison population has gone up, but that increase may be related to the fact that at the same time crime has come down. In my constituency of Colchester, the local police know the regular criminals, the people whom they arrest time after time. They want those people locked up, and if they were it would hardly be surprising to see crime come down.

Parliament has given the courts the power to sentence and courts should be encouraged to sentence according to Parliament's wishes. I draw the attention of the House to the level of sentencing. I asked the Library to provide figures, which are quite startling. In 1993, in England and Wales, there were 1.4 million indictable offences, but only 4.1 per cent. of those convicted of those offences received custodial sentences. It was 4.4 per cent. in total, but only 4.1 per cent. received unsuspended custodial sentences. Is it any wonder that people feel that there is not enough punishment in our legal system?

Only 19 per cent. of people in 39,000 cases of violence against the person received custodial sentences. In the categories of violence against the person, sexual offences, burglary, robbery, theft and handling stolen goods and criminal damage, which is one of the most painful and tiresome problems that people suffer in a crime-ridden environment, only 16.2 per cent. of those indicted were given unsuspended custodial sentences. On the question of the sentencing of young people, it is staggering how many were let off. Even of those in the 10 to 16 age group with 10 or more previous convictions, only 23 per cent. were given any sort of prison sentence.

There is a cry to be tough on the causes of crime. If people feel that they can get away with serious criminal offences, it is not surprising that the public do not have faith in the law and order system. How are we to instil better respect? I very much welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's announcements. We need a prison system that is decent but austere. We need a victims' hot line so that victims feel that they have access to the

system and are allowed to input information that is relevant to their case. I also welcome the announcement curtailing temporary prison leave.

We need more talk of rights—the right of people to feel safe walking down their own streets; the right of victims to feel that the crimes they suffer are justly punished; and the right of police officers to carry out their duties unhindered by some of the more absurd interference from the so-called civil rights lobby. We need to redress the balance between the victim and the criminal. It is worth remembering that among the prison population there are few people over the age of 40. That shows that people do learn eventually and that it is not worth bucking the system. We need a system that instils that lesson rather earlier.

1.26 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in today's debate. Together with my hon. Friends, I look forward to seeing the Government's detailed proposals. In particular, I look forward to the publication of the Bill to tackle discrimination against disabled people—especially after the Government's shameful talking out of the comprehensive Bill introduced last Session by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry).

Today, we are discussing home affairs and I welcome the Government's commitment, outlined in the Gracious Speech, to play an active part in tackling drug misuse and trafficking. The problem of drug misuse is tearing apart our local communities and the Government must bear part of the responsibility for the problems on our estates, in our schools and on the streets. We are all concerned about the problem because of the direct link between drugs and crime.

There has been a sharp increase in the number of drug offences and drug seizures, mirroring the dramatic increase in crime. In south Yorkshire, drug seizures have increased by more than 1,000 per cent. since 1979. Of course, we do not have to rely on statistics alone to see that drug abuse has risen. How many hon. Members remember a time when a school playing field was out of bounds because of the threat from syringes left behind after use the previous night? That did not happen years ago, but it is currently the horrific position in schools in my constituency. Nevertheless, last year the Government cut the number of drug advisory posts that previously were funded by the Department for Education. They also cut the number of staff based in schools and youth clubs.

If the Government cared about the victims of crime, they would do something about its causes, such as tackling drug abuse. There are many good ways to start. The people of the Willow estate in Thorne in my constituency have suffered from crime, like many people on other estates in my constituency and throughout the country. Much of that crime is drug related—vandalism, theft, destruction of property, abuse, fear and harassment. The good people of that estate—and there are many of them, because the criminals are in the minority—said, "Enough is enough," and are developing a partnership with the police and the local authority to tackle the crime wave that has afflicted them a long while. Those residents want what everyone else wants—to feel safe in their own homes and to walk down their own streets free from fear and harm. They have my full support for their work through residents associations.

Partnerships are the key—people working together with pride rather than being alone, isolated and in fear. The weakness of the Government's approach across a whole range of policies is that they have spent the last 15 years talking ruthlessly about individualism—"Get what you can for yourself, no matter who you step on." That attitude will never bring social responsibility but only encourages a mentality whereby people take what they want regardless of the impact on others and the wider community. Such attitudes, coupled with economic despair, breed anti-social behaviour, not social responsibility.

Since the royal commission highlighted the need for an independent body to investigate miscarriages of justice, there has been no action by the Government. The Labour party called for such a innovation during the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1993. Even the Home Secretary made a pledge to his own party conference in 1993. Again, there was no action. I welcome the news that the Government are finally to act, and I hope that they will do so decisively. So far, the Home Secretary has been, at best, lukewarm about that proposal. I trust that he will muster sufficient enthusiasm to make sure that the body is totally independent and that it has sufficient teeth to perform its difficult task effectively.

A halfway house will not be sufficient to reassure the public, whose confidence has been shaken. The decision to establish the review body should not be regarded as an attack on the police. I have good relations with the police in my constituency and was closely involved in bringing them together with a number of concerned residents and groups trying to plan action. South Yorkshire police work hard in the most difficult circumstances and should be praised for their efforts and dedication. They work under extreme pressure from rising crime rates. In 1979, the Tories came to power promising to restore the rule of law. Fifteen years later, crime in south Yorkshire has mushroomed. Since 1989, it has risen 66 per cent. while police numbers have increased by only 2.3 per cent.

The police are also under pressure because of the difficulty of securing convictions. They often feel frustrated when the Crown Prosecution Service does not proceed with cases that the police and victims believe should be prosecuted; it is fast becoming known as the criminal protection service. Others in the criminal justice system have also expressed concern about the CPS and its willingness and ability to take cases forward. Clearly, the Government need to address that issue. The Government cannot fail to appreciate the strength of feeling. In the last two weeks alone, I have been presented with two major petitions.

The Government talk tough but act soft on crime, and ordinary people end up paying the price of their incompetence. People feel let down by the Government, and they have been. The Tories have proved that they do not have the solutions on crime. They have had 15 years in which to sort out the problems and they have failed. If they are not prepared to revise their short-sighted, dogmatic and selfish ideology, they will never find the answers. The content of their legislative programme and their responses to the issues that I have raised today will show whether they are capable of such a leap in understanding.

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

The nation and the people of Doncaster, North will be watching and waiting to see what action the Government take. On their past record, I will not be holding my breath.

1.34 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I shall follow on directly from what my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) said, because the Gracious Speech has demonstrated that the Government are out of touch with the real needs of real people in Britain today.

The Government's priorities seem to be just trying to keep the Tory party together. They do not mind what harm they do to the economy, the health service or the environment as long as they can all cling to office. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) no longer functions as the Prime Minister; he is reduced to being the Chief Whip of the Tory party. The slogan that he uses is, "More privatisation, more deregulation and more money for our friends." That is all very well for holding on to the support of the fanatics on the right wing of the Tory party, but I am glad to say that it does not appeal to the people of Britain, who want a Government with practical answers to the day-to-day problems that they face. After 15 years of Tory rule, the public will no longer be fobbed off with more publicity stunts, diversions and distractions. They want to see their day-to-day problems solved.

In the time available I can give only three examples of how the Tories have failed, are failing and will fail to solve the problems faced by the people of Britain, and to fulfil their hopes and aspirations. Most people in Britain believe that all our citizens should have a decent home, and at a price or rent that they can afford. It is not an outlandish idea. It is what all Members of Parliament have for themselves and their families. It is common decency. It promotes family life, enhances the health of the nation and makes economic sense. What do we have instead in Britain today? Before I deal with the figures, let us look at what is happening today to real people in our country.

Within half a mile of this Palace, many of our fellow citizens will spend tonight in a cardboard box. Families all over Britain will spend tonight in bed-and-breakfast accommodation—one room in which to live, if one can call it living; one room for parents and children in which to cook, eat, wash and sleep. Next Monday morning, after a whole squalid weekend of it, the children will be packed off to school, half fed, half asleep, to an overcrowded classroom with a harassed teacher, yet the Gracious Speech referred to equal opportunities for all sections of the community. What cant and hypocrisy.

What about the young couple living in the home of their parents or in-laws, trying to bring up a child with a bed and a cot in the front room of somebody else's home? We see the ties that bind that couple together: love, hope and responsibility. We see them losing an unequal struggle, with a lack of privacy, lack of space and irritation without respite. Yet the Prime Minister talks of a nation at ease with itself, when tonight, in tens of thousands of homes, three generations will not be at ease with one another.

Then there are the families who cannot afford the soaring rents, relying on benefits that do not pay the whole rent; fretting about how they will cope. Yet we now hear that the Government intend to make things worse by cutting housing benefit. There are the families whose homes are worth less than their mortgage. The Government call it "negative equity". To the families concerned, there is a much shorter word—debt. It keeps them awake at night.

Those are all examples of what life will be like for millions of people in Britain tonight. They show the human pain and anguish behind the housing figures. The figures themselves show how the Government have failed the nation. When the Tories came to office, they inherited a house-building programme in which 244,000 houses were completed each year. Last year, the figure was 175,000. The number of council houses built in 1979 was 75,000. Last year, it was 1,940. That means that 39 council houses were completed in 1979 for every one completed last year, or 390 in 1979 for every 10 last year.

Mr. Jenkin: What about housing associations?

Mr. Dobson: The employed parrot on the Government Back Benches asks about housing associations. I expected that. They are supposed to have taken over the role of house building. But, if the hon. Gentleman looks at the number of houses that have been completed by housing associations, councils and new towns put together in 1979, he will see that the figure was 104,000. Last year between them they built 36,000. To put it another way, three houses were completed in 1979 for every one completed last year. While those 36,000 new houses only were being built last year, 160,000 households were officially accepted as homeless—four homeless families for every house that the Government managed to get built. So the Government have failed to build the houses that our people need.

On top of that, the Government have encouraged house prices to rise and they have deliberately driven up housing association and council rents. Over the past five years alone, average council rents have risen by 79 per cent., while the retail prices index has risen by 27 per cent. On top of that, the Government went on to deregulate private rents. So, rents have soared. Tenants have had to pay out a fortune. Many cannot afford the new high rents, so they have either to claim more benefit or claim benefit for the first time. Five years ago, housing benefit cost the taxpayer £3.7 billion. Last year, housing benefit cost the taxpayer £8.8 billion. That was not the fault of the tenants, or the councils, or the housing associations—it was the direct result of Government policy.

Under this Government, building firms have gone broke, building workers are on the dole, house building has gone down, housing costs have soared and the burden on the taxpayer has more than doubled. No wonder the Government, who insist on indicators of performance for local councils, have not got round to having any indicators of performance for themselves. What is needed now is a house-building programme, drawing on the takings from the sale of council houses and augmented by contributions from the private sector, to begin housing the homeless and the overcrowded. That would not only get building workers off the dole, but it would create jobs for people who make cement, bricks, tiles, lavatory pans, baths, curtains, carpets, central heating boilers, light bulbs, cookers and refrigerators. It would even be good for

florists because if someone moves into a new house or flat, there is always somebody in the family who buys his mum a bunch of flowers. Everybody would benefit from having a decent housing programme. That is what Labour wants to see happen and that is what the people of this country want.

The Tories have, apparently for theological reasons, rejected the practical idea that the answer to a housing shortage is to build more houses. They are much more sophisticated than that. They try to confuse the issue. They produce misleading figures. They try to redefine problems out of existence. I say to the Secretary of State that changing the rules under which a group of people without homes of their own will have priority over another group of people without homes of their own will not do anything to solve the housing problem—it will just redefine it.

There is also the Tories' effort to change the issue by changing the language. They introduced "a rough sleeper's initiative". That suggests shades of "Nineteen Eighty-Four". Until they thought of that title, the usual words were "sleeping rough". "Rough" described the unacceptable conditions under which people were forced to sleep. The rough sleeper's initiative subtly changes all that. Now the word "rough" is used to describe the people, not the conditions under which they sleep. That is another problem redefined. Responsibility is unloaded on to the victims of the Government's policy. What will we get out of this hapless lot next—a charter mark for cardboard boxes?

That is not what people want. That takes me to my second example of the Government's failure. The people did not want their water to be privatised. When the Government ask themselves why they could not convince the people to support the privatisation of the Post Office, they need look no further than the water industry. The people of Britain know what happened and is happening in that industry. They remember that it was sold off at far below its proper price, that shares rose by 17 per cent. in about the first five minutes of trading and that, therefore, the taxpayer lost £873 million on the first day that the water companies' shares were traded.

People know that, since privatisation, their bills have increased by 67 per cent., costing £2.7 billion above what would be justified by inflation. In the south-west, water charges have doubled in five years. In the same period, water company profits have increased by 125 per cent. and water industry bosses' pay has increased by an average of 228 per cent. That average conceals some large discrepancies between one water boss and another. Some, by the standards of the greediest, have shown some restraint, but not the boss of North West Water, who has whacked up his pay from £47,000 a year to £338,000 a year, not to mention the multi-million pound share options.

Needless to say, the Tory party and individual Tories have their snouts in the water trough. Thames Water gave the Tory party £50,000. The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) is a director of Yorkshire Water. The hon. Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) is a director of Folkestone and Dover Water Services and the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) is a consultant to North West Water. People question whether those private monopolies, which raise their money by levying a tax on local people—for that is what the water rate is—should retain the services of any political party through the money that they pay in.

What about the famous regulators? The first thing to remember is that the Government are against regulation and never stop saying so. It shows in the way in which water shares shot up after the water regulator announced his new price regime and in the new round of profit announcements. It shows in the way in which the drinking water inspectorate has not mounted a single prosecution since it was set up.

That is not because there is nothing wrong with the water. Thames Water gave £50,000 to the Tory party. In that region, one water sample in every 20 does not meet legal standards. The inspectorate may not be tough on Thames Water, but Thames Water is tough on poor customers, disconnecting 1,200 of them last year, a rather sharp increase on the total before privatisation of just 14.

The Government's keenness on deregulation also showed when the Secretary of State intervened to relieve Yorkshire Water of the £200 million expense of building a first-rate sewage treatment plant to protect the people of Hull and Humberside. How did he do that? He did it by that tried-and-tested Tory technique of redefining the problem out of existence. Hull is now redefined as being on the coast rather than on the estuary, so semi-treated sewage can be pumped into the River Humber.

Up to now, everyone accepted that by nature or the act of God, the open sea started at Spurn point. Now by Act of Gummer, the open sea has been moved 30 miles upstream to the Humber bridge, conveniently to the west of Hull, so lower standards are permitted. The people of Hull and Humberside want straight answers from the Secretary of State. They want to know who asked him to take that decision. They want to know whether parliamentary lobbyists or Tory Members of Parliament were involved in the asking and they will not be satisfied until they get the answers.

We hear fine words from the Government about protecting the environment, but their actions do not live up to their promises.

Mr. McNamara: Will my hon. Friend speculate on how the Humber bridge became a natural boundary for an area of high dispersal? What would have happened if the Humber bridge were two miles further towards the east and if the west Hull outfall had gone straight into an area that was not so desired?

Mr. Dobson: This may be one of the few occasions on which Ministers will bless the building of the Humber bridge.

The Government constantly proclaim that they want rid of regulation. Last year, the flagship of their legislative programme was the Bill to deregulate anything that they did not like. They should, therefore, not be surprised to learn that people will regard with some suspicion the Bill to establish an environment agency for England and Wales and a separate one for Scotland. A Government who are so busy deregulating everything else are hardly likely to toughen regulations intended to protect us from fumes, poisonous dumps and rivers and filthy beaches.

We do not know what the Bill will finally say, but we know what the draft one says. It shows that the new agency will not be environmental protection writ large but environmental protection writ small. The agency is to

[Mr. Dobson]

combine the functions of the National Rivers Authority, HM inspectorate of pollution and waste regulation authorities. We support that step, but the change is being used to weaken rather than strengthen existing statutory duties.

For example, the NRA has a duty to "further" the conservation of areas of natural beauty, flora, fauna and so on. The duty of the new agency will be to "take into account" the effect that any proposals may have on areas of beauty, flora and fauna. At first sight, that may not seem much of a change, but there is a great difference between having to "further" something and having to take it "into account". As shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, I have to "take into account" the Tory Secretary of State's policies, but I can assure the House that I do not intend to "further" them.

At present, none of the bodies to be amalgamated into the environment agency is required to take into account the costs and benefits of their decisions, but the new agency will have to do so. That will leave it open to legal challenge from powerful business interests and is bound to make it less rigorous in protecting the public. If cost-benefit considerations are to be taken into account, countervailing additional powers and duties must be given to the agencies. For example, the precautionary principle and the concept of making the polluter pay could be enshrined in law and given clear precedence over cost-benefit considerations. Without such changes, the new combined agency will be much weaker than the sum of its parts.

Wildlife trusts have said that they are astounded that the new agency's duty is to be so weak; Friends of the Earth described the Bill as a travesty; and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said that the duty on the new agency is so weak as to be farcical. The National Federation of Anglers believes that it opens the way to a deliberate failure to achieve effectiveness. The Government's reputation has sunk so low that no one trusts a word that any Minister says.

Most interested people welcome the basic idea of the new agency, but they realise that it is flawed from the start, with vested interests taking precedence over the health and welfare of the public and the future of the environment. People are profoundly suspicious of a Government who, we understand, are now considering allowing the nuclear industry to dump bulky, low-level, radioactive waste at landfill sites all over the country. Most people do not like what is already being dumped there and they certainly do not want the situation made worse.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990, passed as a result of Labour pressure, required local authorities to draw up registers of contaminated land. The Government have issued two sets of proposals for implementing that, but both have been withdrawn. We want to know when they will get on with implementing the law. If it was right to pass that law in 1990, surely to God they should have implemented it by now.

The Government have promised action to protect hedgerows, but will the new Bill deliver on that pledge? Will the Government keep their election promise to set up independent boards for national parks and to enhance the status of the New Forest? Will they use the Bill to keep their promise to extend the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to cover environmental claims? Will they promote new technology to replace equipment and processes that depend on chemicals which destroy the ozone layer? Will they use money from the roads budget to encourage the installation of devices to reduce and clean up emissions from buses, coaches and lorries? Above all, will they halt their demented crusade against regulation and recognise that regulation has a useful role to play? It has a useful part to play, not just in the immediate protection of the environment, such as trying to reduce the increasing incidence of child asthma, but in making British industry more competitive.

Higher standards for energy efficiency, for engine emissions and for discharges into rivers and seas may cost a bit now, but in the long run, those regulations can help to make British industry more competitive. World markets are crying out for techniques and equipment that can reduce the damaging environmental impact of what is happening now. That is known in the trade as pollution abatement. In future, those world markets will look for plant and equipment that does not create environmental problems in the first place—clean technology, as it is called.

In both markets, Britain is falling behind. Let us take pollution control. At the beginning of the 1980s, Britain's exports of air pollution equipment were eight times the level of imports. By the end of the decade, the decade of triumphant Thatcherism, we were net importers of air pollution equipment. A recent survey of the international pollution abatement market shows Germany, Japan and the United States between them with about half the market. The British share of the world market is so small that it does not rate a mention in the report. It is the same sad story with clean technology, with a lack of Government support in Britain and massive Government support in Germany and Japan.

It is not just a question of Government support. It is widely recognised that the early adoption of strict environmental standards in Germany and Japan gave their industries a head start by requiring them to meet higher standards at home, which made them better equipped to meet higher standards when they sold abroad. As a result, clean technology, which was actually invented in Britain, has been developed and brought to market by Japanese, German and Swedish companies. Deregulation and weak regulation are not just a betrayal of our people's right to clean air, clean water, clean rivers, clean towns and clean countryside. They are a betrayal of British workers and British business.

Given the spur of regulation and Government help, thousands of British people could now find work in research, design, manufacture, construction, installation, operation, maintenance and repair—top-quality jobs to provide a top-quality environment. Britain would be competing with the best on quality, not reduced to trying to compete with the cheapest on price. That is what the people of our country want to see.

Our people want practical help, practical answers to their problems and a decent future for their children. They heard nothing of that in the Queen's Speech other than bits of cant and hypocrisy. Our people want to see a Britain at work, not a Britain on benefits. They want a Britain where people who work for a living are paid a living wage and where the taxpayer does not have to make up for the poverty wages paid by Tory bosses. They want a Britain where economic prosperity, environmental

protection and decent social cohesion go hand in hand. They want a Britain where everyone has a decent home in a neighbourhood free from crime and free from the fear of crime. They want a Britain with a health service in which the doctors work for the patients and do not have to take orders from Tory bureaucrats in flash company cars. That is what the people of our country want.

Our people want a Government who run Britain in the interests of everyone who lives here. They do not get that from this Tory Government. This Government are too busy with their primary, top-priority task of keeping their own party together. They are trying to do it with the same old mixture of more privatisation, more deregulation and more money for their friends. They are trying to keep their party financially afloat by taking money from dodgy sources in Britain and from lying, corrupt and criminal foreigners abroad. They are out of touch with the people and they have shown that in the Queen's Speech. They are so out of touch that before long, they will be out of office.

1.59 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I congratulate the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on his new Front-Bench position. I am sad, however, that his speech did not rise to the new job. We are discussing serious matters, and I was sorry that he should have recycled an old speech. That was the only piece of recycling that we heard about.

One element in the Queen's Speech that will be of particular concern and interest is the decision to produce a new environment agency. I shall begin with that matter, as it is central to my consideration of the Gracious Speech. The idea of bringing together those three disparate organisations is welcomed on both sides of the House. That is perfectly proper, because one cannot deal with environmental problems in other than a holistic way.

The National Rivers Authority, which I was lucky enough to play a part in founding and setting up, has been a great success, but it cannot do what it was set up to do because its remit is not wide enough. To look after the environment properly, it needs, with others, to be able to deal with pollution not only in terms of water but in terms of air and other elements. It is impossible to have a proper arrangement to protect the environment unless the whole issue of waste is part and parcel of that regulation. We have recognised that, and I am pleased to hear from the Opposition that, in principle, they accept and support the bringing together of those three organisations.

I was keen to move forward with a legislative programme that enabled maximum discussion as widely as possible. That is why I produced a draft Bill as early as possible. I have always believed that the process of legislation within the European Union has something important to teach us, in the sense that we know early on what the proposals are, but in a form that makes it possible to discuss and argue. We often end up with legislation that is wholly different from the original draft. That is the proper way to proceed in a democratic structure. I hoped to extend that idea, so the draft Bill has been designed to meet that purpose.

I am pleased to see that, in most areas, the content of the Bill has been welcomed. But the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred to the use of the words covering conservation duty. I have been advised that the words used have exactly the same effect in law as the words used in respect of the NRA.

I have discussed those matters with the various green organisations, some of which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and tried to explain to them that I saw none of the failures or dangers that they saw. I sought to reassure them because we had no intention of weakening the new agency's powers. They still feel that they would prefer the wording to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and would like a different way of dealing with their concerns.

So that there is no doubt whatever about the agency's conservation and sustainable development role, I have decided to amend the wording to provide the clear duty that those bodies would prefer. That is a main advantage of having a draft Bill. If I claim that the words make no difference, I should be able to turn that claim on its head and say that I am prepared to accept words that help those organisations and make them surer of our clear commitment to an agency that has at least the powers of the NRA and which, by bringing them together, will be a significantly more effective guardian of the environment.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras did not take the same time to read my speeches over the past two months as his hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) spent on the speeches of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. Had he done so, he might have come to the House a little more educated about the issues before us. He might not have made those allegations.

The hon. Gentleman might, for example, have discovered that the secretary-general of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds—the largest voluntary organisation in the country, I believe, with about 1 million members—said that it would be

"hard put to keep up with the environmental pace set by this Secretary of State for the Environment."

He might have discovered that, however much he may dislike the Conservative side of the House, there are some issues on which we might have made common cause instead of nasty innuendo. I fear for the future of our discussions if he is going to approach this issue, which of all issues ought to be the one on which we could find much in common, on a cheap party political basis. I shall seek not to do so, but no doubt it will be extremely difficult, especially if the hon. Gentleman continues to giggle from the Opposition Front Bench as is his wont.

The real issue that faces the House is looking after the environment for the sake of our children. We are signed up to sustainable development. That means sustainability—not cheating on our children—and it means a commitment to growth. Those two things must be brought together for there is no evidence of life if there is not growth, and growth must not be bought at the cost of the next generation. The bill must be paid now.

That is why, in addition to the establishment of an environment agency for England and Wales and a Scottish environment protection agency, the Bill will contain the following measures. I hope that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will listen, because this will answer some of his questions.

First, the agency will have powers and duties relating to contaminated land, and amendments will be made to the powers and duties of local authorities, to achieve

[Mr. John Selwyn Gummer]

consistency. Those provisions arise from the review of policy on contaminated land and liabilities, and I shall make a fuller announcement on the subject before the introduction of the Bill. That is the first of the areas that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras mentioned on which I think that I can give him full satisfaction.

Secondly, there will be new requirements to enhance the agency's abilities—to make it much stronger—and enable it to deal with pollution from abandoned mines. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has not had much time to get in control of his brief, but he did not mention that subject. Most people would say that it is an important matter, not least in those parts of the country with long-standing problems of that type, which need a modern legislative framework.

Mr. Dobson: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends pressed for changes in the law on abandoned mines and took the opportunity to mention the subject during the passage of the various mining and coal industry Bills that have appeared before the House, so that idea is not a novelty?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to be able to say that pressing for that has been a common view on both sides of the House, especially among Members of Parliament who represent constituencies affected by the problem. In the environment agency Bill, I am taking an early opportunity to do something about it. I merely pointed out that, for me, that was a major priority.

In addition, we have been working on one new recommendation, which will form part of the Bill and put Britain ahead of any other nation on producer responsibility. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras pressed hard the view that we should be leading the world on the environment for economic as well as moral reasons. I happen to agree, and that is why we will introduce provisions to support industry-led schemes for producer responsibility.

Recycling will thus become a central part of producers' responsibility. They have worked out the scheme themselves, and given us the basis. We shall work on it with them to complete it. I have no doubt that various alterations will be made to their proposals.

I started by saying that it was likely that the most cost-effective way of delivering the scheme would be worked out by the people who were to do the delivering. In other words, the Government must set the targets and it is much better to get those who are best placed to discover the best means of delivering them. That will increase the proportion of material which is recycled significantly. We shall set the targets, and industry will deliver the goods within a legal framework which protects them from unfair competition from those who do not carry that responsibility.

That is the exact kind of cost-effective system for which I am looking. I do not see why it benefits anybody to make people pay more than they need to pay to achieve environmental benefits. Indeed, I think that the opposite is true. If we spend money that we do not need to spend on the environment in one area, we do not have it to spend in another area. Those who are silly enough to suggest that seeking cost-effective, cost-benefit arrangements are somehow anti-environment are surely missing the point.

Unless cost-effective measures are taken, and unless those measures are sensible ones in which there is a link between a gain and cost of that gain, we will not be able to afford the immense cost of the environmental improvements to which the Government are committed and which will be central to the Bill that I shall bring before Parliament.

Our example stands in strong contradiction to what happened in Germany, for example, where industry has been burdened with a system set up by a Government, with all the bureaucratic failures which a Government system has. It has ended up with the Germans disrupting the whole of the waste recycling system of the rest of Europe, and it has meant that Britain has had to pioneer, push through and finally succeed—or as near as damn it succeed—in producing a new regulation on the issue of waste. The German Government sought to use the bureaucratic methods normally associated with socialist Governments, and I am surprised at them—they ought to have known better.

We in this country have dealt with the matter in two sensible ways. First, we have seen that there was a proper European directive to cover the whole of the European Union so that we act together in concert. That is a proper use of the European Union's powers and of the position of Brussels.

Secondly, we have insisted that the system works upon the principle of subsidiarity, so that we in Britain can produce our own scheme which will be bedded in the principle that the industry which produces the waste must not only deal with its recycling, but do so in a way which is best for the industry to achieve the ends which are set by the Community through the Government.

That is surely the way in which we should deal with environmental issues, and we have shown a lead not only in Europe, but in the world. We shall seek, through Commission on Sustainable Development conferences and other ways, to see that such methods are carried through elsewhere. That does not mean regulation for the sake of it. One respects and recognises the need for regulation, but we should not have unnecessary regulation.

Deregulation means getting rid of unnecessary regulations, making them simpler, making them work with the grain of industry instead of against it, making sure that we get the best value for money, and seeing that we have up-to-date regulations rather than carrying forward all kinds of stuff which has been stuck on the statute book for years. That is deregulation, and very sensible it is.

We know that the Labour party does not like deregulation, because it likes regulating. It likes to be in charge—it is the party of centralised control. What has it said during the whole of this debate? "More power for local government . . . local government must do this . . . local government must do that." It does not mention partnership, but it mentions the people who are in centralised control in local government.

What did Labour local authorities not want? Labour did not want the schools to run themselves; the Opposition wanted them under centralised control, under the town hall or the county council. They did not want parents, teachers and governors to run the schools. They wanted local government to run them because, according to the Labour party, local government knows better.

So let us not be taken in by the Labour party's views of partnership. Its list of partners really amounted to the Government and local government. We believe in partnerships between ordinary people, local government, business and national government, all working together as they do in city challenge up and down the country. *[Interruption.]*

However much nonsense the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) may shout from a sedentary position, he should have accompanied me to Labour-controlled Hackney and Stratford, East the day before yesterday, where he would have seen real examples of partnerships, not just partnerships driven by local authorities. I certainly honour the role of local authorities, but that role should be as one partner to bring in the local community. A partnership should not consist only of those who happen to be part of a local authority net.

This Session we shall certainly introduce measures to establish new independent authorities for the 10 national parks in England and Wales, and to revise parks' purposes. We said that we would do that; now we shall deliver it. The Opposition said that we would not do it or deliver it, so people would not respect us. We said that we would do it; we will; and people will support us for doing it.

We shall also introduce—this will please the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras—an enabling power for the preservation of hedgerows of particular value, and new arrangements for the payment of environmental grants. These measures too will form part of the Environmental Agency Bill. To prepare for that, I wish to announce to the House the names of the people who I hope will help us to move from the present system to the new agency system.

I am pleased to say that Lord De Ramsey has been prepared to serve as chairman. Councillor Harman has also been invited to join the committee. He is leader of Kirklees council and vice-chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, and he has been centrally involved with Agenda 21, the local authority organisation dealing with issues of sustainable development. In that capacity, he has shown himself able to bring together people of all political parties.

In addition, I have invited Peter Burnham, a former senior partner at Coopers and Lybrand and a member of the recently established HMIP advisory committee, to join. He is also a founder commission member of English Heritage. Another member of the group will be Imtiaz Farookhi, chief executive of Leicester city council. Hon. Members will remember that Leicester was Britain's first environment city.

I shall also invite Nigel Haigh, director of the Institute of European Environment Policy and chairman of the Green Alliance, to join. Christopher Hampson, a former board member of ICI, chairman of the HMIP advisory committee, former chairman of the CBI's environment committee, and chairman of Yorkshire Electricity, will also serve.

I shall include John Norris, an NRA board member nominated by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and a well-known expert in drainage matters. Then there is Mrs. Shirley Jackson, whose work as a fellow of the Society of Practitioners of Insolvency and whose business ability will bring to the agency the sort of tight control over bureaucracy that my hon. Friends would like. There will be an additional member nominated by the Secretary of State for Wales.

I am especially pleased that Lord De Ramsey has agreed to be chairman. When I was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I was much concerned about the fact that drainage authorities had no conservation duties. Now, drainage is important when it comes to keeping the environment as we would like it to be.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras might have spoken differently if he had looked at the background and history to the duties of conservation. I was determined to introduce such measures to drainage authorities and the man who made it possible was the then chairman of the Association of Drainage Authorities, Lord De Ramsey. He has been prepared to stand up for conservation not only among the people he represented as president of the Country Landowners Association but on his own farm, where he has carried out a great deal of work which has become a model for people roundabout and beyond. He has delivered the answer to many conservation concerns and hon. Members would honour him for that.

Another aspect of Lord De Ramsey's work should commend itself to the House. He will now withdraw as a member of the board of the long-established Cambridge water company. It recently sank a new borehole some way from Cambridge, and I went to see it and open the pump assembly. That was part of another aspect of conservation that concerns us, because conservation is not just about flora and fauna, which are important, but about the man-made part of Britain's environment.

The way in which that water company has ensured that its installations should clearly blend with the other buildings of a historic village and estate is impressive. I could mention a number of other utilities where that concern has not been dealt with as directly. I was pleased to note that in my discussions with Lord De Ramsey he supported the change in wording of the conservation duty to which I have referred.

We shall also be transferring to the environment agency HMIP's functions under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, and we shall simplify the authorisation procedures, to make them not less stringent but very much clearer. I am sure that all hon. Members will be pleased about that.

Mr. Dobson: The Minister said that the hedgerow legislation would be an enabling measure. Who will be enabled by that? I am not in the habit of commenting on the background of people I know nothing about. The only two people mentioned by the Minister whom I know about are John Harman and Imtiaz Farookhi, who are both excellent. If there are to be local authority representatives on the board of the agency or agencies, I hope that the Secretary of State will consider allowing local authorities to nominate some of their members or to proffer alternatives from which the Minister might choose. In this case, perhaps we could see who two of the alternatives might be.

Mr. Gummer: I do not envisage the environment agency advisory committee, which is what it has to be while legislation is going through Parliament, as having a representative function. I have tried to make it a group of

[Mr. Gummer]

people whose interests are widely spread and who can make personal contributions and have the credibility of great standing.

I hope that no one suggests that Councillor Harman is anything other than a good representative of local authorities. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman did not say that he was not, but he said that people should be representative. I do not see the agency in that way.

One of the problems about the representation of local authorities which have a number of different organisations within them is that one could not have an effective committee with the range of representation that might be convenient for them. Therefore, I have done my best to get the balance which I hope the hon. Gentleman thinks is right. To have both the chief executive and the leader of a local council on a committee of some eight people, plus a chairman, is not a bad way to try to ensure that local authorities are fully covered.

I understand the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) about playing fields. The planning arrangements about the use of playing fields are tough. I made a number of decisions recently in which it was made quite clear that I would not allow playing fields to be developed. I respect my right hon. Friend's views on the matter, which I have looked at before. I shall look again to see whether we need to tighten up in any way, but my impression is that the arrangements are already fairly tight.

I very much agree with my right hon. Friend about the enormous changes in Brent. It is a good example of not throwing money at problems but running the show properly. That is what has made the difference. The Conservative Brent council is now running the show at a much lower cost to the council tax payer than was the case under Labour, and it is running it extremely well. To win prizes for services that used to be nominated as the worst in the country, when the Conservative council has been in power for only just over three years, is a remarkable achievement, and one that is clearly recognised as worth while by the people of Brent.

There are difficulties with development appeals, which was another point raised by my right hon. Friend. After all, what we are doing is telling people that they cannot do what they want on land upon which they should have a right to do just that. We restrict people's rights, so naturally they have an appeal that is different in form from others. I think that that is about the right balance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) raised the question of the National Rivers Authority and navigation issues. I do not think that anything that we are doing will in any way weaken the position of those concerned with navigation. If he has a particular point, I shall be happy to consider it. I am certainly looking at the problem of crushers. I agree with him about their value. The problem is that they make a great deal of dust in many cases and there must be some sensible regulation. If my hon. Friend has any particular cases he wants to raise, I shall consider them.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) courteously explained that he could not remain until the end of the debate. However, I must point out that he has again called for an unfair voting system. In Germany, for example, it ensures that the smallest party remains in government for ever. He wants an unfair voting system, and I think that I know why.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) about the Royal Mail. It will suffer because privatisation has been put off, when in fact it is the answer to the problems.

I say directly to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras that I go around the world selling British industry. We are making considerable inroads and our exports are up in a big way. Many of the companies that are most effective in selling environmental goods, services and new techniques are the British privatised water companies. Yet, in all he said, he did not say a single word about the many jobs and the considerable amount of extra wealth that has come into this country because of privatisation, and especially through the water companies. I am sorry that he is not yet able to admit that.

The difficulty with the Labour party is that it is so much behind the times. No other Labour party would speak as the British Labour party does. In his speech, the hon. Gentleman was more out of date than any spokesman of any Labour party in the whole of Europe. No one speaks like him. Indeed, I do not think that the ex-communists in eastern Germany would speak like him—yet he is supposed to be a moderate, even behind his beard. He made a speech that would not have sounded out of place in 1932. He must grow up in the world in which we live, not in one—

Mr. Dobson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: Not on that point; it would be too much fun to give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have only three minutes— *[Interruption.]* Oh, all right, I shall give way.

Mr. Dobson: My speech would have been out of place in the 1930s, because there were far fewer homeless people then.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that, in the 1930s, the people were better off and had better housing and better opportunities. With or without the beard, that is beyond the bounds of credibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) was right about the rail link; we must carefully consider the points that he raised.

I must tell the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) that the newspaper report he mentioned has no basis. It is the NRA that decides the areas concerned. It then goes to each and recommends whether it needs primary, secondary or tertiary treatment. It has not yet done the survey for Hull. When it does, it will give the advice, not me. It is not my responsibility, nor would I want to have it. It is a technical responsibility.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras cannot resist the party politicisation of everything, even the location of the Hull estuary. He is not interested in the environment, but only in the Labour party's fortunes. I was thrilled to be able to announce today, for the first time in a little while, that the Conservatives not only won a by-election from Labour in Hackney but pushed the Liberal party to the bottom of the poll. I suspect that will be the order in which the Government will be returned to the House at the next general election.

We ought to support in particular the elements in the Queen's Speech that relate to the environment agencies Bill, for we will then give the kind of tough protection to the environment that is necessary.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 21 November.

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That European Community Documents Nos. 10904/93, 8037/94 and 8618/94, relating to two- and three-wheeled vehicles, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee A; and European Community Documents Nos. COM(94)400 and 8782/94, relating to the draft general budget for 1995, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee B.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Thursday 24th November

(i) put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Deregulation (Procedure) not later than two hours after their commencement, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendments to the said Motion which she may have selected and which may then be moved;

(ii) put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to two- and three-wheeled vehicles not later than one and a half hours after their commencement; and

(iii) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1994 not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon; and

(2) at the sitting on Monday 28th November put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the European Communities' 1995 Budget not later than one and a half hours after their commencement;

and the aforesaid Motions may be entered upon and proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

East Thames River Crossings

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): East London, north and south of the River Thames, is an area of higher unemployment than the rest of London. It has more housing problems and poor transport connections to the rest of London. North of the river, Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets are first, second and third in the Department of the Environment's league tables of urban deprivation. South of the river, Greenwich ranks 28th in the Department's list of the 100 most deprived urban councils.

My constituency has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the country, a training and enterprise council that increasingly looks unable to deliver, and adult male unemployment around the town centre in the region of 50 per cent.

The name Greenwich conjures up images of the Cutty Sark, Greenwich park, the royal observatory, the famous Queen's house of Inigo Jones, Wren's masterpiece of the Royal Naval college and Georgian terraces—the Greenwich that tourists see. Few glimpse the reality for ordinary families in the borough, which has unemployment rates higher than in Bolsover or Blyth Valley.

Unemployment levels in my own constituency of Woolwich are higher than in Bootle, Hartlepool, Knowsley, Newcastle or Salford. Together with the boroughs on the north bank of the river, Woolwich also has development potential. At the heart of the town centre are 75 acres of derelict industrial land owned by the Ministry of Defence, which once housed the royal arsenal. In its heyday, the arsenal employed 80,000 people on that site—the largest factory in Europe. Today, it is derelict. To the east, there are hundreds of acres of development land in Thamesmead. To the west, there is the Blackwall peninsula—derelict land that once housed the now-defunct metropolitan gas works.

In that picture of gloom there are enormous opportunities for change; that is already occurring in the London docklands north of the river, where there are well-formulated plans for the Blackwall peninsula. The biggest drawback to development is transport. East and south-east London have poor public transport links to the rest of London, and south-east London is the worst served of all. Indecision about investment in public transport and uncertainty in the vacuum created by the Minister's announcement last June of the withdrawal of proposals for the east London river crossing are hindering development and job opportunities in the area.

Woolwich boasts one of the modern wonders of the world—the Thames barrier. That is a superb feat of civil engineering, but the Thames itself is a barrier to communities and to development that is difficult to overcome. The Thames could be used as a means of transport. It offers possibly the quickest way into central London, but there are no commuter services—only tourist boats. There could be traffic across the river, but apart from the Ford ferry which transports workers from Belvedere to Dagenham, there is only the Woolwich ferry—the floating link between the north and south circular roads in which the Department of Transport has

[Mr. John Austin-Walker]

failed to invest and which it has neglected to modernise, resulting in queues and congestion as boats are taken out of service. For motorists in south-east and east London, there are two depressing announcements on the morning radio. One is, "Only one boat is working on the Woolwich ferry," and the other is, "Overheight vehicle stuck in the Blackwall tunnel." I have to tell the Minister that there were two of the latter this morning.

The Government's preferred solution to those problems was to build more roads. I am aware that there was much lobbying for a motorway to link docklands on the northern side with the M2 and M20 south of the river and the channel ports; for enhanced capacity on the M25 crossing—the construction of the Queen Elizabeth II bridge. There was pressure for improved access across or under the river at Blackwall.

The Government appear to have listened to those voices, but to have ignored all the possible public transport solutions and put all their eggs in the road-building basket. But they came unstuck over the east London river crossing. They planned to build a motorway across the Thames, through Thamesmead and the residential areas of Abbey Wood and Plumstead—areas with some of the highest incidences of asthma and child respiratory illness in the south-east—and then through Woolwich's Oxleas wood, destroying an 8,000-year-old ancient woodland and site of special scientific interest.

Clearly, the Government had not anticipated the strength of the environmental concerns. The battle over the east London river crossing led to what I understand was the longest planning inquiry on record. The Secretary of State was taken to the High Court by local residents. The European Environment Commissioner issued a reasoned opinion that the Government had breached the European directive on environmental impact. What started as a small, local campaign—Plumstead Against the River Crossing—became Londonwide, then national and eventually international. It was discussed at the Rio summit and gained support from the rainforest campaigners in southern America. It eventually led to the Minister coming to the House last June to say that the proposals did not measure up to the Government's current environmental standards.

The problem was that, all the time that that was going on, the area along the line of the proposed road was blighted. Homes fell into disrepair and decay, not just the 258 homes due to be demolished to make way for the road, but the surrounding area as well. The problem now is that, although the original proposals for the east London river crossing have been withdrawn, the Government appear to remain wedded to the idea of a strategic road linking docklands north of the river to the M20 and the M2. They cannot work out how to get around, over, under or through Oxleas wood. They have not cancelled the compulsory purchase orders and have not withdrawn the line order, so the area which has been blighted for the past 20 years remains blighted. But I urge the Minister, having seen the situation for himself yesterday, to accept that the east London river crossing will not be built and to lift the blight on the Abbey Wood and Plumstead area.

I am aware that there are discussions with the private sector about the possibility of a road bridge linking Barking with Thamesmead and stopping at the Thamesmead spine road. The Minister will know that I have reservations about such a proposal. I accept that it might produce some benefits for Thamesmead, but it would also pose problems in terms of traffic generation for Woolwich, Belvedere, Erith and, possibly, Dartford, too. If that east London river crossing were ever built, it should not exclusively be a road bridge, because at very little extra cost it could carry the docklands light railway south of the river to Thamesmead, and I can see that as a very real plus for the area.

If the little east London river crossing—the bridge from Barking to Thamesmead—is an option that the Minister wishes to explore, he could go out to consultation on that and we could examine in detail the benefits and disbenefits of that proposal, but in the meantime he should withdraw the line order through Abbey Wood and Plumstead for the big east London river crossing and help the regeneration of housing in that area.

I implore the Minister to look seriously at the public transport alternatives. I draw his attention to the east London rail studies. In 1989, the then Secretary of State pointed to the need to improve rail services to docklands and east Thameside. The earlier central rail studies had been about relieving congestion, but the east London rail studies stressed the developmental role of public transport provision. The first east London rail studies report referred to regeneration and was probably the first official report to highlight the need for a rail link across the Thames to Woolwich, which would extend the docklands effect east and south. It was clear that a public transport river crossing would have advantages over a road crossing: less noise, less pollution, less disturbance during construction, less community severance, greater development potential, higher safety, less demolition and land acquisition and less harm to local ecology.

The proposed Woolwich rail crossing enjoys the support of the London Docklands development corporation, London Transport, British Rail, Railtrack, Union Rail and the local authorities in the area. London Transport and the London docklands corporation now propose a core scheme linking the north London line with the north Kent line and the provision of new cross-river services between Stratford and Abbey Wood. I hope that a spur to Thamesmead will also be built at little extra cost. The Woolwich metro fits into the Government's east Thames corridor, Thames gateway initiative and core services could be extended east to Dartford and possibly to the proposed international passenger station at Ebbsfleet. A new station could be provided at Silvertown, with a possible link to City airport, and the existing Woolwich-Arsenal station could be utilised.

The project is clearly attractive to the private sector and the project group, consisting of London Transport, British Rail, Railtrack and the London Docklands development corporation, is looking into those possibilities. But the scheme will require a public sector contribution and the Government's reticence could be a major contributor to delay.

The local authorities most affected—Greenwich and Newham—have not been invited to participate in the project group or its steering group. In view of the significance of the rail crossing for Woolwich and the direct impact on Woolwich town centre, I hope that the Minister will argue for the borough council to be a full member of the group. The LDDC, as the planning authority for the north bank, is fully represented on both groups and will, no doubt, be safeguarding its essential

interests. Greenwich, as the planning authority for the south bank, ought to have similar representation. I understand that the LDDC and London Transport are sympathetic to that proposal, but that opposition is coming from Railtrack. I enlist the Minister's support in rectifying that.

The east London rail study has looked at the benefits in terms of development and job creation. It has looked at the possible relief on other overcrowded lines, but it has not yet estimated the benefits from reduced rail overcrowding. It has not considered the benefits from reduced congestion on the road network, nor have the environmental impacts been evaluated and compared with road options.

Even without assessing those additional benefits, the arguments to press ahead with the Woolwich metro are convincing. I hope, however, that we will not see delay, such that we saw over the Jubilee line extension, as the Government dither about whether there is to be public investment. The scheme is too important for the future economy of Woolwich and north Kent and to the successful development of the royal docks to insist on private capital alone being responsible for its construction. It must be a partnership, with the Government playing a full part.

We had delay and anxiety over the Jubilee line extension and then uncertainty about a station on the southern side at Blackwall. What nonsense it would have been to build the Jubilee line extension crossing the river twice from north to south and north again and not provide a station on the south side. What an opportunity will be missed now if the docklands light railway extension to Lewisham does not have a station at Cutty Sark gardens, despite an undertaking by the Government that a station would be included. I hope that the Minister recognises the near impossibility of getting a private funding package of £14 million together by January 1995 and that he will persuade the Department of the Environment to allow the project to go to tender in the new year with the options open regarding the Cutty Sark station.

Finally, I come to the proposed Blackwall third crossing. Clearly, the impact of a third crossing at Blackwall, together with the Woolwich metro, will need to be assessed in relation to the perceived need for an east London river crossing. It is the view of Greenwich council that the Woolwich metro plus the Blackwall scheme would be sufficient to meet transport needs in the area. Of course, the Minister will be aware of local arguments against the third crossing at Blackwall. I share the concerns on both sides of the river about the adverse environmental impact of a high-level bridge on the residents, especially those in Tower Hamlets, the blight and adverse effect with regard to the land-take on the Greenwich peninsula and potential traffic effects. However, at the end of the day, if the Minister is convinced of the need for a third crossing at Blackwall, I urge him to consider seriously the tunnel option.

Yesterday, the leader of Greenwich council, Councillor Len Duvall, suggested to the Minister that, instead of piecemeal consultations on individual projects, there should be widespread consultation in a meaningful way with the local authorities on a comprehensive package of measures to meet the needs of the 'east Thames area. I know that Councillor Duvall and his colleagues in Greenwich, as well as those in Newham and Tower Hamlets, I am sure, are willing to work positively with the Minister to ensure that the developments in the east Thames corridor bring lasting benefits to the local community. The Woolwich rail tunnel is crucial to the economic regeneration of Woolwich and north-east Kent and is crucial to the successful development of the royal docks as well.

2.44 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) on his success in securing the debate and I thank him and Minister for their courtesy in allowing me a brief period in which to speak. My constituency has within its boundaries three of the river crossings that have been proposed or are under construction. They are the Blackwall third crossing, the Jubilee line extension and the docklands light railway extension.

As the Minister knows, there is considerable support in Greenwich for a third crossing at Blackwall, although we are both conscious of the environmental consequences of the proposed high-level bridge that his Department favours, and sensitive to the concerns expressed by people on the north side of the river about the possible consequences of a third crossing. If the Minister considers the congestion that exists, particularly immediately south of the Blackwall tunnels, and the extent to which that affects a much wider region, including Greenwich town centre, he will understand the forceful support of people in Greenwich for a third crossing at Blackwall.

On the Jubilee line extension, there is considerable pleasure in Greenwich at the fact that, belatedly, approval has been given to North Greenwich station, although there is concern about the price that is being paid—approval was dependent on the 1,000-vehicle park-and-ride facility at north Greenwich. There is concern that that will attract more vehicles into a region that, as I have already said, is severely congested. As the proposal is proceeding, it gives added force to the case for the third Blackwall crossing.

On the docklands light railway extension, we enter a rather different world, a curiously Alice in Wonderland world. The Minister for Transport in London is not responsible because the scheme is being promoted not by the Department of Transport but by the Department of the Environment. That seems curious enough, but the second bizarre Alice in Wonderland feature is that Cutty Sark station, which would be on that route, and which would generate the largest number of visitors and serve the major tourist attraction of Greenwich town centre, with all the historic buildings to which my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich referred, is very much in doubt.

The station is in doubt because of an extraordinary piece of short-termism on the part of the Department of the Environment, which said that the station could be built only if the full cost were raised by Greenwich council and private sector partners within a three-month period. Allowing the station not to be built flies in the face of all common sense. Without question, transport logic points to the need for a station to serve this major tourist attraction on a link that serves another of London's major tourist attractions, the Tower of London. There are links down the river, but the case for a direct rail link between the Tower and Greenwich is strong.

The decision to reject a station at Cutty Sark, which is right in the heart of the tourist area, is curious. It flies in the face not only of common sense but of the views of the people who responded to the consultation exercise that

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

the Department of the Environment, Docklands Light Railway and the London Docklands development corporation carried out when the proposal was made to drop the station.

Local residents, businesses and other organisations expressed almost unanimous support for Cutty Sark station to go ahead. Instead of responding positively to that and working with Greenwich council and others to ensure that the station is built, the Government appear to be trying to wriggle out of their responsibilities. Saying that the station will be built only if the council raises £14 million within three months unconditionally is tantamount to killing the station. It is depressing that the Secretary of State for the Environment, who has taken that decision and who is not currently in the Chamber, has essentially signed the death warrant for Cutty Sark station and does not have the guts to admit that. I have expressed that view to him in writing, so the fact that he is not here is not a reason for my holding back from making that comment.

To its credit, Greenwich council is doing its level best to come forward with a funding package to make the station possible and it is working closely with a number of partners, local businesses, landowners and other organisations. At this stage, it is difficult to say how far it will succeed in raising the large sum of money that has been specified. I hope that it will go a long way towards achieving its aim. I am giving the council my full support, but I hope that the Minister accepts that it is very strange for the Government essentially to have passed all responsibility for securing the station on to the local authority and to have established such extraordinarily difficult conditions for the station to be built.

I hope that the Government will change their mind and that the Minister will persuade his colleagues in the Department of the Environment to make them work more constructively with Greenwich council and Greenwich's private sector partners to ensure that the station is built. Not to do so would be an extraordinary exercise in putting short-term economies before the long-term advantages of building the station, which has huge potential for generating additional income and which makes great sense in planning and transport terms.

2.49 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I support my hon. Friends the Members for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), who represent the south bank in east London whereas I represent north Woolwich, or the north bank. I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) is here, too. My hon. Friends have made clear their views on the Blackwall crossing and stated what nonsense it would be not to have the Cutty Sark station on the docklands light railway. The Woolwich crossing, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich referred, should have a high priority. It would extend the north London link from Richmond and Willesden junction—and perhaps by even more ambitious routes—across the Thames to north Kent, Dartford and even further.

There is no great support for the construction of a road for the east London river crossing, but there is support for another extension of the docklands light railway, even by tunnel, across to Thamesmead. Such a proposal would be in keeping with the Government's change from road to rail and would be wholly in line with the royal commission's recent report.

I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich said about the river. Should there be a practical proposal for developing the river as part of London's overall transport system, I hope that the Government will give it as much support as they have given to road planning and construction.

2.51 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) on securing this important debate. Having spent some years replying to such debates, I now appreciate that there is an invariable rule which is that the longer one allows the proposer to make his case, the longer one needs to reply to what he said in the shorter time remaining. The inverse is even worse in that if the proposer sits down after five minutes having said nothing, one has to extemporise for the remaining 25 minutes. However, it was important that the hon. Member for Woolwich and also the hon. Members for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) should have been able to put their remarks on record.

We are not in the business of spending vast sums of public money to build infrastructure for purposes wholly unrelated to the environmental, social and economic needs of an area. We know that the Thames is a great asset of which we wish to make more. Indeed, we have been doing so on an all-party basis and Labour and Conservative-controlled boroughs further down river have co-operated with me. However, what emerged from the consultation and planning work was that the Thames is also a barrier. It is a barrier to regeneration and, as the hon. Member for Woolwich said, it is starkly evident that that is especially so east of Tower bridge where, as the river widens, crossings become fewer, which is a genuine constraint on our ability to regenerate areas where unemployment is high, housing is bad and conditions are far from ideal.

There have been tremendous developments in docklands, north and south of the river and adjacent to specific regeneration areas. There are signs that whole areas are coming back to life. Hon. Gentlemen will agree that many people in London have consistently underestimated the impact of the Jubilee line. It will have a tremendous regenerative effect on a swathe of south London, through Bermondsey and Southwark to Surrey Quays before it crosses back to the Isle of Dogs, on to north Greenwich and up to Canning Town. We all, therefore, have a straightforward agenda in our minds. We want to try to remove the river as a barrier to allow for the regenerative expansion we all seek, and to try to do so in a way that is consistent with the needs and wishes of the local population.

I hope that the hon. Member for Woolwich will allow me to say that he was less than his usual equable self when he described us as having all our eggs in a road-building basket. If he will forgive me for saying so, that was a ludicrous caricature. As he knows, the whole point about our strategy in east London is that it takes account of Woolwich metro, of the Lewisham extension of the docklands light railway and of the Jubilee line

extension. That is a quick £3 billion-worth of eggs in the road-building basket. Compared with that, the road-building component is relatively modest.

Equally, in all fairness, the hon. Gentleman's version of the history of the east London river crossing was unrecognisable. There is no reticence, as he puts it, about Woolwich metro. Far from it; it is very much a live project for us. I was delighted to take it on board as it arose from the Union Metro proposals and to see how the operators generally regarded it highly, not least because it is quite a cost-effective proposal with much of the infrastructure already in place.

Again, the hon. Gentleman will have to forgive me for putting this next point on the record; it needs to be said. There was no dithering over the proposition that we should attract the private sector into the Jubilee line extension. "Dither" is the last word that I would associate with that transaction. For the record, what happened was that Labour Members constantly berated me for not simply saying, "Get on with it. Start building. Do not worry about the private sector. The private sector is too slow. Build the thing." I said no because I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport were well aware that as long as Labour Members took that view, the private sector would sit back and say, "If they are mugs enough to put the money in themselves, let them do it." It was only when the private sector saw clearly that this Government did not flinch that it contributed £400 million towards the building of the line—money that would otherwise have been lost to the Exchequer and lost to London. I apologise to no one for having stood firm in that transaction and for having achieved an excellent result.

To add insult to injury, which is uncharacteristic of the hon. Gentleman who is such a mild and generous-hearted chap in reality, he said that it would be nonsense for us not to build a station at north Greenwich. He is absolutely right. It would, indeed, have been nonsense which is precisely why I made it clear to the private sector interests there that they would contribute in large measure to its construction. That is exactly what they subsequently did.

If one seeks office in this country, it is as well to sharpen up one's bargaining techniques because these people are no patsies. I fear that a life in the wilderness has left the hon. Gentleman with his customary good nature, but without that instinct for the jugular which so defines the Government, whom it is probably best to leave to do these sort of deals while the hon. Gentleman remains happy to chide me—

Mr. Austin-Walker *rose—*

Mr. Norris: Given the limited time, I shall pass on to one or two important issues.

The third crossing at Blackwall is, indeed, a difficult proposition. The difference between the tunnel and the bridge is that the tunnel costs about £80 million more and, unfortunately, provides only two lanes of traffic, whereas the bridge provides four. It is clear that the bridge is extremely intrusive on the north side and it is also clear that British Gas has many reservations about its intrusion on the south side. We want to try to find an alternative, but I am loth to see the tunnel as an alternative simply because it is a rather inadequate solution. We shall need to press further on an all-party basis on that.

On the Cutty Sark station, it is simply a question of looking at £14 million, which is more than all the other station costs put together. That must be set against the fact that Island Gardens and Greenwich stations are on either side of the Cutty Sark and that each is about 700 yd from it. It is the sensible project management that has to go into making tough decisions which will shape that project. The important point is that Greenwich will be on the DLR map. Greenwich is what tourists recognise and Greenwich is where people will go.

The consultation document, which we hope to issue shortly, will stimulate, I hope, exactly the kind of constructive exchange that we have had to date both north and south of the river, recognising as it does that this is a problem that we all have in seeking to regenerate the local community. I echo the hon. Gentleman's words in that I have enjoyed an extremely co-operative relationship with Len Duvall of Greenwich council and with many of his colleagues. I look forward to that continuing. I am heartened by the co-operative sense in which people both north and south of the river are prepared to look at these issues. I promise the hon. Gentleman that there will be no shortage of co-operation on my part in endeavouring to see this through to a successful—

The motion having been made at half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, Mr. Deputy Speaker *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 21 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGES FROM THE QUEEN

SUMMER TIME

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Address praying that the Summer Time Order 1994 be made in the form of the draft laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answers to the Addresses, as follows:

I have received your Address praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes On Estates Of Deceased Persons and Inheritances) (Switzerland) Order 1994 be made in the form of the draft laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

I have received your Address praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes On Income) Orders 1994 for Estonia, Vietnam, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Switzerland, Kazakhstan, Mexico and the Russian Federation be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Railways (Rolling Stock)

1. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the companies set up to supply the railway industry with rolling stock will be ready to place their first orders; and what total capital is being made available to the companies at the outset.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): British Rail, the present owner of the three passenger rolling stock leasing companies, is assessing the business requirements for new passenger trains. After the companies enter the private sector, they will base their investment and capital funding decisions on commercial judgment.

Mr. Gunnell: I believe that it would be in order to compliment the Minister on his new position. This is the third time that I have put the first question to a new Minister; each of the other two has been promoted. [Hon Members: "Third time unlucky."] Yes—he has certainly taken over the railways at a critical juncture.

Will the Minister speed up the orders being placed, because the railway engineering industry is dying as a result of the uncertainty about rolling stock caused by the privatisation proposals and the lack of progress with the rolling stock companies? These companies—there are four of them in Yorkshire—need help now. Will the Minister speed up the orders, so that capital is provided to get our industry going again?

Mr. Watts: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generous welcome and for his predictions about my career.

British Rail is assessing the business case for further passenger rolling stock. I expect it to reach its conclusions early next month. I will certainly do anything that I can to assist with ensuring that packages which are suitable and which fit into the private finance initiative are brought forward.

Mr. John Greenway: I, too, welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box for his first Question Time, and I thank him for the reply that he has just given to the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell).

Is my hon. Friend aware that, unless the ABB carriage works in York has a new order for rolling stock in place by early next year, the carriage works could close with the loss of a further 750 jobs? Will he continue to do all that he can to press British Rail, which is responsible for placing those orders—with the approval of the Treasury under the private finance initiative—to order the trains that Network SouthEast customers want?

Mr. Watts: I had a meeting last week with ABB. The firm explained to me the concerns that my hon. Friend has just described to the House again. I commend his consistent support for the industry. It is, of course, for British Rail to decide whether there is a business case; it is then for Ministers to see whether a proposal can be put together which fits the criteria of the private finance initiative.

Mr. Bayley: Is the Minister aware that 850 people at the York carriage works have already been made redundant since the blight on further orders that resulted from the uncertainty over privatisation? The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) is right. Unless there is an order within the next few weeks, the York carriage works will close and we in Britain will end up having to import trains rather than building them ourselves. On 1 December, the Minister and I will be at a meeting of the York Rail Forum. Will the Minister give a commitment to bring to that meeting confirmation that British Rail has made its business case and timetables for future orders for suburban trains and for the Government's decisions thereafter? If he does not do that, it is likely to be too late.

Mr. Watts: I do not accept that there is a connection between the privatisation process and orders for rolling stock. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the age profile of rolling stock he will see why, in any event, there would be some reduction in the flow of orders at this time. It is for British Rail to decide whether there is a business case. As I said earlier, I expect British Rail to reach those decisions early next month. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that that will not be by 1 December when he and I, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), will meet the York Rail Forum.

Integrated Transport Programmes

2. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider pilot schemes to establish the feasibility of integrated transport programmes.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): The package approach already enables local authorities to put forward package bids covering all forms of transport.

Mr. Hendry: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his well-earned promotion and welcome him to the Dispatch Box. I also welcome the initiative already taken by his Department to take heavy freight off the roads and put it on the railways. Is he aware that there is considerable concern in my constituency about the volume of traffic on the A6? Would he consider using the A6 corridor as a pilot for an integrated programme for improvement of the road structure and for traffic calming measures, encouraging the use of public transport?

Dr. Mawhinney: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind and generous words. I am aware of the concern that he has expressed, not least because, as a conscientious constituency Member, he has brought it to our attention on a number of occasions. I should like to study his suggestion carefully, and if he would like to speak to the Minister for Railways and Roads, I am sure that he would be happy to have such discussions.

Mr. Wigley: I also congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. Does he accept that if the Government are serious about reducing the environmental impact of traffic and wish to move passenger and freight traffic from road to rail, a prerequisite is an improvement in the infrastructure of the railways and co-ordination of transport methods, such as park and ride, traffic calming and the reopening of some lines? Are the Government committed to such a course of action?

Dr. Mawhinney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generous remarks. He mentions a number of matters, all of which we are pursuing. I think that he is premature in suggesting that the existing railway infrastructure could not take a good deal more traffic before serious additional investment in infrastructure would be required. All those issues are actively on the current agenda.

Sir Anthony Durant: I should like to add my congratulations to those that have been offered to my right hon. Friend on his appointment to his new post. Does he agree that integrated transport needs good consultation and good information, and that the proposal to close the M4 immediately after Christmas for four days has caused major concern throughout the affected area? I am delighted that the Under-Secretary and the Minister of State took action and that the closure has been postponed. Who authorised the closure of that road and were the local authorities consulted?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I could not agree with him more about the importance of good consultation. The matter that he mentions has only recently been brought to my attention. I have already asked that it be fully investigated and I assure my hon. Friend that no such proposal will be implemented after Christmas.

Mr. Meacher: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the structure proposed by the Government, which is based on privatisation, deregulation and fragmentation, makes it impossible to achieve a genuinely integrated transport policy? Does he appreciate that bus deregulation and rail privatisation destroyed interchange and network benefits, and that Britain is now the only country in the European Union without a rail development programme? When will he accept that slashing the road building programme in the coming Budget is no substitute for increased investment in new and better public transport systems, especially for the third of all households which do not own a car?

Dr. Mawhinney: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I look forward to debating transport matters with him across the Floor of the House, especially if he continues to pursue the sort of line that he took today. It was not so long ago that, during a transport debate, he called for a moratorium on road building. He is now trying to generate space so that he can change to being pro-road building if, as he suspects but cannot prove—I have no comment to make—the Budget turns out the way that some newspaper speculators think that it will.

When the hon. Gentleman defines his version of an integrated transport policy, I shall be happy to respond to him in detail. He needs to understand that sloganising from the Dispatch Box is no substitute for thought.

Mr. Garnier: Will my right hon. Friend take the time to travel a little further down the A6 corridor, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), and consider the case of Kibworth, a village in my constituency which lies on that road? It is sorely in need of a new railway station so that commuters can go into Leicester by train rather than clogging up the A6. Will he encourage the Liberal-Labour-dominated county council to reopen the station?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am not sure what judgment my predecessor made, but I am sure that the House will understand that I have no plans to memorise every road or rail project in the country, however large or small, simply so that I can respond instantaneously to any comment in the House. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend made a good point and I shall consider it in the spirit in which he raised it. I note again the ambivalence of opposition parties in power in local authorities towards doing what their spokesmen in the House keep talking about.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

3. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he decided to establish the channel tunnel rail link international station at Ebbsfleet; and what account was taken of its location's impact on the Dartford-Thurrock river crossing on the M25.

Dr. Mawhinney: I announced the Government's decision on 31 August. The assessment of each of the intermediate station options was based on studies

undertaken by Union Railways and its consultants. They have advised that the impact of an Ebbsfleet station on the Dartford-Thurrock river crossing would be minimal.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is the right hon. Gentleman telling the House that the representations that his Department has received from Lord Moore of Lower Marsh and the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) had no impact on the decision to locate the international station at Ebbsfleet? Will he explain how that perverse decision to site the station south of the river can be reconciled with the need to minimise traffic on the M25? Does not logic dictate that the station should be sited north of the River Thames?

Dr. Mawhinney: As I have just told the House, work on determining the viability of Ebbsfleet was carried out by Union Railways and its consultants. The Department of the Environment did the regeneration benefits study. The economics, the railways operation, the regeneration benefits and the substantial private finance on offer all made Ebbsfleet a clear choice.

Mr. Dunn: Will my right hon. Friend take it from me that the decision to site the intermediate international station at Ebbsfleet was not perverse, but entirely right and proper on economic, environmental, transport and job creation grounds? It is supported by the people of north-west Kent and the constituency that I represent.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As is so often the case, he has it precisely right.

Mr. Tyler: In deciding whether the infrastructure for the channel tunnel meets the highest possible standards for public safety, what steps has the right hon. Gentleman in mind to ensure that that involves the whole planning of the network? Is he aware that the recent emergency evacuation programme in the tunnel proved to be unsatisfactory? Can he assure the House that the highest possible standards of public safety will be secured in the infrastructure and in the tunnel itself?

Dr. Mawhinney: Of course I can give the House that assurance. I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman raising false worries and anxiety. Certificates for the use of the tunnel would not have been given if safety standards had been inadequate.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: My right hon. Friend knows that Ebbsfleet is an ideal location for the whole south-east, being adjacent to the M25, and that the new station will have a major impact on thousands of new jobs in the immediate area and on good commuting to London. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the kind of mudslinging that we heard today can only damage those prospects?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct, and he is right to stress the regeneration as well as the transport benefits that will flow from the decision. Labour must make up its mind whether it is in favour of an historic engineering feat, with all the benefits that it can bring to this country, or against it. It cannot behave like the Liberals and sit on the fence.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I welcome the Secretary of State to the Dispatch Box, and say what a thoughtful, wise and compassionate man I know him to be. Can he tell the House where is Ebbsfleet? Most people do not know, and it does not appear on many maps. Steve Bell described it in *The Guardian* as "Fartyswamp". Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to meet people from Stratford—which has an unarguable case, on regeneration, economic and social grounds, for an intermediate station—and tell them why he chose "Fartyswamp" instead of Stratford?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his first remarks, including those that came from the heart. He will be pleased to know that a day or two ago, I agreed to meet representatives of the Stratford promotional group, and a date will be fixed. In view of the comments that the hon. Gentleman persists in making to the *Evening Standard*, I remind him that

> "As part of the tender process for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link as a whole the four consortia will be required to enter bids on the basis of no station at Stratford, a Stratford international and domestic station, and an international only station at Stratford."

I hope that the hon. Gentleman, for the sake of his constituents, will stop creating the impression that Stratford is off the map. Incidentally, I was quoting from a press release that I issued on 31 August.

Colchester-London Line

4. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent investment there has been on the line between Colchester and London and on rolling stock for that line.

Mr. Watts: The line between Colchester and London is currently undergoing a programme of resignalling and of track and station improvements which is due for completion in 1997. New class 321 rolling stock was introduced on the line in 1990.

Mr. Jenkin: Let me tell my hon. Friend how much his announcement will be welcomed, given that again this morning commuters were subjected to completely unacceptable delays due to a train failure between Whitham and Hatfield Peverel. Can he give a reassurance that performance on the line is improving? Is it not the case that when Railtrack is privatised, private investment can be attracted to improve the line's infrastructure?

Mr. Watts: Investment in the line is designed in part to improve reliability. In 1992, the charter punctuality standard for Great Eastern was 86 per cent., and that was raised to 88 per cent. for the current year. The average for the past year was 89.7 per cent.

Heathrow (Night Flights)

6. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last discussed the number of night flights at Heathrow with the chairman of the British Airports Authority.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steven Norris): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets Sir John Egan, chief executive of BAA plc, from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest. BAA plc and other interested parties were given the opportunity to comment formally on night restrictions during the public consultation undertaken between November 1993 and February 1994.

Mr. Jessel: As Heathrow Members today week are to meet my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to discuss aircraft noise at Heathrow, will he remember that we and our constituents want a total ban on all night flights, and

that the British Airports Authority itself says that night flights are not of crucial importance to it, which is hardly surprising as only one flight in 80 is a night flight, and night flights create noise, disturbance and nuisance out of all proportion to their numbers?

Mr. Norris: I have never been in any doubt as to my hon. Friend's views on that matter, and he reiterated them today. We have always sought a sensible balance between the interests of the airline industry, which uses Heathrow—our premier airport and a vital link in commercial terms—and the interests of those who live around the airport and who, of course, want to have a decent night's sleep. That is a perfectly reasonable balance and we shall continue to press it and see that it is maintained.

Rail Freight

7. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of freight traffic goes on the railways in (a) the United Kingdom and (b) the European Union.

Dr. Mawhinney: The United Kingdom percentage figure of tonnage handled in 1992 was 7 per cent. as compared with a European Union average of 6 per cent.

Mr. Hain: The fact is, as the Secretary of State will surely agree, that the proportion of traffic carried on roads has increased persistently since the Government came to power in 1979. Does not that abysmal picture show that the Government have failed to invest sufficiently in our railway system, which has turned it from the envy of Europe to the joke of Europe and ensured that our roads increasingly resemble mobile car parks? What action will he take to reverse that trend and to invest in our public transport system?

Dr. Mawhinney: I would not have expected anything else from the hon. Gentleman. The fact is that we have made huge investments in the railways in the past 15 years. The decrease in the use of railways for freight started in the 1920s. We are going to privatise the arrangement precisely so as to make it more sensitive to the customer and thus to reverse that trend. The hon. Gentleman is against that process. He does not appear to be aware that, over the past 15 years or so, we have put some £100 million of grants into shifting 3 million lorry journeys a year from road to rail. The biggest single grant went to a company in his constituency. I am sorry that he did not bother to mention that.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the height of hypocrisy for Labour Members to raise that issue, when they supported a series of damaging strikes by the signal workers, which have been a major setback to the cause of switching freight from road to rail?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It will take British Rail, and perhaps the privatised companies that will succeed it, some time to reverse the damage that was done with the support of the Labour party.

Mr. Meacher: Is not it a serious criticism of the right hon. Gentleman's transport policy that, in this country, three times more freight per tonne kilometre, especially long-distance freight, goes by road, compared with either France or Germany? Is not that because there has been sustained investment in rail freight services in those countries, plus greater controls over lorry traffic, especially a ban on most big lorries using motorways at weekends? What action does the Secretary of State propose to take to double rail freight over long distances of more than 200 km, which would reduce the use of roads by heavy goods vehicles by nearly half?

Dr. Mawhinney: Both the hon. Gentleman and I have been going along a learning curve since we were appointed to our posts. He has further to go than me, because he does not appear to understand that the figures for France and Germany include through traffic. For example, a train now goes every day from this country to Italy. It travels through France and that counts in the French statistics. The hon. Gentleman should also be aware that a fundamental of railway freight finance relates to di ance travelled, and that therefore, by definition, as an island we have more difficulties in meetings those judgments. The truth is that British Rail and the Government are determined to move in that direction with all speed.

Railways (Noise)

8. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to lay before the House the draft Noise Insulation (Railways and other Guided Transport Systems) Regulations, 1993; if these will apply to intensification of use of existing lines as well as newly constructed lines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: Many of those who responded to public consultation on the draft regulations suggested that they should apply to existing lines as well as to new lines. This is one of the issues that we are considering, and a decision will be announced as soon as possible.

Mr. Sims: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware of the genuine concern felt by many residents of the London borough of Bromley who live close to railway lines—which was demonstrated by two recent, well-attended public meetings—about the noise generated by the channel tunnel traffic which is now going through the borough and which is likely to increase and continue night and day throughout the next decade?

May I plead with my hon. Friend seriously to consider allowing the regulations that I mentioned to apply to intensification of use on existing routes? Alternatively, does he accept that opening the channel tunnel has turned what were, in effect, suburban railway lines into intercontinental routes—into what are, to all intents and purposes, new lines?

Mr. Watts: As I said, that is one of the questions that we are considering very carefully, and I am taking a close personal interest in it.

My hon. Friend will be aware that two miles of noise barriers have been erected in Kent—in the borough of Bromley, in fact—under joint arrangements between the borough and Railfreight Distribution. He will also be aware that, when electric locomotives for freight haulage are introduced early next year, there should be a signficant reduction in the level of noise generated by such traffic.

Trust Ports

9. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trust ports have been privatised; and what plans there are for further privatisation.

Mr. Norris: Five trust ports—Tees and Hartlepool, Medway, Clyde, Tilbury and Forth—have taken advantage of the Ports Act 1991 and privatised themselves. I am pleased that Dundee has recently announced its intention to privatise and I hope that other trust ports will also come forward, following the clear success of those which have already taken the step.

Mr. Booth: Does my hon. Friend agree that the removal of constraints on borrowing and the use of trust port land to which privatisation has led has enabled the trust ports—mercifully—to succeed in the private sector? Does he agree that that should continue, so that the ports can not only succeed but help the process of urban regeneration which is a crucial part of the work of the heart of a city that is so often associated with trust ports and with the position of ports?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend has summed up the position excellently. There is no doubt that the performance of ports that have privatised themselves—compared with their previous performance under national ownership—clearly demonstrates the advantages that are available. I hope that other ports that have the opportunity to consider privatisation will look carefully at those examples.

Ms Walley: How can we possibly have an integrated transport system when we have a transport policy that is based on fragmentation and privatisation? Why does the Minister not tell us that it is the policy of a bankrupt Government? He could easily change the Treasury rules; then there would be no need for trust ports even to adopt that course. Will he tell the House that he will now remove the compulsory privatisation clause that is causing so much concern to people in the towns of Lerwick and Dover, and elsewhere—

Mr. Mackinlay: And Belfast.

Ms Walley: Yes, indeed. People in those towns are afraid of the compulsory privatisation that is just a sign of the Government's bankruptcy.

In view of the current concern in the trust port of Lerwick, where it is rumoured that more than 200 people from Bulgaria are about to arrive as mercenaries to take over from existing crews, will the Minister now discuss with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office ways of ensuring that the Bulgarians on the ships are properly protected?

Mr. Norris: I hope that I can remember all that. The first part comprised the hon. Lady's definition of an integrated transport policy—in other words, any policy other than that being pursued by the Government of the day. It is a meaningless phrase that the hon. Lady trots out from time to time without the slightest indication that she has the vaguest idea what it means.

It is absolutely clear that huge advantages have been delivered by the ports that have privatised themselves—and, moreover, have done so voluntarily. They were delighted to do so, and it has been a hugely successful exercise. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) agrees.

If the hon. Lady wishes to bring the issue of Lerwick to the Department's attention, I am sure that my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping will be happy to consider whatever representations she wants to make.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that, whenever a privatisation takes place, it is opposed by the then Opposition, that five years later it is accepted and that 10 years later they say that they will not reverse it? Will not the same happen in 10 years time with the official Opposition in relation to trust ports?

Mr. Norris: It is clear to me that what my hon. Friend says is right. All of this is just a knee-jerk, incredibly predictable reaction and, of course, a smokescreen for an absolute dearth of policy and for the huge gains that have been made by the privatised ports.

Severn Bridge

10. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Wales about the future of tolling on the Severn bridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: My Department and the Welsh Office discuss a variety of issues, including the Severn bridge.

Mr. Jones: After that inadequate answer, may I ask the Minister what the Secretary of State for Wales has had to say about this issue? He represents his region. Business men in that region are incensed that the south Wales economy should be picked to pay the toll when other parts of the country do not pay a toll. If there is an argument for paying a toll on the Severn bridge, why is there not the same argument for paying tolls on, say, the M25?

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman might find that there are tolls on the M25 at the Dartford crossings. The tolls are there for the same reasons: to finance the construction of the relevant bridges.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of those businesses in Wales will welcome the introduction of a second Severn crossing that will give a greater boost to the Welsh economy?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right. What is important to the Welsh economy is that there should be free passage of traffic across the Severn. [HON. MEMBERS: "Free?"] Free, but not toll free. I was speaking in terms of flowing freely.

Passenger Ferries

11. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to modify the regulations governing the safety of the passengers and crews of United Kingdom-registered passenger ferry vessels.

Mr. Norris: The regulations governing the safety of United Kingdom-registered ferries have been modified recently so that an increasing standard of survivability will apply. These regulations and others will, of course, be examined urgently if the need arises.

Dr. Godman: Speaking as a former shipwright, I am not so sure that those seemingly cumbersome rural vessels

should be allowed to be put to sea in anything heavier than a force 6 wind. If the Government are so heavily committed to the safety of both crews and passengers, why will the Marine Safety Agency and the coastguard service suffer drastic cuts? Will the Minister give the House an assurance that the safety of crews and passengers will not be sacrificed for economic reasons?

Mr. Norris: The Government do not believe that ro-ro ferries are inherently unstable, provided that they are properly operated and maintained. The hon. Gentleman knows that no country in the world exercises more vigilant standards of inspection and supervision than the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman sought an assurance on the issue of safety standards and I am happy to give him that assurance and to underline our clear commitment, first, to seeking proper rationalisation and efficiency from all the agencies of Government, which is entirely proper, but, secondly, to do so with a clear commitment to maintaining safety standards.

Cars

12. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Government intend to take to meet the concerns of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution over predicted levels of car dependency.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government have welcomed the Royal Commission's report and are studying carefully all the recommendations, including their potential benefits and costs.

Mr. Miller: The Minister will understand the importance of vehicle building to my constituency. Does he agree that this matter also presents a classic argument for integration? Vauxhall is producing the magnificent V6 engine, 100 per cent. of which is exported to Europe. It needs to get that engine on to trains. Thus far, British Rail has failed to deliver. Is not that the best argument for the Minister, his colleagues with economic portfolios and those in the Department of the Environment to get together and to make the system work in the interests of British manufacturers?

Dr. Mawhinney: First,I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman legitimately makes on behalf of his constituents. Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman has anxieties about the attitude of British Rail or Railtrack, he should pursue them with the appropriate bodies. Thirdly, it is precisely because we wish to introduce systems that are more sensitive to the customers' needs, with a relaxation of investment rules and the rest of it, that we intend to privatise. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join us in supporting that on behalf of the constituents for whom he has shown such legitimate concern.

Mr. Haselhurst: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in meeting the serious issues put before us by the royal commission, we need to be careful of the concerns of people who live in rural areas such as mine about the consequences of a drastic assault on vehicular transport, particularly when there are no alternative forms of transport in rural areas, let alone anything that might be called integrated?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right. I assure him that his point is high on our agenda as we consider the recommendations and decide how we might wish to respond to them.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Disabled Employees

30. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps his Department is taking to increase the number of disabled people employed in the civil service.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert G. Hughes): My Department recently launched an equal opportunities programme for action for disabled people, which provides a framework for Departments and agencies.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that we need an efficient and well-managed civil service which encourages disabled people to play their full part on merit, and that the deputy Leader of the Opposition typically betrays the best interests not only of taxpayers and civil servants but of disabled people when he calls for an inefficient and over-manned public sector?

Mr. Hughes: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of selection on merit. That is why the civil service Order in Council was altered to permit encouragement and assistance in the process of selection to be given to disabled people so that their many merits can be brought out.

Mr. McNamara: Would the Minister be kind enough to tell the House the precise budget and the number of staff that he is making available for the programme for action on disability? In particular, will he give an undertaking that all buildings leased by the civil service will have the necessary facilities to enable current and future disabled people to work safely therein?

Mr. Hughes: First, may I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities in the Opposition team. I am not able to give him an answer to his first question and I will tell him why. It is not possible to give an answer because we want action to be taken by people responsible for personnel matters and equal opportunities inside every Department and every agency. So the number of people involved, the amount spent and the amount of action that will go into the programme should be enormous. I want it to be enormous. As for buildings, a review is being carried out at present which I asked my officials to start so that we know which buildings are accessible and which are not.

Science-industry Links

31. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on measures to encourage closer links between science and industry.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): A number of initiatives are set out in our White Paper "Realising our Potential" which we are now implementing.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the University of Kent at Canterbury and Pfizer on the remarkable programme that they are carrying out together in protein engineering? Does he agree that it would be wrong if, as some Opposition Back Benchers suggested two weeks ago, we spread research money around universities evenly, as a teaching aid, instead of focusing it in those places where it obtains the best results for the nation?

Mr. Hunt: Yes. I pay tribute to the University of Kent and the initiative that it has taken with Pfizer. I was in Scotland at the weekend seeing some initiatives at the University of Edinburgh and I have recently been to Cambridge university. There is no doubt that we have a number of centres of excellence. It is important that we sustain them in the best possible way.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Would not a good way of encouraging links between industry and science be to give an example in the public sector, for example, with the Post Office? Has not the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in his letter to the Prime Minister of 2 November scotched any possibility that the Government could encourage such links by showing that he is prepared to abandon the commercial future of the Post Office and is not prepared to give it the commercial freedom in the public sector that Labour demands?

Mr. Hunt: Of course, I do not comment on leaked or stolen documents, but the plans announced in the Green Paper to develop new opportunities and investment in automation for Post Office Counters will go ahead. The Green Paper sets out the limits of what is possible for Royal Mail in the public sector and the reasons for these limits. We will be looking at them again, but they cannot be simply wished away.

Hon. Members on both sides must appreciate that there are no easy options. Public sector bodies fall within the public sector borrowing requirement— that is a fact. Commercial freedom in the public sector means that more activity is underwritten by the taxpayer and Conservative Members take a responsible attitude to what happens to taxpayers' money.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the best links between science and industry have been encouraged by university departments in the north of England? Will he join me in congratulating three universities—the university of Lancaster, the university of Central Lancashire and Bradford university—which have had particularly good records in forging links between university science departments and industry?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, I will. I very much welcome the approach that I am finding in universities throughout the nation in forging even closer links with the private sector. We are seeing some very innovative approaches which, along with my hon. Friend, I commend warmly.

Charters

32. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce new charters.

Mr. David Hunt: A number of new charters are in preparation, including those on higher and further education in Northern Ireland which will be published early next year, taking the number of charters to 42.

Mr. Banks: Does the Minister have any proposals to introduce a charter for gas consumers? After all, at the moment they are caught in a pincer movement between a Government-required VAT increase and an increase in gas prices above the rate of inflation, and now they have heard that the chairman of British Gas is to receive a 75 per cent. increase in his salary, bringing it to £500,000.

Gas consumers are being taken to the cleaners; this private monopoly has been created by the Government and the consumers have no protection. Perhaps one of the Minister's miserable new charters might render them at least a little protection.

Mr. Hunt: I detect that that was a welcome for the Government's proposals on legislation. The best assurance for customers is competition. That is why the Gracious Speech included proposals, which will start in 1996, to remove the monopoly of British Gas in the domestic sector.

Price increases are a matter for British Gas and the independent regulator, Ofgas. The director-general has confirmed that the increase recently announced is allowable within the price formula and, of course, salaries are a matter for the shareholders.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As part of a programme of open and accessible government, I refer my right hon. Friend back to the question from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and ask whether the Minister can incorporate in the charter for Government Departments and agencies accessibility for both members of staff and the public? Perhaps the simplest way that he may consider doing this is for Ministers to ask their employees in the civil service and agencies to notify them if they intend to take on property which is not accessible either to staff or to the public.

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend has raised a number of important points. He will recall that when I was with the Department of Employment we launched a new scheme called "access to work". The disability symbol, which is now available across the public and private sectors, is an indicator of the need to maintain a very positive approach to the sorts of problems that he outlines.

Mr. Henderson: Does the Chancellor accept that the fares increase announced by Network SouthEast last Friday, which in some cases is twice the rate of inflation, shows that the passengers charter cannot protect the public from bad management and bad organisation? Does he accept that that raises serious doubts about the extension of charters into other aspects of the public service?

Mr. Hunt: I welcome the hon. Gentleman and all his colleagues to their new Front-Bench responsibilities. The

hon. Gentleman must be referring to the lowest cash increase for eight years—an increase which is not, of course, allowable for lines that have not met the targets which have been so clearly set out. I believe that the passengers charter is one of the great successes of this Administration, just as the citizens charter has transformed for the better the quality of services right across the public sector.

Dr. Spink: In considering the citizens charter initiative, has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to review the article in *The Independent* on 17 November? It stated that the Government's health and schools policies in particular were paying off and that that was in part a result of the charter targets.

Mr. Hunt: I am very happy to catch up with my hon. Friend. He instances just one further example of the way in which the citizens charter has transformed for the better the quality of public services and has come in right on the side of the ordinary citizen.

Open Government

33. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he has taken to review the level of secrecy in government since taking responsibility for openness in government.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I am continuing to implement the policy set down in the White Paper on open government.

Mr. Gunnell: In that case, would the Minister explain to me why he has not been willing to place the permanent secretaries' handbook even in the Members' Library, which means that those documents are kept secret from hon. Members? Surely that cannot be open government.

Mr. Hughes: This is a familiar question from the hon. Gentleman. As he well knows, the handbook referred to is a compendium of guidance and other documents which are mostly in the public domain. Some material, such as that on security and vetting procedures, is justifiably confidential. I would have thought that most hon. Members would have agreed with that.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the Minister disregard completely the issue of the level of secrecy and concentrate on the promotion of accuracy, following the scandalous attack on one of my hon. Friends last Wednesday? He was accused of exaggerating wildly when he quoted net contributions to the European Community which were published in the Chancellor's Red Book.

Mr. Hughes: I rather suspect that that is a matter for the Press Complaints Commission.

Mr. Olner: When the Minister looks at levels of secrecy within Government, will he also look at the levels of secrecy in quangos which, throughout the country, conduct their business in private without any remit from anyone?

Mr. Hughes: As all hon. Members know, that is being looked at precisely at the moment.

34. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress towards open government.

Mr. David Hunt: I believe that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has done more to open up the processes of government than any previous Prime Minister.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my right hon. Friend for that most true reply. Will he use the processes of open government to tell the European Commission that the British acorn is as good as the German or any other acorn? If there is any doubt about that in Brussels, let the Commissioners come to see the ceiling of Westminster Hall which is made of British oak and which has been in place for almost 700 years.

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for promoting the British acorn. I promote it with enthusiasm myself, having taken the opportunity on many occasions to take my constituents around Westminster Hall and to point out the original hammerbeam roof, which is very much the pride of the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Chancellor agree that John Maples, a deputy chairman of the Tory party, has made a contribution to open government in his recent statement to Tory Members and others that it would be a good idea not to mention the national health service because the Tory party has given up on it? What is all this about setting yobbos on my leader? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that is the new Tory party tactic? Have the Tories stooped so low?

Mr. Hunt: I am gravely tempted to ask the hon. Gentleman whether he would write a handbook for yobbos because I believe that the code of practice that he would lay out—

Mrs. Ann Taylor: A charter for yobbos.

Mr. Hunt: Indeed, a charter for yobbos. The code of practice that the hon. Gentleman would set out would make very interesting reading indeed. Of course I do not comment on leaked or stolen documents. The hon. Gentleman should know that. He ought to scrutinise the recent survey of social attitudes, which was published last week and which demonstrated that, for the first time, the majority of people in Britain applaud the Government's national health service reforms.

Competing for Quality

35. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what inquiries from abroad the Office of Public Service and Science has received about progress with the competing for quality programme.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The efficiency unit has received inquiries from more than a dozen different

countries on the competing for quality initiative and, in December, representatives from at least 18 countries will be attending our service for the citizen conference.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that that is recognition from yet more Governments around the world of the success of this Conservative Government's policies? Has he any news, following on from last weekend's Labour party policy statement, of when it will be altering its policy statement in that area to welcome this particular policy?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The United Kingdom is a leader in this field; many other countries are following what we have done. That is not surprising when £20 million of expenditure on the project produced savings last year of £135 million. The answer to the last part of my hon. Friend's question is that Labour party policy is generally one general election behind.

Citizens Charter

36. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he intends to extend the practice of the citizens charter to non-elected spending bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The citizens charter applies to all public services.

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister accept that there are now more appointed people on quangos than elected members of local authorities? Since unelected bodies are responsible for handling £46 billion, far in excess of the amount that local authorities handle, will he insist that there are published charters from the unelected bodies so that people may judge them? If there is disquiet among people who receive service from the quangos, would he also take action to remove the people who are causing that disquiet?

Mr. Hunt: Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman that non-departmental public bodies, or quangos as he calls them, have reduced in number by 36 per cent. since 1979. Indeed, the Labour party would take us back up in numbers. In its recent policy statements, it has talked about the creation of many more quangos. All the citizens charter's provisions covering published standards, openness and information, choice and consultation, courtesy and helpfulness redress matters when things go wrong and value for money applies right across the public sector to all public services.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that some of the most important non-elected bodies are those which run the national health service trust hospitals, which have been responsible for increasing the number of patients treated and significantly reducing waiting lists? Is not that a success story which we should shout loudly?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend is right. It contrasts starkly with the position when we came into office in 1979, when a local hospital did not even know what its budget was. Now, there is much more devolution locally, standards are improving all the time, and record numbers of patients are being treated. That is a tremendous success story to which he is right to pay tribute.

Science Research Council

37. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what changes he expects in the Science Research Council's administrative staffing over the next two years.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Government policy is to reduce the administrative costs of research councils to the minimum level required for them to be efficient and effective, so that as much money as possible goes into science.

Mrs. Campbell: Will the Parliamentary Secretary confirm that he intends to approve Sir John Cadogan's plans to reduce the administrative staffing of the research councils by around 500 people? Will he also tell us how much that will add to the £16 million that the research councils have already spent on past restructuring and early retirement? How much more money will be spent on top of that?

Mr. Hughes: No decisions have been reached and therefore the first part of the hon. Lady's question does not arise, as she well knows. The fact is that in the 1994 "Forward Look", we explained that the director general of research councils had embarked on a fundamental review. I would have thought that anybody sensible, indeed most people in science to whom I have spoken, would believe that it is important that we direct money towards science and not towards unnecessary administration. Expenditure on administration to ensure that we get the best value for money is, of course, not unnecessary.

Mr. David Shaw: When considering how to direct more money into science research, will my hon. Friend consider promoting the information super-highway in the way that he did this morning at the excellent conference that he launched? Will he also consider the fact that Britain leads in that area of technology? Will he accept my congratulations on the Government making more information available on a world-wide web server called "open.gov"? Will he also congratulate Walmer school in my constituency which went on to the information super-highway this morning and connected with a school in the United States of America?

Mr. Hughes: The answer is yes to each of my hon. Friend's questions and I thank him for his kind remarks. The information super-highway and the Government's use of the Internet provide exciting opportunities for delivering public services better. We take that seriously and that is why the experiment which was started only a month ago, and which has already been accessed by more than 100,000 people, will expand and more information will be placed on it. We will use it in the best possible manner to improve public services.

Bosnia

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement about events in the former Yugoslavia over the weekend and earlier today.

The House will be aware that following the recent attacks by Bosnian Muslim forces in capturing large areas of Bosnian Serb-held territory in the Bihac area of Bosnia, the Bosnian Serb army has been prosecuting a vigorous counter-attack in conjunction with Krajina Serb forces from over the border in Croatia. They have now recaptured most of the territory that they had lost.

In pursuing their attack, the Bosnian Serb army and the Krajina Serbs have launched a number of missile and artillery attacks against civilian population areas in the Bihac pocket, including attacks on Bihac town itself. Earlier last week there was an attack by aircraft launched from Krajina Serb territory. That increasingly serious threat to the Bihac safe area was exacerbated on Friday by a further air attack from Udbina air base in Krajina Serb territory, this time against the Bosnian Government's 5 Corps headquarters in Bihac using napalm and cluster bombs.

After consultation with our allies, the United Kingdom co-sponsored a Security Council resolution at an emergency meeting of the Security Council on Friday night, authorising the extension of the use of air power for the protection of the safe areas to the territory of Croatia. On Saturday, the Security Council passed two resolutions. The first, the United Kingdom-sponsored resolution 958, extends to Croatia the provisions of United Nations resolution 836, which allows the use of all necessary means to support UNPROFOR in and around the safe areas in Bosnia. The second resolution, 959, expresses the United Nations' concern about events in the Bihac pocket and condemns violations of international borders, particularly by Krajina Serb forces. It also calls on all parties to respect and co-operate with the United Nations protection force and show maximum restraint.

On Saturday, Krajina Serb aircraft launched another attack, this time on the town of Cazin, to the north of Bihac. Bombs were dropped and one aircraft crashed into an apartment block causing civilian casualties. On Saturday night, following an approach from the United Nations Secretary-General to the NATO Secretary General, the North Atlantic Council met in emergency session. In accordance with Security Council resolution 958, the NAC authorised the conduct of air strikes in response to attacks launched from the United Nations-protected areas of Croatia threatening the United Nations safe areas in Bosnia. Such attacks would be conducted in accordance with existing procedures for co-ordination with UNPROFOR, and the NATO rules of engagement in force in Bosnia.

The House will wish to know that, following a request to NATO from UNPROFOR, at 12 o'clock today a force of 39 NATO aircraft launched an attack on Udbina airfield in Krajina territory. Two Royal Air Force Jaguar aircraft took part in pre-attack reconnaissance and two further aircraft attacked the runway. I understand that the mission was successfully completed. All NATO aircraft returned safely. The attack was conducted in accordance with the principles of proportionality, timeliness and the need to try to avoid collateral damage and civilian casualties.

I believe that the House will wish to support NATO's response at the request of the United Nations. Let me assure the House that that action by NATO does not herald any change in our view that the only lasting solution to this dreadful conflict is a negotiated settlement acceptable to all the parties.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House to inform us that British airmen have been involved in an air attack in the former Yugoslavia. I speak for the whole House when I say that we are relieved that they have come back safely. Opposition Members recognise that the action is justified, in accordance with United Nations resolution 958. Clearly, the Krajinan Serbs felt that they had found a loophole in the United Nations armour and we are glad that it has been closed.

The action was necessary on two main counts: first, to stop the killing of innocent civilians in the United Nations safe area of Bihac. If safe areas mean anything, that is the least that could happen, especially in response to napalm bombing. Secondly, we believe that it was necessary to maintain the reputation of the United Nations and NATO, for the lesson is that threats should not be made unless they will be carried out.

What consultations have been undertaken with the Croatian Government as to that bombing and any other action? Does the Secretary of State feel that that action and any subsequent action might draw the Croats back into the fighting? Clearly, none of us would want that to happen.

What plans has UNPROFOR to protect the Bangladeshi contingent in Bihac? We understand that the Bangladeshi forces are very lightly armed and are unable to defend themselves. Are the reports correct that they have only one rifle between four soldiers? Although we recognise that no British troops are in the immediate vicinity, are there any plans to move any of our troops from, say, Bugojna or Travnik over to Bihac? Will the Secretary of State always bear it in mind that whenever such action is taken, however justified, it threatens the lives of UNPROFOR soldiers on the ground?

We agree with the Secretary of State's final statement that, at the end of the day, the only way in which the problem can be sorted out is around the negotiating table.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support on this matter. I shall respond to the two specific questions that he raised. First, with regard to the attitude of the Croatian Government, although the Croatian Government would not have been familiar with the precise details surrounding today's attack, I understand that they gave general support to the United Nations resolution allowing the use of air power in such circumstances.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to the problem facing the United Nations Bangladeshi forces in Bihac. There are no British troops there, although there are 10 British military observers in Bihac, but primarily it is a Bangladeshi presence. Not only are they lightly armed, but their rations have not been resupplied for some time and they have been living on emergency rations for quite a long period. That is a serious matter. United

Nations force commanders are urgently considering the necessary resupply of United Nations forces in Bihac to ensure that they have proper food, equipment and protection. The United Nations has never hesitated to call for close air support if there is a direct threat to United Nations troops. I am sure that that matter will be at the forefront of the consideration of the United Nations commanders.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for coming to the House and giving us that information. Is he able to reassure the House on two matters that I believe are of great concern? The first is that the Americans might take further action that would appear to be partisan on the part of the Muslim Bosnians and therefore jeopardise the safety of UNPROFOR forces. Secondly, if that occurred, will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that adequate forces are available to make sure that we can get our people out safely if we are targeted by any or all of the warring factions?

Mr. Rifkind: I can assure my hon. Friend that any use of air power or any other action by NATO can be carried out only under the dual key arrangements. That requires the authorisation of Mr. Akashi, the special United Nations representative, and the United Nations commanders on the ground. My hon. Friend is correct to emphasise the importance of the safety of our troops. That, too, is the primary responsibility of the UN commanders. There is therefore no possibility of any action being taken by an individual country. NATO can operate only when requested to do so under the arrangements that it agrees and accepts as necessary.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I offer my unequivocal support to Her Majesty's Government for the actions that they have taken at the United Nations and in the former Yugoslavia, not least because of the anxiety that many of us feel about the introduction of napalm and cluster bombs to the conflict.

Can the Secretary of State confirm that the operations that he has described were directed at denying the use of runways; and that, if necessary, the Government will support more operations specifically against aircraft or installations?

Mr. Rifkind: The details of the result of the attack are still coming through, but the information that we have at this stage is that much of the attack was concentrated on the airport and runway facilities. The runway appears to have been severely damaged in five places. Clearly, that will have profound consequences for denying the use of the airfield in future to Krajina Serb aircraft. Breaching the no-fly zone was an important part of the justification for today's attack.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Clearly, Her Majesty's Government and the Governments of our NATO allies were entirely justified in taking the air action that they saw as necessary, because the Serb air force deployed in Serb-occupied Krajina was crossing an international frontier in prosecution of its offensive air operations, which is quite intolerable under the terms of Security Council resolution 959. Can the Government ensure that the Serbs realise that if there is any repeat of offensive operations of that kind, other bases, if used again, will be taken out, too?

Mr. Rifkind: Of course, that will be a matter for the United Nations and NATO to determine, but I think that the crossing of the international frontier, as my hon. Friend rightly says, provided an additional dimension of a sort that made the necessary response entirely justified. I am sure that any future incursions of that kind would invite a similar response.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Will the Secretary of State share with the House NATO's assessment of the American decision not to enforce the embargo, particularly in the light of his statement that that matter can be resolved only within the former Yugoslavia? What representations have been made to the American Government on the subject? As the United States is a member of NATO, what was the American response to those representations?

Mr. Rifkind: After the United States made its announcement, the Military Committee of NATO met to consider its implications. The committee concluded that the practical consequences were minimal and did not interfere with NATO's ability to carry out its task—although it would have to do that without the involvement of the two American ships. But the committee's overall judgment was that the announcement, while regrettable, had no practical consequences for NATO's ability to carry out its task in the Adriatic.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Serbs were given every conceivable warning over several days, even to the extent of putting at risk UN forces in the area? Secondly, will he strongly condemn the use of napalm in such circumstances—a horrendous weapon at the best of times? Finally, has he seen the disturbing reports to the effect that the Bangladeshi battalion is grossly ill equipped, with, apparently, only one weapon for every four soldiers? Surely that gives the wrong signal; and should not the Security Council be doing something to re-equip them in due course?

Mr. Rifkind: I unreservedly agree with my hon. Friend about the use of napalm on this occasion. It appears beyond doubt that it was used in one of the air attacks in the Bihac area. That will invite universal revulsion, for the reasons that my hon. Friend has rightly given.

As for the UN and NATO response, there were three separate uses of air power by the Krajina Serbs. Because there was no legal basis for an attack on Croatian territory, the response had to await a Security Council resolution, which came about as a result of the United Kingdom initiative over the weekend.

I repeat that we share my hon. Friend's concern about the Bangladeshis. I know that the UN commanders regard it as an important priority to ensure that the Bangladeshis under UN authority are provided with all that they require to carry out their task.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is not the crux of the matter simply that if the action, which was fully authorised by the United Nations Security Council, had not been taken, it would have encouraged the Serbian warlords to carry out further air attacks? We hope that

[Mr. David Winnick]

they will have learnt their lesson. Is not it part of the role of the international community to protect safe areas in the former Yugoslavia? Therefore, this action was totally justified. I am pleased that it has been taken and that the Secretary of State is accordingly reporting to the House.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Of course, the United Nations always has a difficult task in that it seeks to be non-partisan in this awful conflict. The imposition of the no-fly zone has been an important achievement by the UN over the past two years, and such a flagrant violation of that zone justified today's response.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. and learned Friend reinforce, not just in the House but through whatever international means of communication he has with the Serbs, that any sort of retaliation against the UNPROFOR force will be dealt will absolutely and immediately? We must protect men who are sitting in white armoured vehicles around the borders of that country and make certain that their lives are safeguarded.

Mr. Rifkind: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. The Government have emphasised from the beginning of this operation that close air support or any other military means that may be necessary to protect UN forces, including British forces, will have our full support. I believe that that is also the view of other countries with forces on the ground in Bosnia. Close air support has been used in the past, and I have no doubt that it will be requested again if the circumstances, in the view of the UN commanders, require it to protect the men under their command.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): While I fully support the use of force in these circumstances, may I ask the Secretary of State to say what consideration has been given to the designation around Bihac and the other UN protected areas of a heavy weapons total exclusion zone?

Mr. Rifkind: Under the terms of the existing authorities, it is for the UN commanders on the ground to determine whether they believe that the designation of any exclusion zone should now be extended to the Bihac area. One of the factors that they have taken into account over the past week or so is that one should designate such an area only if it can be effectively enforced on the ground as well as in the air. Clearly, the number of forces in Bihac give rise to some question as to whether that would be a feasible proposition. It is not a matter to be determined by anyone other than the United Nations commanders on the ground, who have the power so to designate if they are satisfied that that would have the proper consequence.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Despite the heightened tension in Bosnia, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that he has no plans to withdraw British troops from that area, bearing in mind the fact that they are doing valuable work in protecting our aid programme, which is rebuilding hearts and minds in an important area?

Mr. Rifkind: That is indeed the case. British and all other United Nations forces are making an invaluable contribution, which has already saved hundreds of thousands of lives. The need for the UN presence in Bosnia will continue over the winter months. However, their presence there must be subject to the two criteria that we have emphasised from the beginning of the operation, which are: can they carry out their mandate; and can they do so without unacceptable risk to themselves? As long as both criteria are met, we agree that their presence is appropriate.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Secretary of State will know that UNPROFOR officials on the ground and western journalists with access to Sarajevo are alleging that United States personnel have been training Muslim militiamen and providing them with equipment. Will the Secretary of State deny that that is happening?

Mr. Rifkind: All I can say is that I have absolutely no reason to believe that those reports are true. I have seen the allegations in the newspapers. The United States Government have denied them and I have no reason whatever to believe that there is any truth in them.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that to the outside observer there appears to be little desire by the combatants for a negotiated settlement? Will he give us a military assessment of whether the combatants have a desire for peace? Does he have any estimate of how much of the UN supplies are being given to the combatants rather than to their wives and children?

Mr. Rifkind: On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I can tell her that there has been substantial progress at the political level, given the willingness of the various parties, apart from the Bosnian Serbs, to accept the Contact group proposals. The failure of the Bosnian Serbs to accept those proposals has halted that process at present.

My hon. Friend asks about the military situation. The events of the past few days have shown how improbable is a military solution to this conflict. The Bosnian Muslim forces broke out of the Bihac area some weeks ago and captured some 200 sq km of territory, and that was seen as a major advance. Of course, the Bosnian Serbs have now responded and are recapturing the territory that they lost a short time ago. It is a process of gaining a few square miles or losing a few square miles of territory, but without any strategic change in the overall position. No one can be certain whether that will remain the case, but all the evidence suggests that none of the factions involved in the war is capable of achieving all its objectives by military means.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does the Secretary of State agree that as runways can be repaired, it would be a good idea to ensure that they continue to be denied to forces that drop weapons such as napalm and put the UNPROFOR forces at risk? Until he gets an absolute guarantee that such weapons will not be used, will he ensure that JP233 is applied to the runways to deny their use for further outrageous conduct?

Mr. Rifkind: We trust that the Krajina Serbs will today have learnt the appropriate lesson that the breach of a no-fly zone and the use of aircraft to attack sites in Bosnia

invites a strong and effective NATO response. We should like to believe that they will therefore desist from that activity. If they do not, they will invite further such action.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure my constituents, especially those stationed at RAF Strike Command and RAF Halton, that the Government will not send British airmen into action in the Balkans except where their objectives are both precisely defined and militarily attainable?

Mr. Rifkind: Those are important criteria, so my hon. Friend is right to emphasise that, when the use of air power or any other military power is advocated in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we must be satisfied that it makes military sense as well as achieving political objectives. We have some fine men serving in the RAF and the other services and we owe it to them to ensure that only operations that make military sense are contemplated. That has been an important consideration for both General Rose and General de la Presle in their role as United Nations commanders on the ground.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Does the Secretary of State share my horror at the use of napalm in mainland Europe in 1994? Will he emphasise to the allies that the Serbs must be warned not only by the fully justified action today, but in no uncertain terms that they must not continue to use such barbaric weaponry to pursue any war? Does he have any idea where the Serbs obtained those weapons and whether they have any supplies of other unacceptable weaponry, such as chemical weapons, that they may use in the Balkans?

Mr. Rifkind: We believe that the use of napalm anywhere in the world is repulsive and must be condemned. I have no evidence that the Serbs in the Krajina area have access to chemical weapons, but we must constantly monitor the position.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that while the UN resolution on the arms embargo is still valid, all members of NATO and UNPROFOR forces will enforce it, irrespective of the attitudes of an individual country?

Mr. Rifkind: The resolution requires all countries to respect the arms embargo. The resolution itself does not require individual countries to enforce it. NATO has accepted that task at the request of the United Nations and its commanders believe that they have the means to continue with it.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): In supporting this display of resolution—even at this very late hour—in the era of Serb aggression, can the Secretary of State advise the House on where the orders to use napalm came from? If he feels, as he might, that they came from the headquarters in Pale, would not it be in order that, the next time napalm is used, strikes are made against the headquarters, not just against the base that carries out the orders?

Mr. Rifkind: At this stage, we do not have information on where authorisation for the use of napalm may have originated. In addition to the Bosnian Serb forces central command, there are other Serb military leaders. It is by no means certain that those in Krajina come under the control or authority of the Serb commanders in Pale. It is a confused and decentralised system, and at this stage one should not necessarily draw the same conclusions as the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is not it the case that the American decision concerning the Bosnian arms embargo poses a formidable threat to not only NATO but, worse, our soldiers on the ground? Is it likely that other Governments may follow America's decision concerning support for the Bosnian Government against the Serbs?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not believe that the American action by itself will have consequences for the safety of our forces. Obviously, there is concern whether at some future stage a proposal to lift the embargo might be pursued and implemented. Clearly, that would have profound consequences for the UN's ability to continue in Bosnia. At the moment, we have no reason to believe that any other countries are contemplating reducing their current action in helping to enforce the embargo.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): Air strikes only take us so far—the advance on the ground continues. How serious is the UN about safe areas? Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that the UN will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that safe areas remain so?

Mr. Rifkind: The UN has the authority to call for the use of air power or other military means in protecting safe areas. The judgment whether to do so is for Mr. Akashi and UN commanders on the ground, who will wish to take into account all the implications of any initiative that they might recommend. If a request is made, it must come from them.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Two weeks ago, I visited the Tornado and Jaguar detachment at Gioia and the VC10 and AWACs detachment. I pay tribute to the morale and commitment of our armed forces there. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that the Royal Air Force will be given whatever material resources it needs in terms of fuel, flying hours and spares to enable it to enforce UN resolutions, and that the RAF will not have to dig into resources earmarked for training to undertake that important work in support of the UN in Bosnia?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the compliment and proper tribute that he paid to the Royal Air Force and to its work in Italy, where the Jaguars are based. He will recall that in July, when I announced the outcome of the "Front Line First" study, I said that we were able to fund a substantial increase in RAF training and in the facilities available to pilots and others required to perform tasks on our behalf. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks.

Points of Order

3.58 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On the matter of order in the House, I draw your attention to today's issue of the *Financial Times*, which has a front-page article based on a memorandum written by John Maples, deputy chairman of the Conservative party. Referring to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Maples wrote:

"Maybe a few yobbos of our own to try to knock him about a bit."

While I am the first to accept that today's Tory yobbos are not a patch on those of the past, that article raises important issues for you, Madam Speaker, and in respect of the conduct of the House. Will you deprecate anyone who advocates concerted and organised efforts to undermine the procedures and order of the House?

Madam Speaker: That is an important matter for me. I certainly deprecate such behaviour in the House, and I say to right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House that while I or any of my deputies are in the Chair, we shall not put up with that sort of behaviour.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Do you not find it interesting that the deputy chairman of the Conservative party at least acknowledges the fact that there are yobbos on the Conservative Benches? Do you have a list of potential yobbos? If not, will you accept one from me?

Madam Speaker: Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that I have not seen the article to which hon. Members are referring. It has been cut out and put on one side for me to read, in what are laughingly known as my "moments of leisure".

Perhaps we can now get on with the business of the House.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

BROADCASTING

That the Broadcasting (Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976) (Exemption for Networking Arrangements) Order 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 2540) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 1003) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FOURTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Dunn.]*

Question again proposed.

Industry and Education

Madam Speaker: Before calling the Secretary of State, I must tell the House that a number of hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I have decided to limit speeches to 10 minutes between 7 pm and 9 pm. Outside those times, I ask hon. Members to limit the length of their speeches.

4 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I welcome the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to his new position and hope that he will be able to remain in it with distinction for a considerable time.

The first priority for a successful industrial and commercial policy is to establish the economic conditions within which enterprise and competitiveness can flourish. Last summer, the Government published a Command Paper outlining a comprehensive strategy to raise the competitiveness of the economy. The Gracious Speech includes a number of specific initiatives where legislative change is necessary to move that agenda forward, but before dealing with those and other specific matters it is appropriate to start with the overarching significance of the economy.

For decades, our companies have not enjoyed such favourable conditions as they do today. It is recognised internationally that the United Kingdom has led western Europe out of recession. Inflation is at levels not seen for nearly 30 years. National output is rising by more than 4 per cent. while manufacturing output is 5 per cent. up on a year ago. Industrial relations are as good as at any time in the past century.

The situation looks even better when one recognises that unit labour costs have shown the biggest monthly fall for nearly a quarter of a century. Wage levels increased by 4.5 per cent., but a rise in manufacturing productivity of over 6 per cent. has more than absorbed that. To improve the outlook further, I should say that the profitability of our companies is markedly higher than at any similar stage in past recoveries.

The latest CBI surveys show that investment confidence is at its highest since April 1989, and the UK now attracts more than 40 per cent. of American and Japanese investment in the European Union. Export volumes to the European Union have risen by 17 per cent. in the past 12 months, although the market has grown only by 5 per cent. They have risen by 6 per cent. to the rest of the world and, increasingly, analysts speak of the elimination of the UK's balance of payments deficit within the foreseeable future.

We are enjoying high growth, low inflation, falling unemployment and a record recovery led by exports, which has coincided with rising investment. It is quite clear that the House, the national media and commentators outside should now recognise the dramatic improvement in our national economic statistics. The central determination of Government policy is to pursue that climate of opportunity.

The central theme of the competitiveness White Paper was the comprehensive nature of the agenda for change that it encompassed. The Gracious Speech refers to two specific matters of direct concern to my Department: the liberalisation of the gas market and the privatisation of AEA Technology.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose—*

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: I give way to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick).

Mr. Winnick: The right hon. Gentleman has just mentioned the gas industry; earlier, he mentioned labour costs. How can he justify the 75 per cent. increase that will bring the salary of the gas industry's chief executive to about £500,000 a year, at a time when the Government are constantly telling people in both the private and the public sector that there is no justification for any pay increase above 2 per cent? Is not such an increase disgraceful, given that the gas industry is to raise its prices next year? It is an affront to millions of gas users.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explain the Government's view on that many times. My right hon. Friend has said—and the Government believe—that it is necessary to exercise restraint. Restraint can be exercised by the market or by the shareholders, but the fact is that any increases in remuneration above inflation must be paid for by productivity and rising profitability. What the Labour party cannot face is the fact that British Gas has been turned into a world-class company, winning in the marketplaces of the world, has held down its prices consistently over the years and, since privatisation, has been transformed.

The Gracious Speech refers to two specific matters of direct concern to my Department. Before I deal with them, however, let me address the wider issue of privatisation itself. A decade or so ago, the commanding heights of the economy were owned by the state: that was the consequence of different post-war Labour Governments carrying through the doctrinal commitments of clause IV of their party's constitution.

Everyone knows that the organisations that those Governments created were monopolistic, producer-driven and subjected to the most intense Treasury control. By and large, they were denied access to the world marketplace and heavily subsidised; they became the plaything of politicians and trade unions. They also had the effect of concentrating power in London at the expense of the provinces, on a scale without precedent in our industrial history.

The 1980s saw a transformation in the relationship between those organisations and the national economy. Losses and subsidies were turned into profits and tax receipts; loss-making monopolies became world-class competitive companies; trade union power was replaced by consumer choice; and state ownership was converted into millions of individual and corporate shareholders. The essence of the policy, however, was the pursuit of competitiveness. In many cases productivity leapt, investment shot ahead, new markets were opened and new competitors emerged.

What the Labour party cannot understand is that there is a fundamental contradiction between a state monopoly and a genuinely competitive marketplace. Labour cannot realise that allowing Government-owned companies to raise money with the overt or implied guarantee of taxpayers' support undermines the essential disciplines within which private sector companies must trade and account.

To add to Labour's problems, hardly a country in the world is now prepared to defend the discredited theories of nationalisation. It took the courage of this Conservative Government to confront those theories, and to reverse them by placing companies in the private sector, but every time we took a step in that direction it was resisted by the Labour party. Labour Members recognised that we were right only when they realised that they had been rejected so often by the electorate that they would have to abandon their own convictions to have a prospect of winning power.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the President of the Board of Trade tell hon. Members whether he supports public ownership of the Post Office?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is fully aware of my views about privatising the Post Office: I made my position clear to a Select Committee of the House. The intellectual arguments for introducing private capital into the Royal Mail are overwhelming; the only arguments the other way are social and political. I made it clear that the Government would have liked to proceed with privatisation, but that a small number of supporters on the Conservative Back Benches were not prepared to do so. In the end, democracy rules: I should have thought that right hon. and hon. Members might be able to understand that. The fact that it does so is the reason why Labour Members are kept bedded on the Opposition Benches.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: I shall not give way.

The new leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), tells us that he wants to repeal clause IV. My right hon. and hon. Friends will find it surprising that a reference to privatisation produces a belly laugh among Labour Members, with the exception of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield. That shows that,

[Mr. Heseltine]

although a small handful of my colleagues may disagree with my views on privatisation, a united Labour party rejects its leader's views on clause IV.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not persist in rising; it is obvious that the Secretary of State is not giving way at this stage.

Mr. Heseltine: The dilemma for the Labour party, which has conveniently brought the Royal Mail and the Post Office into the debate, is most clearly revealed by the press release that the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) issued today explaining what he sees as the alternative way forward. He has listed a range of suggestions that he thinks will solve the problem.

A significant proportion of those proposals are already Government policy and I shall tell right hon. and hon. Members what they are. We have already made clear our determination greatly to expand the commercial opportunity for post offices. After all, 19,000 post offices are already in the private sector. We have made it clear that we intend to help those organisations to automate their services to widen their ability to compete.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: They are in the public sector.

Mr. Heseltine: They are not in the public sector. That is the point that the hon. Gentleman cannot understand. Nineteen thousand post offices are owned individually by men and women in this country. They are private sector shops in towns and villages. We want to help them to go on flourishing in that environment and we have made that clear.

The right hon. Member for Copeland listed some other changes, but he merely restated the opportunities that are already available to the Royal Mail under the private finance initiative—our private finance initiative and we have always made it clear that it was broadly available to the public sector. The British Broadcasting Corporation is taking advantage of the opportunities that the right hon. Member thinks he has discovered for himself, but which he would find listed in the Government's policy statements. None of the things that the right hon. Member lists goes to the heart of the matter.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and I thank him for his kind opening remarks, of which at least 50 per cent. were kindly intended. As he seems to think that everything in the Post Office is fine now and that he has cracked the problem, why did his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in a letter to the Prime Minister, say:

"For his part, Michael made it clear that he regards greater commercial freedom for the Post Office as essential to its long term health"?

If all is fine now, why does the Secretary of State want greater commercial freedom?

Mr. Heseltine: I made the point to my colleagues, as I did to the House a few minutes ago and to the Select Committee when it first discussed the matter, that the Royal Mail could be a world-class, competitive company, but that to become such it must operate in the competitive world with the freedom to raise and be responsible for its cash, just like British Telecom. That is what I believe to be right. Persuading the last tiny rump of my party of the wisdom of those views is a task to which I shall set the rest of my political career, but do not ask me to stand at the Dispatch Box and tell the House something which I profoundly believe to be untrue. I believe that there is a huge opportunity for the Royal Mail.

I wish to make a further point, and the right hon. Member for Copeland has helped me along the journey. If it was all so simple, if it was simply a question of changing the odd rule here or there in the way that the right hon. Gentleman's press release suggests, why did not the Labour Government do so between 1974 and 1979? I do not want the House to be left with the impression that the Labour Government did not face the dilemma: they certainly did, but what did they do? Instead of doing all those simple little things that the right hon. Gentleman would have us face, when they had to decide between letting the Royal Mail and the Post Office free in the public sector and cutting the capital programmes in the public sector, they cut the capital investment programmes of the Post Office by one third between 1974 and 1979. If it was so simple, perhaps the Post Office was in some special straitjacket.

Why did not the Labour Government let the electricity industry be free to expand, as apparently they could have done? Why did they cut capital investment in it by 25 per cent. between 1974 and 1979? The answer is simple: in power, the Labour party realised that the disciplines of the public sector bound the whole of the public sector and that it was not possible to be credible if one thought that one could find some illusory piece of jiggery-pokery to change the odd Treasury rule. That is the real world.

In his press release, the right hon. Member for Copeland gives the game away. He says clearly at the end of it:

"The Government's political problem is that if they accept our proposals it would be transparently clear that earlier privatisations had not been necessary and future privatisations would be called into question."

If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that past privatisations were unnecessary, why is the Labour party desperately trying to abandon clause IV? Why does it resolutely refuse to threaten to renationalise any part of the public sector that we have privatised? The reason is that its leadership knows that the theories are bust, that the concepts are bankrupt and that across the world there is hardly a Government who are prepared to defend the doctrinal obsessions that led us down that blind alley of nationalisation.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): If the President says that more commercial freedom is essential for the Post Office to succeed, and if he is not prepared to change the Treasury rules, is he not in effect condemning the Post Office to decline in the future? In his letter, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster clearly says that he told the Cabinet Committee that this was the last opportunity before the end of the 1990s to do anything about commercial freedom for the Post Office. The President of the Board of Trade is not prepared to provide that commercial freedom. He has rejected what was called in the letter the "Prescott option". Therefore, is he not condemning the Post Office to decline?

Mr. Heseltine: I know what the House would do if I pursued the logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument. The

first time that money was raised to threaten a constituent company of the hon. Gentleman, he or it would be in my office saying that it was unfair. The first time that the Royal Mail invested overseas and lost money, the Labour party would demand a statement. The first time that anything within the activities of the organisation became politically sensitive, demands would be made for a debate in this place. The House has always behaved in that way, and I believe that it always will. The short-term political opportunism of Opposition Members will always override this country's commercial interests. That is why the only way forward is to liberate Britain's wealth-creating processes from state ownership and put them into the hands of the private sector, with all its existing accounting disciplines.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: Madam Speaker made it absolutely clear that many hon. Members wish to speak in this debate, and I have already given way several times.

The gas competition Bill will aim to bring genuine competition to the gas market by creating a framework that will allow competition to be phased in to the domestic market, starting from April 1996. The average domestic gas consumer, who has already benefited from a fall in gas prices of more than 20 per cent in real terms since privatisation, will reap further benefits. I cannot authenticate the claims of those who want to enter the marketplace, but it is common to hear suggestions of price reductions approaching 10 per cent.

Under the Bill's provisions, newly licensed suppliers will be able to enter the domestic gas market, providing 18 million customers with choice for the first time. Competition will place powerful downward pressure on costs and prices and will provide a strong incentive for efficiency. It will promote innovation and development of the products and services that customers will choose.

Gas suppliers will be required to adhere to codes of practice in order to meet certain social obligations regarding procedures for debt and disconnection, the care of older and disabled customers and the provision of energy efficiency advice. We will have the opportunity to discuss this matter at length when the Bill comes before the House for a Second Reading.

I now turn to the privatisation of the commercial activities of the Atomic Energy Authority. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry made clear last February, ownership and the safe management of the UK's atomic energy and nuclear responsibilities will remain in the public sector. The technology wing of that organisation, which deals with science, engineering and business and selling technical, environmental and safety advice, will be privatised.

The privatisation process will enable AEA Technology to realise the full potential of its commercial activities, allowing it the freedom to sell its services as it is and not as the Government see fit. It will benefit consumers and, of course, add to national competitiveness.

It is some time since we debated coal in the House. On 12 October I was pleased to announce that we had identified the preferred bidders for the regional coal companies and certain care and maintenance collieries. Subject to further detailed negotiations with each of the preferred bidders, we aim to complete the sales by the end of this year.

It might interest the House to look back over the past two years at what was said and what has actually happened as a result of the privatisation process. British Coal has ceased operation at all but 16 pits, including one which is in development. All of these pits will transfer under the privatisation packages.

Four other pits where British Coal has ceased operations are the subject of bids as part of the privatisation process, and an interest in another one—Frances— is being pursued. In addition, nine pits that British Coal had closed were licensed to the private sector in 1994. A total of about 30 collieries are likely to be operating in the private sector in 1995, compared with the 16 that British Coal currently runs.

The House will want to remember precisely the validity of the forecasts that were made when we took our difficult but courageous decisions two years ago. The Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), told us that we would have only 15 pits in two or three years' time. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the Opposition spokesman on trade and industry, made his position clear: that 50 pits had been in operation at the time of the general election and that in the next month or two there might only be 15. For the hon. Member for Livingston to be only 100 per cent. out is, by his standards, to score a bull's eye. It is worth looking at the matter in more detail.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: The House will need to look at productivity—output per man shift in tonnes—if it wants to know why this great industry declined so far and so fast—

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): We know why.

Mr. Heseltine: I wonder whether the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) does know why. I will tell him. In 1978-79, when the Government were elected, output per man shift in tonnes was 2.31. In the 24 weeks to the end of October, it was 13.04 tonnes. That is why the private sector is finding ways in which to open pits that British Coal closed.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North) *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: The next great canard to which we had to listen with nauseating regularity was that if we closed the pits we would destroy the mining equipment industry. In the three months to July, mining equipment exports were up by 17 per cent. on a year ago.

We had a whole Select Committee report about the devastating consequences on employment of four proposals. I have asked for the figures and I have here the figure for unemployment in the travel-to-work areas for the coalfields in October 1992—254,248, an average of 11.6 per cent. I asked for the latest unemployment figure.

[Mr. Heseltine]

It has gone down to 227,900 and the average unemployment rates have fallen from 11.6 per cent. to 10.8 per cent.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: In the real world, all the forecasts made by the Labour party have been proved to be fallacious. They were nothing more than what we knew them to be at the time—scaremongering from the worst of political motives.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It is obvious that the President of the Board of Trade does not intend to give way at this stage.

Mr. Heseltine: Nothing more illustrates the difference between the achievements of this Government's industrial strategy and the Labour party's empty phrases than the recent speech by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) at the Labour party conference on the subject of the information revolution. I shall quote one sentence that gives the flavour of what he said.

"We should be investing in the new electronic super highways—satellite and telecommunications technology that is the nerve centre of a new information economy—doing for the next century what roads and railways have done for this one."

Let us assume that we are prepared to pass over the fact that, between 1974 and 1979, the previous Labour Government cut the road programme from £1.8 billion a year to just £1 billion a year. That gives us the clearest indication of what a Labour Government do to the infrastructure of our country.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): The right hon. Gentleman does not know what highways we were talking about.

Mr. Heseltine: I will tell the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) what highways I was talking about. I was talking about the highways to which his leader referred in his party conference speech.

The fact is that since this Government pursued their strategy for the telecommunications industries in the 1980s, we have seen the liberalisation of the marketplace and the privatisation of British Telecom. Since 1991, more than £27 billion has been invested in the networks—£22 billion by British Telecom, £2 billion by Mercury and more than £3 billion by cable companies.

New markets have opened up in mobile telephony and the United Kingdom market is almost twice as large as that of any other European Union country. We have 122,000 public telephone boxes, of which 96 per cent. actually work. When we began on this journey, we had only 80,000, of which 75 per cent. worked. In 1984, BT had 9,000 km of high-capacity fibre; in 1994, it has 2.5 million km. BT's prices are down by 35 per cent. and those of some of its competitors are down by more. There has been a 30-fold improvement in call reliability. There are 146 new public telecommunications operators, including 18 national licensees, and more are on the way. New technologies are being delivered in radio, opto-electronics and digital applications. The consequences of the 1980s' revolution in telecommunication have been more choice, more reliability, better quality, higher efficiency, lower prices and perhaps the best platform from which to expand into the future to be found in western Europe.

As a result of our experience—gained in the teeth of the Opposition—we have been able to persuade our European partners to move to liberalise the European single market by 1998.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Gentleman has forgotten one little thing.

Mr. Heseltine: I bet that I have not, but I shall listen to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the President of the Board of Trade forgotten that tens of thousands of BT's workers were effectively sacked and replaced at wage rates often 25 or 30 per cent. lower by people working for a company called Manpower? Has it not been a deliberate policy of BT simply to cut wages?

Mr. Heseltine: I am very glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. He has come to the heart of matter. It was precisely because the Labour party thought that it could sustain employment in the mines, in the shipbuilding industry and in the steel industry that it went on regardless of what was happening in the marketplace, of what overseas exporters were doing and of the opportunities to win contracts overseas. It went on and on protecting, subsidising and removing the disciplines of the marketplace because its paymasters in the trade unions would not face the realities of a changing world.

The argument that the hon. Gentleman advances is a classic one. The only way in which BT can bring about the communications revolution is to be a world-class competitive company. That means that people will have to move from job to job to be retrained and re-educated and reskilled. Those are the words that the leaders of the Labour party are constantly using. Are we being told that, in power, they would deny the logic of all the things that they say? Has the hon. Gentleman read any of the speeches of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield? Does he begin to understand what his leader is saying to him? The answer is that he does not. Even if he did, he would not care, because the power structure behind the Labour party is that of the producers and against the consumers. It is of the state and not the private sector. Labour Members will never come to terms with the real world, which this Government have embraced, with an enormous increment in wealth to the national economy.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does my right hon. Friend believe that any of the investment that he has just explained in outlining the total of £27 billion invested in networks would have been made if BT had remained a nationalised industry? Would we have seen any of the investment by the cable companies, which will allow us to take advantage of the super-highway?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If BT were still in the public sector, still held back by the restraints of that, it would be begging the Government to be given the freedoms of the private sector to become a world-class company.

Mr. Blunkett: Who stopped BT?

Mr. Heseltine: I am asked who stopped it. I will tell the House who stopped it. It was the Labour party year

after year after year which stopped it. It is precisely because BT has proved what can be achieved by turning it into a private sector, world-class company that I want the Royal Mail to have exactly the same opportunities.

Three other areas are important to the competitiveness agenda that we will pursue. The first is the continuation of the deregulation initiative. The House will be aware of the recent enactment of legislation enabling us to propose procedures and thereafter make changes at a speed not previously available. That is an important aspect of our determination to free up the marketplace while preserving essential protections for the environment and for safety.

I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) in the Chamber and I pay tribute to his remarkable work in pursuing our deregulation initiative. As a result of his work and the leadership of Lord Sainsbury, and now Francis Maude, 900 regulations are either in the process of being repealed or are at an urgent stage of reform. We have already notified to Parliament under the new legislative procedures 55 measures that are saving business millions of pounds. That is an important aspect of our market-opening activity.

The House will be fully aware of the recent satisfactory outcome of the GATT negotiations, which we hope to see concluded by the end of this year. That will manifest one of the Government's central beliefs: that there is much gain in widening the world's marketplace and freeing up opportunities for import and export. Nowhere is that more so than in the less prosperous parts of the world, which will gain far more from increased trade than they ever will from increased aid.

The third area relates to the Government's remarkable success story of pursuing policies of inward investment. As announcement after announcement is made about the scale of inward investment to this country, and as we now have 40 per cent. of all inward investment in the European Union from America and Japan, I wish every so often that when Opposition Members see new investment, plant and factories opening in their constituencies, they would recognise that that is happening because the Government's policies have made this country the most competitive European economy in which to invest.

Let me make a clear statement on behalf of the Government: we have transformed the competitiveness of this economy and have made ourselves one of the most attractive investment bases in the European Union. The economic outlook is among the best that we have seen in recent years. We have achieved a record of low inflation, low interest rates and have restored public finance to health. We have a range of policies to enhance the competitiveness of this nation. They have required guts and determination from a Government determined to ensure that they lead to the improved performance of our national economy, and nothing will persuade us to throw those opportunities away.

4.37 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): We fully anticipated that the President of the Board of Trade would come to the House today with a combination of bluff and bluster to cover his embarrassment about the great hole in the Queen's Speech where his party political prize was supposed to be, and he has not let us down. Rather than come naked into the debating Chamber, the President apparently exchanged his loincloth for a White Paper, but it could not disguise his political nakedness. Rather like the emperor's new clothes—or in this case, the President's new clothes—apparently no one but the President was fooled.

The Queen's Speech was intended to have as its centrepiece the privatisation of the Post Office, but it is not there. Apparently, the space is being filled not by alternative proposals from the President, who had nothing new to say today, but by Mr. John Maples and what he has to say about what the Government's real programme should be.

Mr. Maples certainly does not agree with the President of the Board of Trade. Mr. Maples said:

"What we are saying is completely at odds with what Tory supporters experience."

On the national health service, Mr. Maples said:

"The best result for the next 12 months would be zero media coverage."

I wonder what his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has to say about being gagged fully for a year.

Mr. Blunkett: That would be wonderful.

Dr. Cunningham: It would indeed be wonderful, as my hon. Friend says.

On the media—nothing new here, really—he says:

"We need to feed our friends and potential friends in the press with good stories."

On voters and the media:

"The influence of the media on voters' perceptions cannot be overstated."

On my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party:

"If Blair turns out to be as good as he looks, we have a problem."

Of course, the President of the Board of Trade has several problems, as we know: declining political credibility; failure to carry his own party with him; failure, above all, to convince the British people that his ideas for Post Office privatisation had any merit whatsoever.

It was nice to have confirmed on the record what we have all known for a very long time—that is, that the yobbos on the Tory Back Benches are organised, planned, prepared and part of that party's approach to preventing sensible and coherent debate in the Chamber of the House of Commons. I wonder what the right hon. Gentleman thinks about Mr. Maples and yobbos.

It was the Prime Minister, only in September, who said in London that he would like to create a yob-free culture in Britain. The Prime Minister wants a yob-free culture in Britain, but the deputy chairman of the Conservative party wants a yobbo-ridden culture on Conservative Benches in the House of Commons. Now we know that there is a vacuous programme from the right hon. Gentleman on what industry and the economy need, and a hidden agenda from his friend the deputy chairman of the Conservative party.

I congratulate the Union of Communication Workers and its members on the excellent campaign they waged to prevent privatisation of the Post Office and Royal Mail. The President's proposals, unfortunately, came back to him from his Cabinet colleagues marked "return to sender". They were from the depths of the *Jurassic Park* of Tory politics—privatisation, an idea whose time has certainly come and gone. Opposition Members, however, do not accept, as the right hon. Gentleman apparently

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does, that, if the Post Office cannot be privatised, it has to be ossified—deliberately forced into decline to satisfy the failed dogma of the Tory party.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I will take the hon. Gentleman as a friendly yobbo.

Mr. Dover: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that compliment. What is his view of top management's opinion of Post Office privatisation? Surely they are in the best position to judge. They either face problems keeping the Post Office in the public sector or they have freedom in the private sector. Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that their views count?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not know, because I have not had the opportunity of their advice, except from what I have read in the newspapers, but I half suspect that, like many other top managers in privatised industries, they would be thinking of their share options and their salaries, rather like Cedric Brown and Mr. Giordano have been doing at British Gas. But we may return to that matter in a moment.

The people of Britain are fed up with being ripped off or overcharged by people in private monopoly industries giving themselves huge salary increases with apparently no accountability and no care for what Ministers, including the Prime Minister, have to say about it. I remind the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) and the President of the Board of Trade what the Prime Minister had to say in his Mansion house speech. At the Lord Mayor's banquet, he said:

"There is more that business could do to further improve its image. There is no doubting the resentment that large and often unjustified pay rises can cause, so I welcome what Sir Brian Nicholson, the president of the CBI, had to say about the need for responsibility in setting the pay of company executives. The power is there to control it, and I hope it will be used."

Apparently, the only member of the Government today who was willing to defend what has happened in British Gas was the President of the Board of Trade—no Back Bencher, no chairman of any Conservative committee, and certainly not the Prime Minister. The only one to defend it was the right hon. Gentleman. I wonder for whom he thought he was speaking. He certainly was not speaking for consumers; he certainly was not speaking for the British people; he certainly, apparently, was not speaking even for his own Prime Minister. I wonder who is really in charge.

On the Post Office privatisation and its future, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be a little more forthcoming than he has been so far. It is clear from the letter of his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy that the President of the Board of Trade does not think that the Post Office can succeed in the public sector. He seems to think that it will wither and fade away, and that other private sector operators will take over.

The real question is this: are the right hon. Gentleman, the Government and the Conservative party willing to see that happen, are they willing to see more freedom, more latitude and more opportunity for the Post Office in the public sector, or will they simply let it fade away and die? The right hon. Gentleman's argument, apparently, is that everything that could be done has been done. That is simply not true. That view is not even shared by senior management of the Post Office, let alone by the Opposition.

We could have changes to the calculation of the external financial limit. We could have the removal of capital expenditure limits. We could have the relaxation of Government scrutiny of specific projects. The President of the Board of Trade had much to say about political interference. Why does he not remove that bit of political interference from the Post Office?

We could have freedom from Department of Trade and Industry interference in proposed training projects, ability for the Royal Mail to enter joint ventures, new freedoms for Post Office Counters Ltd, and the Royal Mail given more latitude in its private finance initiatives. All those things are possible, but the right hon. Gentleman's thesis is that he would rather seek to defend his dogma on privatisation, with the Post Office forced into commercial difficulties.

We do not share that view. What is more, it should be possible, in a sensible country, for us to sit down and agree a way forward for the Post Office with the management, with the UCW, with the Government and with all those who are interested in helping the Post Office to build on its successes. I make that offer to the right hon. Gentleman now. Is he willing to accept it? Why does he not answer—yes or no? The answer is clear. The right hon. Gentleman has been put in his place by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because the answer to the question is that it is his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer who will not agree to anything of that kind.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman of what he said. He said that he does not believe that the Post Office can succeed in the public sector. However, if we look at the 1994 Blue Book which was published a few weeks ago, we see that British Nuclear Fuels plc has been reclassified to the public sector. The right hon. Gentleman has effectively nationalised British Nuclear Fuels. He never said a word about that, of course; there was no statement and no great speech. Apparently he thinks that British Nuclear Fuels can operate successfully in the public sector, but that the Post Office cannot.

That is quite a political flip-flop—quite a head-stand—from the right hon. Gentleman. One successful, profitable company with a huge positive cash flow and lots of business can operate successfully in the public sector, because the right hon. Gentleman has just agreed to its being put there, but the Post Office cannot. The right hon. Gentleman's argument is a complete and utter fraud.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): On sitting down with trade unions, did the right hon. Gentleman hear this morning the diary tapes of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), in which he described in graphic detail how the previous Labour Government had the life squeezed out of them by trade union power? Does the right hon. Gentleman really think that a future Labour Government would do any better, and if so, why?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, I believe that a future Labour Government could do better—not only better than that Administration, but a lot better than the present one, too.

The right hon. Gentleman's argument is not only flawed, but it is not borne out by an examination of what has happened over privatisation.

The most recent examination of the results of privatisation, carried out by London Economics—one of the few organisations, as Victor Keegan reminded us the other day, to have done comparative studies—shows that there has been no great gain in productivity following privatisation. There has been no great gain in profitability, either. Many of the improvements took place before privatisation ever happened. This study and many other analyses bear that out.

What has happened, however, has been the creation of private monopoly power—power which, as we saw again this weekend, has been roundly abused by those who have it in their hands: with share options, for instance. They have frittered the money away. The privatised water companies have had to write off more than £500 million because investments made outside the water industry have failed. These people would rather give bonuses to shareholders—East Midlands Electricity gave away £187 million in this way—than cut prices for consumers and give them a better deal.

The making of money, arguments with the regulators, bumping up emoluments, salaries, bonuses and perks for managers—these things have had a far higher priority for those who run the privatised utilities than has service to consumers.

Mr. McLoughlin: The right hon. Gentleman has just proved what the President said would happen. He has complained about some of the enterprises in which the privatised companies have invested and about the money that they have lost. How then would he make sure that the Post Office did not go into the same sort of enterprises if it got the extra commercial freedom that he is arguing it should have in the public sector? Instead of private investors losing money, the taxpayers would.

Dr. Cunningham: Taxpayers have already lost heavily in these privatised enterprises. So have consumers—we have Mr. Maples's authority for that. *[Interruption.]* We are well aware that the Tory yobbos are here this evening, but we are not going to be put off our stride by them. If the hon. Gentleman goes to the Library, he will see, in the shape of the write-offs that were given to the privatised water undertakings to get their balance sheets in shape, that the taxpayer lost billions of pounds before privatisation ever took place.

The Government and the President of the Board of Trade are almost alone in believing that the present system of utility regulation is adequate, effective and fair. I almost split my sides laughing this morning when I heard, on commercial radio in London, a British Gas advertisement that said:

"We put our customers before ourselves".

Today of all days, one would have thought that someone in the PR department would say, "I think we'll give this one a miss."

This week, 3 per cent. price rises have been inflicted on consumers—including some of the lowest paid people in the country. This same week, they have been told, in what is supposed to be a democracy, that, if they do not sign direct debits, they will have to pay more. That amounts to a hidden tax on people without bank accounts—usually the lowest income families and households. All this comes at a time when more VAT is to be imposed on people's energy bills. Is it any wonder that people are infuriated by the announcement of British Gas salary increases?

We should have seen the warning signs when British Gas appointed a part-time chairman at a salary of £450,000 a year. Mr. Giordano is well known for making sure that he is well remunerated wherever he goes. Now the chief executive is to have a 75 per cent. increase, while directors will get a 50 per cent. increase. That really is an abuse of private monopoly power and, as these industries are answerable to him, the right hon. Gentleman should have said so loud and clear.

The President has had the chance now to reflect; does he still support these decisions? Does he expect that his credibility can be sustained while this is going on, at the same time as people are having another round of VAT imposed on their energy bills? It is a scandal, and the right hon. Gentleman knows it. He should have had the courage to stand up and oppose it.

The regulators should have the power to do something, and, while considering the gas Bill that the right hon. Gentleman foreshadowed in his speech, we shall seek opportunities to provide such power. It will be interesting to see whether any Conservatives support such powers—the public will be watching closely. Will the right hon. Gentleman at least give the House a guarantee that these problems will be dealt with in his legislation? Apparently he will not. Obviously, he thinks that there is nothing wrong.

We do not agree. We see our priorities as the protection of vulnerable consumers and the right of the 18 million households that depend on gas for heating and cooking to enjoy a safe and secure supply, free from the sort of exploitation that appears increasingly to be the trend with British Gas.

What of the work force? They were told that their industry could afford only a 2.9 per cent. pay increase, despite all the productivity and profits. Yet the chief executive gets a 75 per cent. pay hike. That is the kind of grotesque unfairness that occurs in the private monopoly companies of which the right hon. Gentleman proudly boasted in his speech.

The President had nothing to say either about another major industrial issue of the moment: the proposed takeover of VSEL by either British Aerospace or GEC. The struggle is going on before our very eyes, yet the right hon. Gentleman says nothing, and the Secretary of State for Defence says nothing. [HON. MEMBERS: "Of course not."] Well, why boast about their White Paper on competition, if they are willing to stand by and watch another private enterprise monopoly being created, this time in warship building? That is one possible outcome.

Why this silence? Why no action from the man who said that he would intervene before breakfast, before lunch, before tea and before dinner? Why was he silent on the sale of Rover to Germany? Why was he silent about the transfer of Raytheon's business and technology to the United States? Why, a few days ago, was he silent about the transfer of the ownership of Boots's pharmaceutical division to a German company?

The right hon. Gentleman's silence is legendary. He did not even intervene to save Swan Hunter shipbuilders on the Tyne, or to ensure that a maritime nation could go on

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building merchant ships. We must be just about the only such nation in the world in this invidious position. So much for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention.

We know, however, that people are not silent in the corridors of the DTI or the Ministry of Defence. We know that Lord Prior, one of the right hon. Gentleman's old political friends and comrades, and the other people from GEC—including, no doubt, Lord Weinstock—are patrolling the corridors trying to fix up a deal.

I should like to know whether the right hon. Gentleman has a strategy. I ask, not for myself, but for the thousands of workers on Clydeside and in Barrow-in-Furness whose jobs, skills, livelihoods and mortgages are at this very moment being squabbled over. Meanwhile, no statement of any kind is made. The Government appear to have no policy at all—or do they?

Mr. Heseltine: I realise that the right hon. Gentleman has not been in his job for very long. He and the House will understand that I have quasi-judicial responsibilities in all these merger and monopoly cases. It would be quite inappropriate for me to make any statement or to become involved in the way that the right hon. Gentleman suggests.

Dr. Cunningham: I said that the President's response would be patronising and, predictably, it was. What about the Secretary of State for Defence? He has no quasi-judicial role in this matter. He has been boasting for two years of his determination to maintain competition to protect taxpayers' interests.

Why does the President not say that the matter should be referred to the Office of Fair Trading? That would not cut across his quasi-judicial role. Why does he not do that in the light of the implications for warship building, jobs, skills and technology and in the interests of the taxpayer? The reality is that he is transfixed because his political friends have probably once again got their sticky fingers in the pie, and he does not want to do anything about it.

The President is carrying out a review of Companies House, but he did not refer to that today, and it is not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. It would be helpful to my hon. Friends who are interested in this matter, to those who have constituencies in south Wales and, more importantly, to the people at Companies House to know when the review is to end. Is the right hon. Gentleman contemplating legislation on Companies House? Will he follow the advice of the consultants that he appointed to carry out the review? He took on board SRU, a private consultancy which was co-founded by Mr. Peter York.

As Prufrock told us in *The Sunday Times* a week ago, the paper made an inquiry to Companies House and reported that the service was satisfactory. Prufrock wrote:

> " the company records I ordered last week arrived promptly. They show that, in its last filed accounts, SRU recorded a fall in turnover to £3.7 million from £4.1 million in 1992. And its profit of £193,000 in 1992 slumped to a loss of £328,000. During this clearly difficult period for the company, the chairman, Henry Stevenson, saw his pay rocket from £338,000 to £497,000."

That is the firm of consultants that the right hon. Gentleman favours and has found a place for in his review of Companies house. Does he not think that the people who work there and carry out many essential services deserve better? Do they not deserve a clear answer from him soon about what he intends for them, their organisation and their future? I hope that he will find an early opportunity to clarify that.

The President speaks about the economic recovery as if some great miracle has occurred. He speaks of British industry needing to be world class. Britain could do with a world-class Government, because at present we certainly do not have one. In opening the debate, he spoke about a wonderful economic and industrial recovery. Unfortunately for the right hon. Gentleman, as his friend in Tory central office has told him, no one believes him. He has not convinced his own supporters, and he has certainly not convinced the British people or Mr. John Maples.

Over the period of Conservative rule, we have not improved our position vis-à-vis our competitors in Europe or in the wider world. Last Thursday, the *Financial Times* reported:

> "Europe's long-term outlook gloomy but short-term business confidence bubbles."

That is a familiar story—short-term booms for Britain but no long-term strategy for our industry, manufacturers or our economy.

A plethora of reports, which are available to us all, contradict almost everything that the right hon. Gentleman said in his speech. The Engineering Employers Federation says that, next year, UK engineering output will be no higher than it was in 1990. It says that output will remain below 1990 levels in mechanical engineering, metal goods and transport equipment. In its November "Manufacturing Bulletin", the CBI says:

> "the manufacturing trade deficit continues at around £10 billion . . . Weaknesses remain . . . the longer-term underlying weaknesses still remain, with a 20 to 40 per cent. shortfall in the average levels of productivity, sluggish investment, lower levels of skills than our main competitors and persistent trade deficits in manufactured goods."

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The President made a euphoric statement about British industry. Is my right hon. Friend aware that a recent IBM consultancy survey suggests that only between 1 and 2 per cent. of British companies are world class?

Dr. Cunningham: I am happy to confirm my hon. Friend's intervention, because I was coming to that matter in my speech. For good measure, the second "Lean Enterprise" report from Andersen Consulting states:

> "The UK shows the lowest productivity of any European country, and the second worst quality. Low production volumes, coupled with the presence of many different car makers, creates a fragmented industry with multiple standards and different messages from different customers."

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall do so in a moment, and I hope that I shall not be told that it is all the fault of the workers, because our labour costs are as low as those of almost any other country, with the possible exception of Japan. They are lower than those in the United States, Germany, France and Italy. The problem is that our unit labour costs are higher than those of all the countries that I have mentioned except Italy. That is the real problem,

and it has nothing to do with wage rates. It has to do with lack of investment, training, skills and proper equipment for our work force.

Mr. Brandreth: I am pleased to intrude on the right hon. Gentleman's catalogue of misery, which is another example of talking our country down. What he says does not tie in with the facts. Over the past decade, manufacturing output in Britain has risen by 22 per cent., compared with 21 per cent. in Germany and 11 per cent. in France. Our productivity is greater than that of France and Germany. What the right hon. Gentleman says is the reverse of the truth. The reason for inward investment in Britain is that what he says is not so.

Dr. Cunningham: That was not an intervention: it was a short speech—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer it."] I am answering it. Our productivity is hopelessly lower than that of our principal competitors. It is worth reminding the hon. Gentleman and the House of the Government's incompetence. They manage to run a trade deficit with 10 of the world's richest nations and a trade surplus with 10 of the poorest. That puts the trading performance of the right hon. Gentleman's policies in some sort of context.

Over the period about which the President spoke, UK average growth was lower than that of Europe as a whole, lower than the OECD average and lower than that of the G7 countries. That is our performance on growth, and on investment it is much the same story. As the right hon. Gentleman said, export growth has remained steady at 3 per cent. However, the manufacturing trade deficit continues to be very large. As I have said, the underlying weaknesses are lack of proper training, lack of skills and a shortage of effective investment for our work force. In reality, manufacturing output is barely higher than it was 20 years ago. So much for the right hon. Gentleman's wonderful success story about 15 years in government.

As *The Sunday Times* said, Britain's productivity is so poor that our unit labour costs are higher than they are in almost any other country. It ran the headline:

"UK 'bottom of league' in car productivity".

That is where the right hon. Gentleman's policies have brought us to.

Plenty of people in this country want change and recognise that we must live and succeed in a global economy. The evidence, over and over and over again, is that, far from getting us to that stage, the policies of the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friends are taking us lower and lower down the performance leagues.

As for grappling with some of the problems, I was astonished to read that European Union officials are angry because the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are actually refusing European Union aid worth half a billion pounds intended to retrain workers in front-line industries in Britain. They talk about not getting a fair deal from Europe and not getting enough back, so why are not they taking that money? Why are not they taking the money to combat Euro-fraud? It is because none of them can ever agree on a policy on Europe. Listening to Ministers talking about Britain's place in Europe is like being at a Karaoke evening—they do not quite know the words, but they are singing a different song anyway.

I want to deal with the right hon. Gentleman's long-term support for the social chapter. In his book, he said that Britain had paid a heavy price for standing on the sidelines when the common agricultural policy was formed. The implication of his remarks was that he felt the same about the social chapter. Of course, since he has returned to the economic and political fold, he has changed his tune.

The Prime Minister made great promises on matters such as European works councils. I am delighted to tell the Secretary of State—although I am sure that he knows—that, just a few days ago, my union, the GMB, and my lifelong friend, the national officer, David Williams, signed the first European deal with a British manufacturing company to form a Europewide works council. The company involved is United Biscuits.

Of course, what that really means is that the benefits of the social chapter are coming to British workers, despite all the bluff and bluster and the huffing and puffing about the opt out. What many of us always knew—indeed, what the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) predicted—was that that was exactly what would happen.

The Secretary of State could at least afford a little smile, because that agreement is likely to be the first of many. More than 100 British companies are covered by the regulations because of the extent of their operations in the European Union. United Biscuits is just the first of many. That is good news for working people in Britain. It is something of an aberration, or perhaps it is just a fluke, that the first company to sign such a deal has as a non-executive director Lady Howe, who I am sure was very much to the fore in arguing for a fair deal for the work force of United Biscuits.

When the right hon. Gentleman was deprived of Post Office privatisation, he was bereft of something to say to the House. He came today with flannel. He had nothing new to say and no proposals to create new opportunities for investment or skills training. Indeed, he continues to reject any. He once made a speech about abolishing the Department of Trade and Industry. He has moved a little way from that, and now talks about the essential need for an industrial strategy—another one of his political flip-flops—and his wish to reduce the Department by 30 per cent. Perhaps he should be the first to go.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House is aware that Madam Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 pm. A large number of hon. Members wish to speak, so I hope that those who are called outside those hours will bear that in mind.

5.14 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Judging by the speeches of Labour Members, including that of the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), they are experts in trying to rewrite history. They have forgotten all the disastrous results of the policies that they pursued every time they were in government, but especially, as I remember, between 1974 and 1979. We constantly hear Labour Members talking about the 1970s and what has happened to British manufacturing industry since then, but they never mention that it was trade union militancy that destroyed that industry throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and especially when Labour Governments were in power.

I also recall that every Labour Government that there have ever been left office with unemployment higher than it was at the beginning of their term in office. I am sure

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that that would again be the result if this country were ever foolish enough to elect another Labour Government. I lived in the midlands throughout the 1970s and I suffered with the rest of the British people from the effects of a Labour Government. Labour Members should remember that then there was inflation in the high 20 per cents. and compare that with this Government's success in bringing down inflation to low single figures. They should also remember the mistake made by the shadow Chancellor, who predicted that unemployment would rise month after month, yet since then unemployment has fallen month after month.

Labour Members, especially those in the shadow Cabinet, usually have one or two faults. First, they have had no experience at any time in their lives of working in industry. If the press were to investigate the jobs many of them had before coming to the House they would find many social workers and university lecturers, but few with any experience of working in industry, in any capacity. Secondly, those who speak about industry are frequently motivated by an unfortunate combination of ignorance and prejudice—ignorance because of their lack of experience of the sharp end of industry, which I have been lucky enough to have, and prejudice because they believe that profit is a dirty word.

When Labour Members talk about investment, they usually mean Government subsidy. They do not realise that companies raise the money for investment by making profits. To hear many of their speeches, one would think that they all believe that profit is a dirty word, yet it is profit that allows a company to invest. They throw around cheap insults about senior company officials and their pay while failing to recognise that companies must pay the rate for the job. While I would not defend every pay rise that directors vote for themselves, sometimes companies seek to recruit in the international market, and to get the right people with the right leadership for British industry they must outbid United States, Japanese and European competitors, all of whom pay very high salaries. Those factors are often forgotten by the opposition parties.

Both of the main opposition parties constantly call for the implementation of the social chapter and the minimum wage. I had the good fortune to visit some factories in Germany during the summer recess, where I met senior works managers at the sharp end of industry. They said, "Make sure that you do not make the mistake in Britain that we made in the 1960s and 1970s." German manufacturing industry today has precisely the problems that we had in the 1960s and 1970s, when I recall that management at places like Longbridge had lost the right to manage. In German companies, particularly those in which the IG Metall union has great power, managers do not have the right even to chose to move a machine on the production line 5 ft to the right without consulting the works council. A thick book of rules, closely typed with small print, entitled the "Bevertriebsrad", insists that the works council must be consulted on everything.

The senior works manager who used to manage a plant for his previous company in south Wales as part of massive German investment there said that it was a joy to work in Britain because we have not saddled ourselves with the stupid bureaucracy under which German companies labour. That manager told me, "Make sure that you don't go down the road that we did. Don't have a minimum wage or saddle yourselves with social chapter regulations, because you will strangle your industry the way that German industry is now being strangled."

Labour Members who claim that the social chapter works fine for Germany should ask those who work at the sharp end of German manufacturing industry. They say that it is a disaster, which is why German companies are losing out right, left and centre to Japanese and other far east manufacturers, and why companies such as Bosch, which is in south Wales, are closing their plants on the mainland of continental Europe and relocating to Britain. Britain enjoys 40 per cent. or more of all inward investment to the European Union.

The debate is about both industry and education, which are closely linked. If British industry has a well-educated work force and well-trained managers, it will have a successful future. I was delighted to hear last week's announcement of the new national curriculum, which will bring a return to the high educational policy standards that were so sadly lacking over many years because of the trendy socialist ideas peddled through teacher training colleges since the 1960s.

The new English curriculum will make increased demands on pupils. There will be greater emphasis on grammar, spelling and punctuation—the traditional values that parents want and children need, but about which the Opposition parties have forgotten. There will be more emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic—particularly in the primary years, and on the need for pupils to be taught written and spoken standard English. There will be greater emphasis on high-quality English literature and, for the first time ever, more attention will be paid to correct English across the curriculum.

In mathematics there will be more emphasis on arithmetic, particularly during the primary years. The use of calculators by five to seven-year-olds will be restricted so that children will learn mental arithmetic. Calculators cannot be a substitute for arithmetical skills. As someone who has taught and is the son of a university lecturer and mathematics teacher, I know that those things matter.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: Not at this stage, because of Madam Speaker's ruling about the length of speeches.

The new curriculum will place a strong emphasis on history, on targets for attainment, and on the ability of pupils to recall and to deploy knowledge, facts and understanding. There will be a strong emphasis on British history. A specific reference to British industry has been added, rightly, for five to seven-year-olds. Of the eight core historical periods that seven to 14-year-olds will study, six will focus on British history and one on the 20th century, including Britain's part in both world wars.

I am secretary of the Conservative Back-Bench sports committee and joint secretary of our Back-Bench education committee, and sport is a subject dear to my heart. The proposal that 14 to 16-year-olds should be required for the first time to play competitive team games has been strengthened, and competitive team sports for younger age groups have also been confirmed. That will help to ensure that young children will be taught well and be kept fit, to become the well-trained work force that we will need in future. Pandering to outmoded educational ideas is ending.

A crucial part of education policy must be encouraging young people to turn to constructive pursuits and to keep them away from drugs. Labour's new leader suggests that he and his party are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. How does he square that claim with the action of many Labour Members in signing motions and speaking in favour of legalising cannabis? The Liberal Democrat conference also voted to legalise cannabis.

The most serious cause of crime in my constituency and, I suspect, in many others, is drugs. I want my party to continue adhering to tough policies on crime, to ensure that there is a clamp down on drugs. I hope that, during my lifetime, no Conservative Member will ever call for legalisation of cannabis or any drug.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that this debate is about education and industry.

Mr. Hawkins: I understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I was seeking to stress the importance of an education policy that encourages traditional values in law and order. I understood that hon. Members are allowed more latitude in the debate on the Loyal Address and to range wider than usual.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair has been allowing reasonable latitude.

Mr. Hawkins: It is vital that schools adopt tough policies to ensure that there is no drug taking in their playgrounds. I was greatly concerned to discover recently that many schools, particularly those in inner cities and inner urban areas—including in my own constituency—are finding that drug dealers are congregating in the vicinity of playgrounds, trying to encourage children as young as 10 or 11 to buy and to take drugs. We have heard nothing from the Opposition Benches about tackling such problems.

It is crucial that traditional values in education are reinforced and that young people are encouraged by their teachers and parents to participate in constructive activities, because that will take them away from the danger of drugs. Competitive sport in and outside schools is an important part of that. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education can reassure me that she will stick to traditional standards and values.

We have already heard from my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade about the great success of British industry. If we can ever get the British press to talk proudly about Britain's successes instead of constantly knocking our country, and if we can ever get either of the main Opposition parties to stop running Britain down, we shall have the right kind of debate. My party will build on our strength in industry and education rather than be diverted by the sideshows on which Labour often concentrates.

5.28 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): This was the 15th Gracious Speech since a Conservative Government were elected in 1979. Like the others, it consisted mainly of generalities expressed in felicitous language. The Government are apparently in favour of economic growth, rising employment and permanently low inflation. The reality of 15 years of Tory policies and of 15 Queen's Speeches for a constituency such as mine—which, by the skin of its teeth, is hanging on to the status of an industrial constituency—and others in south Wales is quite different from the description given by the President of the Board of Trade this afternoon.

The grim picture for my constituency—which is not very different from others in the north-west, the north-east and Scotland—is one of high unemployment among young people, and among young men in particular; long-term unemployment; many part-time jobs offering low incomes; and low per capita incomes, with the consequences that that has for town centres, local authority expenditure on community services and everything else. We do not have much to praise after 15 years of Gracious Speeches produced by Tory Governments.

Recently, I met a group of about 20 of my constituents who had been declared redundant. They had been working for a small company in the constituency. Most of them thought that they would never work again. Some were fairly optimistic in thinking that they might, in the not-too-distant future, obtain part-time employment.

A gentleman in his late fifties sounded much more optimistic than the others. He said that he had already found another job. Indeed, he had found a full-time job. That came as some surprise to the others, and to me. He said that he had been made redundant four times since 1979. On each occasion he had found a full-time job within the constituency to replace the one that he had lost. Unfortunately, there was a sting in his message. He said, "In my next job, my take-home pay will be lower than the pay that I received in 1979 before I first lost a job." He was not engaging in any computations with inflation. He was simply talking about the cash return for his work since 1979 and the subsequent redundancies.

My constituent's account is, unfortunately, part of the reality. That is the position even where there is no unemployment and some part-time work. Even when people can secure jobs, they are finding time and again that they are earning less and less when they compare their take-home pay with that which they received in previous employment. That is certainly the position in constituencies like mine.

It seems, as far as I can discern, that the situation has not been very different in the United States. In the 1960s, when I was in the United States, it was almost the tradition among working-class families for people to take a second job. That enabled them to make ends meet and even to better themselves. In those days, a man would often take a second part-time job, and perhaps even the woman of the family would take one. There were such jobs available at that time, the United States economy being what it was.

I understand that that opportunity to improve a working family's standard of living disappeared in the 1980s. Second and third jobs are still available, but many of those who work in car factories, in industry generally and in the service sector in the United States are finding that their standard of living is becoming lower even when they take extra jobs. I suspect that that experience will come to Britain. It seems to be coming slowly to constituencies such as mine. There is not much joy there for the Conservative party if we choose to talk about such matters in political terms. As I have said, I think that the American experience will come to Britain and perhaps even to the rest of western Europe. The trend will be

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accelerated if we continue to hand over control of monetary policy to central bankers, whether in Britain or in the rest of western Europe.

Another testament to 15 years of Tory rule appeared in my mail recently. My attention was drawn to some figures that analysed the 1990-91 census. There were the usual grim statistics about unemployment, including activity and inactivity rates. The statistics that took my eye related to inactivity rates among households. In 1991—only four years ago—there was no one working in 41 per cent. of households in the Llanelli constituency. To use an old-fashioned term, there was no breadwinner in those households. The decline in employment had continued at about 1 per cent. a year since 1981. Taking account of that trend—I would not think that it has changed—the figure is now probably 45 per cent. It might be even higher because of recent redundancies. By the next general election, in about two years' time, it may be that no one will be working in 50 per cent. of households in the Llanelli constituency.

I understand the composition of households and I accept that there some are made up of elderly people who are not seeking work. Nevertheless, the figures to which I have referred are a grim condemnation of 15 years of Tory policies and 15 years of Tory Gracious Speeches.

The President of the Board of Trade has told us that he does not wish to subsidise industry. Although no one is working in about 45 per cent. of households in the Llanelli constituency—the position is not so very different throughout south Wales—there is no shortage of new build housing. The Tarmacs, Wimpeys, Westburys and McAlpines are building houses everywhere. That is despite the fact, as I have said, that no one is working in almost half the households in the Llanelli area. House building seems to be the main economic activity—it is certainly the most manifest one. Large estates of private houses, which have not been designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, are being built. The houses are rather cheek by jowl, but they probably meet the Parker Morris standards of a previous era. They are quite nice two and three-bedroom houses.

Before the few remaining representatives of the Adam Smith Institute on the Government Benches leap to their feet, let me assure them that the house building to which I have referred is not market driven. That is the vogue phrase that is used these days. It is not the result of real and proper planning, for there is no strategic plan.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): The right hon. Gentleman has talked about a high level of unemployment and a great deal of housebuilding. Is that building providing employment locally for those who would otherwise be unemployed?

Mr. Davies: I am happy to deal with that question immediately. Bricklayers, masons and carpenters are being employed. It is curious, however, that most of the houses are not being built by local builders. Building is taking place but local builders are not getting anything out of it. As I have said, the houses are being built by Wimpey and other large companies. I accept, of course, that some people are being employed while the houses are being built.

It is strange that the building work is not market driven. No great strategic plans have emanated from the Welsh Office. It may sound parochial, but often the house building is the result of clearance by the Welsh Development Agency of old industrial land. Whatever critics of the WDA have said, and irrespective of the problems that have surfaced, the agency is extremely good at clearing and cleaning old industrial land.

It is unfortunate that in the early 1980s the Government stipulated that for every £1 of public money spent by agencies of the WDA, £3 or £4 had to be contributed by private industry. That sounds fine but there is a problem. The easiest way of finding £3 or £4 in south Wales nowadays is to approach national companies, such as Wimpey, which build houses.

Ever since the war, if there has been any money around, it has usually gone into property or house building, rather than into wealth-creating investment. That has been the history of the British economy under both Labour and Conservative Governments. That still happens. The £3 or £4 usually comes from the house builders. Nobody has an imaginative use for the land, so people say, "Let's put houses on it." No analysis is made about whether the houses should be there. No infrastructure questions are asked. Nobody asks whether schools and shops will be there to service the two and three-bedroom houses. Nobody thinks about the effect that the investment will have on the town centre down the road. Yet, public money is used.

Mr. Deva: I am becoming increasingly baffled. I have heard, on many occasions, the Labour party complaining that there are many homeless people and not enough housing, but the right hon. Gentleman is complaining because houses are being built. Will he please explain?

Mr. Davies: I am not complaining. Perhaps I should not do so in debates such as this, but I have been in the House long enough and I know that I am allowed to describe what is happening. The hon. Gentleman should not assume that I am complaining now. I shall come to my complaint when I get to the end of my speech. I am merely trying to describe the fact that, although no one is working in 45 per cent. of the households, thousands of houses are being built by national house builders. I am trying to point out that, in part, they are being built with public subsidy—the kind that must not go to BT, British Gas or to industry. Apparently, public subsidies are all right if they go to Wimpey, Tarmac or McAlpine.

The builders are pretty stupid. They can get cheap land that has been cleared for them, they can build reasonable houses at reasonable prices, but what if they cannot sell them in that low-income constituency? When I look around, I find that there is no problem. If they cannot sell them, there is always the fairy godmother of capitalism—the purchaser of last resort, which for houses in south Wales these days is the housing association.

Housing associations used to be collections of retired vicars, surveyors, trade unionists and various do-gooders, but not any more. They have become corporations. They have chief executives, public relations directors, nice motor cars, shiny offices. They buy the houses from the builders, who cannot sell them directly to individuals, and tenants are put into them. Again, I made some inquiries, and discovered that housing association rents are usually about twice as much as those for comparable houses built by that dreadful institution, the local authority. The

Government are paying twice for those houses, which would have been built anyway. They are also contributing to the land, which is nice. They are creating problems for the future, because there is no planning for community services, or for anything else. So I am not complaining about public money—quite a lot of it goes into my constituency—but it is just scattered around. It is not planned. It is not even market driven.

I wondered how anybody could afford to pay the rent charged by housing associations, but it does not matter, does it? The Secretary of State for Social Security picks up the tab. He pays the extra rent, which goes to the housing associations to provide them with their empires. Yes, indeed, we have house building in my constituency, but it is not wealth-creating. All right, a few people will be employed, but we would rather have the money to recreate our industrial base so that my constituents do not have to live on handouts. Under the Conservative Government, a handout culture is developing. It does not really matter whether the money comes from Cardiff, from London or from Brussels, local authorities and Members of Parliament queue up for it. One cannot blame people, because the wealth-creating base of our communities has been steadily eroded since 1979.

Mr. Deva *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman can shake his head as much as he likes. I am telling him about my constituency. I take no pleasure in what I have said, as it is sad. My constituents are proud people. The tradition of south Wales for a hundred years and more has been the production of wealth, which benefited the communities and the wider world around them. They do not want to live in a society of handouts. If we are to get some money from the Government, at least let it be planned properly. Let us have value for money, because I do not see value for money in the exercise that I have recounted to the House.

The problem remains one of no industrial strategy and no real belief in industry—the President of the Board of Trade may have believed in industry in a previous manifestation or incarnation, but probably does not any more. Certainly, many other Conservative Members do not. I was surprised to hear how few industrialists and how many people with experience in industry are Conservative Members. I see hon. Members with experience in finance, housing and other sectors, but not with experience in industry. It has been neglected for the past 15 years. We need an industrial strategy. If there is public money to be invested, it needs to go into wealth production. That is not happening in my constituency and will not until we have a new Government, devoted to rebuilding our industrial base.

5.46 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to the debate. I do not wish to follow on from what was said by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), because Conservatives believe in industry, in wealth creation and enterprise.

I shall concentrate my comments on education and the Government's education policies. Before doing so, I wish to say a few words about measures proposed in the Gracious Speech. I welcome warmly the proposal to promote enterprise and improve the working of the labour market and, particularly, to reform the unemployment and income support benefit and create a jobseeker's allowance.

All hon. Members, from both sides of the House, believe that unemployment is one of the greatest evils of our age. Although I am delighted with the falls that we have seen recently in the level of unemployment, must be done to encourage people to get into training, retraining and, I hope, back to work. My constituency has pockets of very high unemployment and my constituents look to the enterprise culture, to the retraining potential, to get jobs and opportunities for them along the Thames gateway. We look with interest at the development of the planning and industrial opportunities, which that area of the Thames gives.

I believe that the proposed contract between the employment service and the unemployed person will be of great benefit to both. A new approach to help genuine work seekers, with job experience, training and retraining, will result not only in better value for money for the taxpayer, but also a much better service to the client—those people who want to job. While the workshy are a small percentage of the total unemployed, the aim of the new allowance will be as a means of support while the unemployed person looks for work, and not an income for life divorced from the world of work. That is progress. We need good training and profitable and successful industries to create the jobs for those people.

I welcome the abolition of the regional health authorities, as proposed in the Gracious Speech. We need less bureaucracy. We need more cash up front so that the health service can provide service for the patient, not bureaucratic structures. Contained throughout the Gracious Speech is the belief that we need less government and more effective utilisation of our natural resources, for the benefit of all.

I am delighted that no major education reform Bill was included in the Gracious Speech. There have been many good measures in the recent past, and decisions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), who was Secretary of State for Education. I feel, however, that the fact that this Session will include no major education reform measure is good for education, good for the taxpayer and good for the nation's children, teachers and parents. In the past, so much had to be done because, regrettably, the education service declined during the 1960s and 1970s as the wrong policies were implemented. This Government confronted and tackled the problems; the results are beginning to feed into the system, and more achievements will follow.

In the past decade, much more public money has been spent on education in real terms—some 47 per cent. since 1979. More has been spent on books and equipment; we have seen better pay for teachers, and improvements in the teacher-pupil ratio. We have also made considerable progress in our aim of improving educational standards.

Out have gone the trendy views of the 1960s and early 1970s—the destruction of good schools, and the endeavour to make the large, monolithic comprehensive the norm. In has come reform—attention to standards, and pure common sense. We have seen the establishment of the national curriculum, local management of schools, regular testing of pupils, greater choice, more information about schools for parents, pupils and the local community,

[Mr. David Evennett]

the expansion of higher and further education and so much more. That is a real record of achievement in the past decade.

Those measures were intended to improve our education service—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not like to hear about real achievements that were prompted by our ideas rather than theirs.

We aim to improve our education service, and to ensure that individual children are given the best chance to develop their talents to the maximum. In addition, those who must foot the bill—the taxpayers—want to know that their money is being well spent for the nation's future. The fact that we now have more information—not only about examination results but about discipline, truancy and all the other matters that are of interest in individual schools—allows parents to make reasoned choices.

Parents want to know more about which schools deliver which services, and what advantages their children will gain if they go to particular schools. Parents can now attend annual meetings and ask questions; they are no longer excluded. I congratulate the Government on what they have achieved so far. Moreover, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has launched a crusade to improve spoken English: our national language, which has now become the international language, is often spoken better by foreigners than by some of our children, and we want to make improvements.

Needless to say, the Opposition rejected all our reforms at one stage and have taken a long time to catch up. At the weekend, I was interested to learn that the Opposition's education spokesman—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett)—now thinks that the publication of results is not such a bad thing after all. Some of us have been saying that for some years.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Evennett: The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) nods in agreement: I am glad that the Liberal view supports ours for once.

All the reforms in which we believe are intended to improve the education of our nation's children, not to change society as the Labour party wants to do. We want the best, and—as the past decade has shown—we are prepared to invest the necessary money. I do not know what the Liberal Democrats' views are; the hon. Member for Bath has sometimes favoured grant-maintained schools and sometimes opposed them. In any event, the Conservative party has been in the engine room when education reforms have been initiated—in the form of primary legislation, or decided within the Department for Education.

Although the Queen's Speech does not mention an education Bill, we need improvements in our education service. We need time for the reforms of the recent past to work through the system. We are already seeing improvements, and I believe that, as those reforms come on stream, we shall see a further vast improvement in standards and enthusiasm in schools, along with results in further and higher education.

I welcome the proposed extension of the nursery school system. During the time—until May—that the Conservatives controlled my borough of Bexley, we experienced a steady improvement in the provision of nursery education. Although I welcome that, I must introduce a note of caution.

The Select Committee on Education, of which I was a member, examined provision for the under-fives and produced a good report. We supported nursery education and the gradual expansion of provision, but insisted that education must be appropriate for the age group, not merely an extension of primary schooling. Early education is a helpful foundation for a child's later development, but the educational content must be appropriate.

Conservative Members, including me, strongly support the Pre-School Playgroups Association, which has done so much excellent work over the years. The staff-pupil ratio is far better in playgroups than in nursery schools. Playgroups encourage mothers to join in, allow pupils to attend for one or two sessions a week and enable children to socialise in a friendly and homely atmosphere.

I recently visited Christchurch playgroup in Erith, in my constituency. I was very impressed by the educational content of its activities, and by its super atmosphere. Similarly, when I recently visited the excellent St. Paulinus playgroup in Crayford, I was impressed by the commitment of staff, the interest and involvement of parents and the work of the children.

I should not like to see that work destroyed; the playgroups are still doing so much good work. Conservative Members want expanded nursery education provision—of course—to work alongside the playgroups: we believe in choice and diversity in education for those aged three and over. We know that education is a continuing process.

For many years, Britain has lagged behind its competitors in terms of vocational education. I accept that our A-levels are first class, and I certainly do not want that standard to be diminished; but we must ensure that general national vocational qualifications, and higher GNVQs, are raised to a standard of excellence that is accepted throughout the country—by industry, parents, schools and colleges. The course must be perceived as worth while and challenging.

I know that progress has been made. I understand that some 4,000 students took advanced GNVQs in the past year; that is excellent news. We must ensure, however, that rigorous standards are maintained and developed, especially in view of the amount of public money that has been spent.

This was a good Queen's Speech—moderate, effective, yet radical in parts. *[Interruption.]* Ah, I have woken the Opposition. They do not like radicalism; they are living in the past. We, as good Conservatives, believe that we should be radical where necessary, and conserve where necessary.

The speech will be welcomed in the country, both for what it includes and for what it omits. The omission of education legislation should allow our radical reforms of the past to work through the system—to improve standards, encourage excellence and ensure the best for all our children. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has tremendous good will from all quarters in the country for what she is doing. Under her stewardship, results will come through which will be a credit to everyone in the education sector, whether they are administrators, teachers, parents or pupils. The

education reforms have been right. They have been good and essential, and they will work. After they have worked their way through, our education service and system will again be the best in the world.

5.59 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): As a day has been set aside for a debate on industry and education, one might reasonably have expected the Government to present large Bills involving those sectors. This afternoon, however, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told hon. Members with great gusto why there was no Bill for Royal Mail privatisation. It was strange that, having spent the entire summer on the nation's airwaves telling people why it was so important that the Post Office and Royal Mail should be allowed to compete, he said today that he had no intention of allowing them to do so, which in effect confirmed yesterday's newspaper stories.

Having lost his internal battle over the issue of ownership, and having not been able, evidently, to persuade Conservative Back Benchers, whom the Tory party deputy chairman is hoping to summon to his aid throughout the coming Session, not to behave as yobs and to get on side on the issue of ownership, the Secretary of State is now willing, out of nothing more than ideological principle, to prevent the Royal Mail from having the very freedom that he has spent the summer promoting.

That tells us where the right hon. Gentlemen's priorities lie. He is looking at the whole matter from a political view. He has no interest in allowing the Royal Mail to thrive in the public sector, despite the fact that that was one of the options in his own Green Paper earlier in the year. One must ask whether it was a bogus option all along.

The Green Paper contains the very solutions that could have been introduced in the Queen's Speech. Hon. Members must realise that maintaining the status quo in the Royal Mail is not an option. The Post Office needs commercial freedom in the public sector to modernise itself, to become more efficient and, yes, to be competitive. The rigidity of Treasury rules and controls over public bodies was one factor that contributed to the privatisation drive in the past few years. The Government's Green Paper recognised that that inhibited the Post Office's operations.

If the Post Office is to tap the benefits of private finance, it is essential that its practices should correspond more closely with those of the general corporate sector. That is most obvious when one considers the external financing limit, which, under existing rules, means that the Treasury is the sole gainer. It is unimaginable that private companies, even those with the most overly generous dividend payments, would pay 80 per cent. of their profits to shareholders in the form of dividends, but that is what the Post Office is required to do—£220 million, out of a profit total of £280 million, will go to the Treasury this year.

The Secretary of State referred to the proposed Bill to introduce competition into the gas market. The principle of competition in that market must be welcomed, as it has the potential to increase efficiency and quality of service and to reduce the cost to the consumer. There are, however, some worries in that regard, which revolve around three points.

It is self-evidently true that it is more expensive to supply gas consumers who live far from the supply source than it is to supply those who live closer to it. It is more efficient, or cheaper, to supply gas to big consumers than to small consumers. Furthermore, it is clear that any restructuring of the gas market will involve considerable transitional cost.

If competition is not organised properly, the consumer will pick up the tab. Competition might be attractive to large industrial gas consumers who are near to the point of supply, but it will not be good news if disproportionate costs find their way on to the domestic tariff of high consumers on low incomes in remote areas. Many hon. Members have that worry.

We want to know the detail of the Government's proposals. We want to be convinced that the regulator will have the power to attend to the three points that I mentioned. On the evidence to date, it seems that the gas regulator does not have the necessary powers to deal with the real issues in the industry.

Independent suppliers have claimed that they will be able to cut the cost to the consumer by about 10 per cent., and the President of the Board of Trade referred to that figure again today. A number of observers and industry experts have cast considerable doubt on that figure. When one considers the cost of gas at source and the cost of transmission, it is difficult to understand how they imagine that they can make a reduction of 10 per cent. They will have removed virtually all the operating margin.

Furthermore, the estimates of benefit to the consumer have been based largely on the experience of industry. They should be treated with caution, because they may not translate accurately or appropriately to the domestic consumer.

A separation of British Gas's transportation and storage business from its other functions is essential if people in remote areas are not to suffer, but that, as I have said, will involve considerable cost. People have worries, and it is right to be cautious and to remember that VAT on domestic fuel is set shortly to increase as well.

As we have heard today, executives in senior positions in the gas industry are the ones who are seemingly benefiting from the performance of British Gas. Shareholders have already done so, their dividends having almost tripled. It is high time that consumers benefited. We shall put the Bill to that test when the Government introduce it. We shall decide whether to support it on that basis.

Ratification of the chemical weapons convention is another issue that the Secretary of State did not raise today, and it is important. The Queen's Speech did not contain necessary legislation enabling ratification of the convention. The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for introducing that. It has been reported that both the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence are frustrated that the Department has been dragging its heels. I would welcome it if the Minister could give some explanation of the Department's policy, and tell us when we can expect something to be done.

Education forms the other part of today's debate. It was notable that nothing in the Queen's Speech dealt with the issues. There was no sign that the Prime Minister's recent conversion to the idea of universal nursery education for three and four-year-olds would manifest itself in the form

[Mr. Nick Harvey]

of practical action. That is a glaring omission. We would have wished such a Bill to be included in the Queen's Speech.

Listening to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) running down the education system so comprehensively, even in the same breath as he was telling Opposition Members not to run down Britain, one was left wondering which party has been in control of the education system for the past 15 years. His touching idea that the answer to industry's problems is that people should be taught to speak standard English and to get their grammar correct is highly at variance with the facts.

Mr. Brandreth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Harvey: I am mindful of the clock, and it would not be appropriate to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, South is keen on reading and writing. He extolled their virtues in his speech. I shall send him a copy of the resolution of this year's Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton, which he felt so qualified to speak about. If, after reading that, he still seeks to perpetuate the myth that the conference passed a motion calling for the legalisation of cannabis, at least he will do so in the complete knowledge that he is making points that are wholly at variance with the facts.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): And the truth.

Mr. Harvey: Exactly.

British industry's problems, and the possibility of education helping to resolve them, are real. The skill shortages are the product of education systems that have not delivered what society and the economy have sought of them. I wondered when I listened to the Secretary of State today what his priorities and those of the Government are, as they look to the future and seek to improve our investment performance.

The great problem with our economy has been one of under-investment, yet all that one can read into the Government's economic policy is that there will be tax cuts before an election, as there were in 1974 and 1987, for example. Those cuts were followed, as ever, by huge tax rises to make up for what the Government had cut.

We need a Government who are prepared to look to the longer term and do something about under-investment. Investment per head per annum in Britain is currently £2,800. In France, it is £3,800. In Germany, it is £4,500. In the United States, it is £5,500 and in Japan, it is £6,500. We look to the Government, in their economic and industrial policies, to do something about that, and to introduce measures, perhaps in the Budget, to stimulate investment in the future.

We had hoped that the Government would look anew, as the privatisation programme has run out of steam, at the possibility of encouraging public-private partnership investment schemes. The hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) talked about skill shortages and the need for training measures to do something about them. We welcome recent Government initiatives on vocational training, but it is a point worth making that we still have a long way to go to catch up with our economic competitors.

Only 25 per cent. of Britain's work force have any vocational qualification. That compares with 40 per cent. in France and 63 per cent. in Germany. An example is the fact that we are 22nd out of the 22 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries when it comes to producing qualified engineers. It is little short of a national scandal that, with 2.5 million people unemployed, many British firms find that skill shortages are holding them back from exploiting economic recovery.

Rectifying the under-investment in people's skills must be a more pressing priority than funding pre-election tax cuts. If we are to succeed in the global economy, a well-educated, well-skilled, adaptable work force is critical. That requires action from the early years, through post-16 training, to continuing opportunities for retraining and reskilling throughout adult life. Learning should be a continuous process. It is vital to both personal development and fulfilment and to Britain's economic success.

6.12 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I suggest to the House that this year's Queen's Speech, rather than being overshadowed by bad news, was illuminated by good news: the announcement on that day that unemployment was down by almost 50,000. That continued the trend in the past 12 months of a reduction in unemployment of 300,000. Coupled with the underlying rate of inflation, which is now 2 per cent. and the lowest for 20 years, that means that we have all the ingredients for a long and sustained recovery. The two factors of falling unemployment and low inflation demonstrate that the Government's economic strategy is working well.

Against the background that I have outlined, I welcome the Queen's Speech. Although it is less radical than most Queen's Speeches since 1979, it will consolidate past successes by building on the already successful privatisation of the gas industry, which is recognised now as a world leader, by improving the help available for the out of work through the new job seeker's allowance and by introducing new social reforms to tackle discrimination, improve the care of the mentally ill—which will be welcomed very much in Leicestershire—and improve the management of the national health service.

I represent a seat in the middle of England. It is not a traditional Conservative shire seat, but one that was Liberal and then Labour until 1970. Indeed, if Lord Wyatt of Weeford, the former Labour Member, had preached the philosophy that he preaches today, particularly when he writes in *The News of the World*, perhaps history would have taken a different course.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Philosophy in *The News of the World*?

Mr. Tredinnick: Yes, he philosophises in *The News of the World*. He usually writes about the importance of privatisation in creating jobs and that sort of thing.

It is my belief that the Conservative party has developed a strong showing in my constituency since 1970—the majority when I took over the seat was 17,000; by good fortune, it has now risen to 19,000—not only because the Government's policies have been right at

national level but because at district council level the Conservative-controlled council has operated similar policies of tight monetary control and good management, which have kept the local taxes among the lowest in the country. The local services, including housing, refuse collection and job creation through an industrial strategy in the area, are among the best in the country. When our electors determine which way to vote in the next general election and in the local elections next year, I am sure that they will consider the economic progress that has taken place in the constituency and in the east midlands in general.

When we examine the economy in the east midlands, we find a dramatic improvement. There has been a vast increase in confidence in current and expected business conditions: 49 per cent. of businesses in the east midlands expect conditions to improve. Only a small proportion expect them to worsen. That is the most positive outlook for five years. In a recent statement, Leicestershire chamber of commerce said:

"We are extremely positive about the way forward for the small to medium sized companies . . . We would say that the economy is buoyant and a large number of these companies actually have full order books."

If one drives around Dodwells Bridge industrial estate in Hinckley on a Friday afternoon, one can feel the increase in economic activity that has taken place in the past year. In the county, all sizes of businesses have performed well. That is reflected in the fact that 74 per cent. of businesses in Leicestershire have reported an increase in sales. In addition, in the past six months there have been 61 new business start-ups in my constituency alone.

Training is an area close to the heart of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education. It has been an area of growth and excellence in Leicestershire and in my constituency. I can tell my right hon. Friend that this month we held an award ceremony for 12 firms in the Bosworth division. They received the "training for excellence" award in recognition of the contribution that local businesses had made to the improved training and skills development of the working population. That is not to be underestimated. In addition, 11 businesses in the Bosworth constituency are committed to the Department of Employment's "investors in people" initiative. They are currently being guided towards that goal by the South Leicestershire Training Group. On Friday, I saw for myself the way in which its efforts have succeeded. I shall refer to that a little later.

On Europe, I am disappointed by the die-hard attitude of what has become known as the Euro-sceptic minority in our Conservative party. It would be catastrophic for Britain's prospects not to ratify the European Communities (Finance) Bill. I favour speedy action to put the Bill on the statute book. I am sceptical about many things that go on in Europe, but I suggest that the Bill is the wrong ground on which to fight. The right ground is fraud in Europe. Nothing drives my constituents madder than the thought of Euro-fraud. It is a tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that he was able to have the issue of fraud addressed in the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Dover: I agree.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We need to pursue fraud and bureaucracy in the European Union with considerable vigour.

Another aspect of the European Union that alarms our constituents and hon. Members on both sides of the House is that Europe may spring an unpleasant surprise, such as the alleged demise of the British banger, the crisp that has to be black, or some other Euro-madness.

A week ago all those involved in the herbal industry held their breath when a proposal that could have devastated that industry was put forward. It could have forced it to shut down, with the loss of 3,000 to 5,000 jobs. Herbalists would have been unable to practise, retail shops would have lost 20 per cent. of their business, and manufacturers and service providers would have been similarly affected.

That proposal comes at a time when the popularity of alternative and complementary medicine is on the up. Every chemist now stocks homeopathic preparations, the Chiropractors Act 1994 and the Osteopaths Act 1993 are on the statute book, and more and more people are turning to Chinese medicine and acupuncture.

Rather than face such a threat from Europe, the Department of Health should try to integrate alternative and complementary medicine, in all its aspects, in the health service. We should then save a fortune in health costs.

Mr. Purchase: It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman's views about Europe. He takes a somewhat ambivalent stance on those matters. Is he telling the House that he would be favourably disposed towards an amendment to the European Communities (Finance) Bill? If fraud were tightened up, would he be prepared to see the legislation through?

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for trying to help me in my speech. I certainly want to combat fraud in all its elements, although the choice of ground for achieving that is perhaps not within the scope of my speech. Nevertheless, combating fraud is a key issue, as is the need for vigilance to prevent the sort of action that threatened the herbal medicines industry last week. Fortunately, that threat has been averted thanks to the good offices of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), whose lawyers have found that those products will not fall within the scope of the legislation.

I referred to the economic improvements in industrial infrastructure around Hinckley in the east midlands—improvements which I believe are largely due to the Hinckley and Bosworth borough council. Nowhere are they better demonstrated than in the creation of the Triumph motor cycle factory. My constituency will now be the capital of the motorcycle industry in Britain. Triumph motor cycles are being sold successfully abroad because of free access to European markets, and our favourable trading relationship with America has seen numbers in the order books increasing and additional workers employed at Triumph. Triumph motor cycles are outperforming and outselling Japanese models.

A very important part of the economic transformation in my constituency has been the use of computer-aided design. I recently visited a company in my constituency called Profilex.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): Profilex?

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Gentleman should not joke about companies in my constituency that are doing so

[Mr. Tredinnick]

well. The company, which manufactures access-hatches for hotels, has recently employed some trainees through the training and enterprise council system. Without the "investors in people" standard award, the company would not have the computer-aided design department that it now has and I do not believe that it would have been so successful.

My message to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is that those schemes are working well. She will be relieved to know that the youth training commitment from the Government that no 16 or 17-year-old who wanted a place on a training scheme would have to wait longer than eight weeks is being met throughout Leicestershire. That is a considerable achievement.

The debate is also about education. I have spent a lot of time in the past year trying to educate the Child Support Agency on behalf of my aggrieved constituents. I welcome the proposals that were put forward in the report of the Select Committee on Social Security. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Sir D. Madel), who spoke on Wednesday, I should welcome a measure to incorporate the Select Committee's recommendation that past property and capital settlements be taken into account by the agency, as well as travel costs.

There is a moral aspect in that debate involving the custody of children. I do not believe that when one partner breaks up a marriage through an affair or for some other reason, that action should not be considered in determining custody of children. I shall give the House an example from my constituency.

Constituent "X" came to see me. His wife had walked out and gone to live with another person. That lady had broken the marriage and expected her former husband to support her and her new partner, who was unemployed, through the CSA. She also wanted custody of the children. He asked me, "Where is the justice? I have tried to maintain a family unit. I have tried to bring up my children to a very high standard and teach them to act well in the world. Now their lives are shattered. Should not I have the opportunity to gain custody of these children whom I love very much?" There is certainly scope for considering that proposition. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) looks askance, but it is a very real problem. People hold those points of view and I believe that the House should consider them.

I raise two other points: one about foreign affairs; and the other, which is a little closer to home, about industry. I have witnessed, as we all have, the recent troubles in the Gaza strip. I visited the area several years ago with hon. Members from both sides of the House—one of them is now an Opposition Whip—in an attempt to address the issue of Gaza. It was a quite frightening experience.

It is completely unacceptable that the west has given pledges to Gaza that are not being kept. Half the reason why the area is such a tinder box is that it has not received the money that it was pledged. As we all know, when one tries to run any organisation without funds, the situation becomes very volatile and unstable.

Finally, I refer to Post Office privatisation.

Dr. Moonie: Hear, hear.

Mr. Tredinnick: Thank you; I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me. History will relate that privatisation, the child of the Conservative party in general and Lady Thatcher in particular, has been the key political philosophy of the late 20th century. The hon. Gentleman has not murmured, so he must agree with me. It is transforming economies across the world which have been ruined by socialism. The philosophy has been adopted worldwide; in Russia, eastern Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Latin America, privatisation is the key philosophy.

We have global communications. Computers are developing at the speed of light—what buys one system one year, the next year buys two systems that are twice as powerful. We have information technology systems. This year saw the 10th anniversary of the privatisation of British Telecom. What a huge success that has been—not only a milestone in UK deregulation, but an example to Governments throughout the world of how to turn a bureaucratic Government monopoly into a world beater. The Post Office, the other half of British Telecom, which should have been privatised, has now been put on ice, thanks partly to scaremongering by the Opposition. They try to portray the sub-post offices as part of the state. They are not. The sub-post office that I helped to save in Barwell in my constituency is privately owned, as are most.

The real problem comes from competition from abroad—from the German Post Office, the Dutch Post Office and international carriers of all shapes and descriptions, from DHL to Business Post. The collapse of the letter, the bedrock of Post Office business, is absolutely crucial. I do not believe that it is in the national interest, in the interests of Labour Members' constituents or in the interests of my constituents, that we shall, unfortunately, be unable to take on the issue in this Session. It is not right that we should put more money into a state-owned organisation. It must get into the private sector, which is the key point. On that note, I commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

6.30 pm

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate. I welcome the Gracious Speech, not for the visionless, mean-minded and spiritless measures that are in it, but for what is not in it. I made my first speech to the House on the Government's planned privatisation of the Post Office. I said then that the Government would not be able to carry it through. Although the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) seems to have had his head in the sand and not to have noticed this, the reason why the Government have not been able to carry it through is that there has been opposition from their own Back Benchers. Like the whole country, apart from the rabid right on the Government Benches, I am very pleased that the Government have been unable to carry it through.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said earlier, the welcome absence of Post Office privatisation is a hole in the heart—if they have a heart—of the Government's programme. That hole will not be plugged by the other measure about which I shall speak—the proposed Bill to extend competition in the gas

industry. Labour is not against competition and Labour is not against efficiency—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Conservative Members do not listen and will not hear. We are not against efficient, productive and profitable industry—far from it. Unlike the Government, who have inflicted damage on British industry, Labour supports industry in Britain. We want British industry to survive and thrive, but, unlike the Government, we are prepared, as is the case in every other successful industrial economy around the world, to take steps to help it to do that. We are prepared to do that not only for the sake of industry, but for consumers and for the economy and Britain in general.

What will the gas competition Bill be? It will mainly be remedial action—a legislative move made necessary, even in the Government's own terms, by the failure of gas privatisation. British Gas is now a successful and efficient company, and we welcome that, but what has privatisation achieved? It has certainly not achieved competition. Only the private sector, and especially the company's directors, are gaining at the expense of the public. As privatisation failed to bring about competition, this non-intervening Government now have to intervene in the gas market to bring it about. It is remedial action.

Privatisation has not brought about lower gas prices. The imposition of VAT on fuel has caused hardship and suffering for millions of people, although not for those rich enough to pay their gas bills years in advance. The repellent price manoeuvrings by British Gas last week have completely wiped out whatever price benefits privatisation brought. We are back to square one, with no competition and no lower prices. It is just a lot of rich directors getting richer.

We have only to look at today's announcement of the obscene pay rises for British Gas bosses. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland said earlier, I cannot have been the only person in London to have fallen out of bed this morning on learning that British Gas has a new advertising slogan, which says:

"We put our customers before ourselves."

My constituents find that wholly incredible. The Bill will not change that.

The Bill will simply spread the pickings more widely and will give some other fat cats a chance to get in on the act. Let us consider the recent Select Committee on Trade and Industry hearings on the gas industry. People were refused entry to the hearings and some who did get in had to sit on the floor because so many potential gas suppliers wanted to get a sniff of the money that they would make. One could barely hear the evidence being given for the sound of lips smacking in anticipation. Most of the independent potential suppliers are, of course, saying that, with greater competition, everything will be fine.

Mr. Deva: Will the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) explain whether she is in favour of competition or against competition?

Ms Church: I am about to tell the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) the answer, so I shall carry on. The potential suppliers say that with competition, everything will be fine, everyone will be happy, everyone will be well supplied and safe, and everyone will have lower prices, perhaps 10 per cent. or 20 per cent. lower. As the President of the Board of Trade said earlier and as the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) said, nobody believes that prices will be 10 per cent. or 20 per cent. lower. Given what has happened with electricity, water and gas prices, we are a tiny bit sceptical that this gas utopia will be achieved.

In this welter of good will, occasionally a little bit of truth manages to slip through. Let us take what the electricity company Norweb said to the Select Committee:

"Apart from the requirement to offer minimum safety standards, all other areas of increased standards of service should be a marketing decision for the supplier."

All other standards? So there will be no minimum standards to help the elderly, those unable to pay their bills, those living far away from the gasfields or low-income, low-use customers. Apparently, there will not. There will just be "marketing decisions". In other words, the companies believe that if they cannot make sufficient money, on marketing grounds all those people—our people—will be left to the market.

Let us consider Associated Gas Supplies—Agas. It said:

"Some customers will have to pay for services that were otherwise cross subsidised."

Who might those customers be? Associated Gas Supplies helpfully tells us that they would, surprise, surprise, be the elderly, late payers, and geographically distanced and low-load customers. Many of my constituents are included in those categories.

The predatory independents will cherry-pick the industry. They will try to carve up the best customers between them. The Select Committee asked whether there was a risk of new entrants cherry-picking the most profitable customers, the ones from whom they could generate most money most consistently and most easily. Again, only Agas was honest enough to give the real answer:

"It is not a risk. It will happen under the present proposals."

The company is right; it is already happening.

The price changes made by British Gas last week were straightforward cherry-picking, trying to get ahead of the competition by signing up on direct debit all customers able to pay in that way. I suspect that not many of them were in my constituency. The price changes were just British Gas trying to protect its market share, at the expense of the poor, the old and the vulnerable. In terms of the "marketing decisions" that will be prompted by the Bill, it is an example of British Gas trying to get its retaliation in first.

Labour believes in markets—I am answering the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth, as I have done so far—but not in markets free to ride roughshod over everybody. Labour wants to protect people who are less able to protect themselves.

What should the Bill contain? It is clear that there must be minimum standards to be met by all suppliers, shippers and network operators. Those standards should cover safety and there should be a single telephone number, like the 999 number for fire, police and ambulance services, connecting people straight away with emergency services for electricity, gas and water in case of failure. There should be an obligation to supply all potential customers, not just the most profitable ones. There should be common standards on debt and disconnection practices across all suppliers and on services to older customers.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I listened to the long list of proposals that the hon. Lady

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

made from the Opposition Benches. Could she enlighten the House and tell us whether she has costed those proposals and exactly who will pay for them?

Ms Church: Many of those proposals have been put forward by British Gas itself in a letter that has been sent to all hon. Members. Frankly, we should not be worrying about the cost of the proposals. We have to provide proper services for the elderly. We have to provide proper services and guarantees for disabled customers. We have to provide guarantees on energy efficiency. Above all, we must ensure—something that has to be put into legislation—that all suppliers should have to offer the full range of payment methods. That would ensure that all the people who are being supplied with gas have a choice—not the sort of choice that British Gas is now putting before the people, that if they cannot afford to pay their bill months in advance, they will end up having to pay higher prices, and whereby the least able to pay the higher prices will have to pay them. Also, all suppliers should be required to publish their prices. Above all, we need clear regulations on cherry-picking.

If the Government do not implement those proposals, British Gas says that 12 million people will lose out and 6 million people will gain. One does not need a crystal ball to know who the 12 million are who will lose out and who the 6 million are who will gain. Listen to the voice of the gas customers and the Gas Consumers Council, which I strongly suspect that Ministers and British Gas would like see the back of. It says:

"Service standards are likely to fall below the present level that regulation . . . has forced on British Gas".

It also says that competition will lead to price rises, which

"may be on a scale which will leave many people at a price disadvantage for several years, some of them forever."

That may be what the Government want; it may be what British Gas wants; it may be what the independents want; but it is not what my constituents want and it is not what I want. It is not what the Labour party wants. After the bloody nose that the Government got over the Post Office White Paper, the Government may be well advised to listen.

6.41 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I was proud to be elected a Member of Parliament and proud to be a Minister in Her Majesty's Government, especially a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry—a Department about which I knew something, which I know is normally regarded as a disqualification for office. I was also very pleased to have responsibility for what I regard as one of the most important aspects of Government policy: deregulation. I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, my successor, to the Front Bench. The deregulation orders, which I hope that he will be bringing forth in profusion in the coming year, should significantly reduce industry's cost. I hope that he will pursue that policy with great vigour. I pursued my own deregulation interests with vigour and I am sure that my hon. Friend will as well. I enjoyed piloting the Bill through the House last year. I enjoyed being a pilot on the bridge. Now that I am a stoker in the engine room of the ship, I intend to enjoy that role as well and I shall play my full part as a Back Bencher supporting the Government.

I have, of course, accepted that I had to relinquish office, but I cannot accept the suggestion that I abused my position as a Member of this House or betrayed the trust reposed in me by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I bitterly resent the suggestion that I was prepared to accept payment in cash or kind to ask parliamentary questions or change my opinions. As a Back Bencher and, indeed, as Minister for Corporate Affairs, I sought to uphold the standards of probity and integrity which this nation rightly expects of those holding high office in Government or in business.

The press and broadcasting are a major industry—some parts of it, of course, employ highly skilled manufacturers. They play an essential part in the education of a modern democracy. On both those grounds, the future of that industry is highly relevant to today's debate. The Gracious Speech could have included several measures which would strengthen the press by reinforcing the instinct for accuracy and fairness, which, if compromised, turns a tremendous force for good into a terrifying power to destroy.

Public confidence in Government and politicians has undoubtedly been seriously undermined by the way in which the story about alleged corruption in Government has been reported and presented. To—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to intervene but the hon. Gentleman must get down to addressing the Queen's Speech, which we are debating this afternoon, and not what happened to him personally in the past.

Mr. Hamilton: I shall certainly be doing that. I did say that we were dealing with a very important industry and I was proposing a number of measures which might have been in the Queen's Speech in order to strengthen it.

I wish to illustrate the point that I have just made by referring briefly to my recent experience. On 20 October, as the House will know, *The Guardian* printed an unsubstantiated allegation about me by Mr. Mohammed Al Fayed, that I, as a Back Bencher, had corruptly accepted bribes of £2,000 a time to table parliamentary questions. There is no truth in this claim. Mr. Al Fayed has also alleged—this led to my being questioned by Sir Robin Butler—that I had received £50,000 for putting down 17 parliamentary questions for the House of Fraser. There is no truth in this claim—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not wish to have to keep rising and I have no wish to intervene in the hon. Gentleman's speech—*[Interruption.]* Order. However, he is straying widely from the Queen's Speech, which we are debating. I hope that he will address his remarks to the speech itself. If he does not, I am afraid that I shall have to rule him out of order.

Mr. Hamilton: I had understood, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the debate on the Loyal Address, one could speak on any aspect of policy and that the subjects for debate were merely indicative. I am not questioning your judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker—nothing could be further from my intention—but we are dealing with what I regard to be an important industry, the operation of which has very significant effects on the way in which industry

performs and the impact which that has on the trade balance and other aspects, which will most certainly be within the remit of today's debate.

Mr. Sheerman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must say that when I became a Member of this House, I was told that in debating the Queen's Speech one could talk about anything. I think that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall put the hon. Gentleman right. We are talking about policy and measures.

Mr. Sheerman: I know that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair has ruled.

Mr. Sheerman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have just ruled on that point.

Mr. Sheerman: But this is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It cannot possibly be further to a point of order which never existed. I ruled against it.

Mr. Sheerman: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sorry—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it a different point of order?

Mr. Sheerman: It is further to the point of order—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sheerman: I shall not allow it to rest—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sheerman: It is an infringement—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have just ruled on that point of order. There can be nothing further to it.

Mr. Hamilton: I was hoping to demonstrate that if the press and the broadcasting industry operates in certain ways, it can assist the Government of the country. But, in other ways it could undermine it in a manner which would be highly disadvantageous to trade and industry. That is the point that I am trying to make about this allegation of so-called sleaze in Government. In my own particular case, to which I was going to allude briefly, all that I was going to try to show was that the plethora of allegations made against me do not in any way concern my operation as a Minister in Her Majesty's Government.

I was the Minister for Corporate Affairs in the Department of Trade and Industry with responsibility for competition policy and company investigations. Mr. Al Fayed, whom I mentioned a moment ago, was suing the Department in the European Court of Human Rights, claiming that the DTI inspectors' power were draconian and breached the convention. I was advised by officials that, in law, I was not debarred from taking decisions by virtue of my previous sympathies—well known to hon. Members of the House—with the House of Fraser case. Nor was I debarred by virtue of having enjoyed Mr. Al Fayed's hospitality in the 1980s as a Back Bencher. However, I considered it imprudent, if not improper, to expose the Government to the possibility of criticism by exercising ministerial discretions in relation to the House of Fraser and instructed officials not to send me any papers involving that company and not to involve me in any decision-taking affecting the company's interest. The upshot is that it has manifestly upset Mr. Al Fayed that he has been unable to influence Ministers or to overturn the Department of Trade and Industry inspectors' report on the takeover of the House of Fraser.

The press and television wield an enormous influence over public opinion and the power of an editor vastly transcends that of any individual Member of Parliament or most Ministers, and the ability of individuals to protect themselves against that misuse is restricted in practice in ways in which legislation could remedy. I know that better than most because, as the House will know, 10 years ago I was involved in heavy litigation with the BBC, when my costs amounted to £235,737.35. It took me three years to clear my name. In my opinion, the law should be changed to reduce the imbalance of risks. Greater risks for editors would increase self-discipline and greater powers for the victims of their mistakes would enable wrongs to be more easily redressed.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hamilton: I am anxious not to give way as I do not want to take up longer in this debate than is absolutely necessary.

The Press Complaints Commission is a sheep in wolf's clothing and it is treated with open contempt by wilder media moguls. It should be replaced by a serious body which can command respect.

Our court procedures should be tightened to reduce the delays in securing justice and there should be more balance in the risks run. Informal mechanisms to stamp out media abuses are plainly inadequate and legal mechanisms are ruinously costly and slow. A major lacuna in the Queen's Speech is that nothing is proposed to remedy those serious defects.

However, I read in yesterday's *Mail on Sunday* that the Lord Chancellor is preparing a Bill, based on proposals put forward by Lord Justice Hoffman five years ago, to make it easier for ordinary people to bring libel actions and to speed up and cut the cost of proceedings. I strongly support such ideas and I hope that legislation will be announced as soon as possible.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hamilton: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I am anxious not to take up longer than is absolutely necessary.

Democracy flourishes when public understanding is at its greatest. We are now faced with a situation in which the press, both broadsheet and tabloid, are sometimes prepared to go to any lengths to undermine the authority of our institutions. Too much of the media in this country are prepared to destroy anything in their sights.

While my right hon. Friend the Minister for Export Trade does a brilliant job leading trade missions to the far east, our business men's efforts and our constituents' jobs are put at risk by an avalanche of snide criticism and false accusations against our trading partners' political leaders.

Business men batting for Britain abroad are bashed by the media at home. Not only do they have to contend with fierce international competition, but, unlike their French or Japanese counterparts, they have to contend with a hostile domestic press. While British Aerospace sales

[Mr. Hamilton]

teams are flogging their guts out winning orders in the far east to keep £1,000 million worth of manufacturing jobs going for my constituents and those of other hon. Members in the north of England, some unhelpful journalists sweat it out at their computer terminals, denouncing our trading partners and, in the same breath, the Government for failing manufacturing industry.

A commission has been appointed to consider standards in public life. Perhaps the Queen's Speech should have extended its remit to the lack of such standards in one of the most important of our national institutions—the press. Again, perhaps my own experience is instructive. The campaign against me appears to have been unleashed not because of sleaze in the Government, but because the Government are clean. Desperate to find sleaze, the media have accepted at face value the sincerity of Mr. Al Fayed's statement of his motives. They have accepted uncritically all his allegations.

On 8 and 9 March 1990, *The Guardian* castigated Mr. Al Fayed for

"lies, deceit, cock and bull stories"

and the commission of

"a very serious offence . . . the dishonest acquisition of one of our major stores groups."

It would be interesting to know what has occurred in the mean time to produce that startling change of perception of Mr. Al Fayed by the editor of *The Guardian*.

A free press is essential to a modern democracy, but a licentious press is subversive of it. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has a point when he criticises the press for its obsession with trivia and personality rather than issues. Those factors, coupled with a cavalier disregard for accuracy and balance in the pursuit of profits from circulation, have contributed powerfully to the growth of national cynicism.

Nothing better illustrates that cynicism than a letter I received from a senior journalist on one of the newspapers which had hounded me from office. The letter read as follows:

"I hope you will accept my deep regrets about your departure from office. I know you blame the media in part, but I hope you will accept that, as far as I am concerned, it was a straight reporting job. We need more of your calibre in Government not fewer. When the dust settles please let me buy you both a very declarable lunch."

So that is all right then; all in a day's work. I will not, of course, reveal my correspondent's identity as I well recognise that there is no more sacred duty in life than the protection of one's sources. In any event, we look forward to the lunch.

Editors accuse Members of Parliament of being corrupted by the acceptance of corporate entertainment, but apparently they are not corrupted by the same process. It would, of course, be daft to suggest that *The Guardian* would print something flattering to Barclays bank as a quid pro quo for inviting Mr. Preston and his wife to the men's finals at Wimbledon this year at possibly £1,000 a ticket plus £100 a head for a slap-up lunch and tea. I am not for a moment suggesting that that editor has been corrupted by that hospitality, but that is precisely the allegation that he makes against us as politicians.

I invite the House to speculate on the column inches of pious indignation that would have been directed at the Home Secretary or the police had they sought to obtain information on terrorism or drug smuggling by the kind of subterfuges that have recently been employed to expose non-existent sleaze in the Government. Surely a commission to look at standards in public life should concern itself with questions such as those.

Furthermore, for evidence of naked bias, one need only compare the kind of coverage that my now celebrated stay at the Ritz hotel in 1987 received with the two or three inches on page two accorded to a former Prime Minister who apparently received, but did not register, a payment of £12,500—three times my inflated so-called Ritz bill—from the bucket-shop bank, BCCI, also in 1987 when I visited the Ritz.

I make no charges of impropriety against Lord Callaghan and accept his explanation that that was a mere "technical oversight". However, I merely draw attention to the double standards of the press and invite the House to speculate on the paroxysms of denunciation that would have flooded the pages for weeks on end had that been Lady Thatcher and not Lord Callaghan.

Moving from the sublime to the ridiculous, what sense of priorities motivated *The Guardian* on the previous day to run its front page lead story under the banner headline, "Minister is part-time dentist"? The truth is that, sadly for the sleaze merchants, there is no sleaze in government here. Oh, how they must yearn for the United Kingdom to provide the rich pickings found elsewhere like in Italy, where former Prime Minister Craxi is holed up in Tunisia, unable to return home where he would join a significant portion of the political classes already in gaol, or in Spain where they really know how to satisfy an inquiring press. The chief of police for Madrid is on the run, wanted for corruption, while the Governor of the Bank of Spain has been called before the National Assembly to explain his own rather than the nation's finances. Even in France, two Cabinet Ministers were marched off by the gendarmerie on corruption charges.

I was told that if this speech attacked the Prime Minister for requiring me to resign, I would get the front-page headlines in every paper in the land and I have no doubt about that. However, I have concentrated on issues rather than personalities, so, if this speech is mentioned at all, it will probably be buried obscurely on the inside pages. If that is what happens, it will prove precisely the point that I have been making.

6.56 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate and I want to refer to a topic which was not referred to in the Queen's Speech, but which I was pleased to hear raised by the President of the Board of Trade when he opened today's debate. That topic is the development of Britain's information infrastructure and the deployment of optical fibre and other advanced technologies to provide the new generation of telecommunications services to Britain's businesses and homes. They are the services which, through the so-called information superhighway, will underpin economic development in the next century.

There is enormous activity worldwide in that area, but it is remarkable that, as far as one can ascertain, our Government are doing nothing to promote the deployment of those new communications technologies in Britain. The picture is very different around the world in our competitor economies. In the United States, the Clinton

Administration on taking office established an information infrastructure task force which produced its report—an agenda for action—in September 1993.

The report made it clear that, in the United States, the information super-highway will be developed through private sector investment and that the role of the Government will be as a catalyst, complementing the efforts of the private sector and working in partnership with business, education institutions and state and local authorities. That is a model with which, I imagine, the British Government would be entirely comfortable.

That United States initiative has inspired others. The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications in Japan is developing a public-private sector partnership to establish a new broad-band infrastructure. Two industry bodies have been established, one of which is the Association for Broadband Business Culture Creation, comprising 150 major communications users taking part in pilot applications of the new technologies.

Last year, the main Japanese carrier, NTT, which, like its United Kingdom counterpart, has several new and aggressive competitors, said that it would establish an optical fibre network across the country by 2015. This year, the Japanese Government have said that they want the job carried out faster than that, with optical fibre links being provided to every Japanese home and business by 2010, a task to be carried out by the private sector, with competition between cable television and telephone companies.

The European Union's action plan acknowledges the vital economic importance of developing information super-highways in Europe. Optical fibre connections to customers are being widely deployed in Germany, particularly in East Germany, where there was not a proper telecommunications infrastructure before. The French Government have been considering an £18 billion proposal rapidly to establish an optical fibre network to every home and business, yet the United Kingdom Government are turning their face against opportunities to allow Britain to take a lead.

I am not asking the Government to invest billions and billions of pounds in an information infrastructure—that will not happen, and it does not need to—but we desperately need from the Government some vision, leadership and the willingness to act as a catalyst to bring together the partners who together can create the innovations that we need. So far, all that we have had is silence. That is very strange, because the Government frequently point to the need for partnerships.

I was very pleased that the Secretary of State for the Environment was able on Friday to pay tribute to the regeneration partnerships created by my local authority, by Newham council in Stratford, and by Hackney council in Dalston. However, for a national information infrastructure, only the Government can pull together the partnerships that are needed. How much longer must we wait before the Government make a start?

It used not to be like that. In 1983, the Government launched "The Cabling of Britain", which heralded modern British cable television. Things have not worked out as the Government then envisaged, and the regulatory regime which was introduced then has created some problems, but at least then there was a vision. At least the Government said that they were important issues, and major private sector investments followed, but today the Government are silent. A report which was published in February for the Department of Trade and Industry tactfully expresses it as follows:

"There is a view held by some in the industry that a clearer vision of the future shared with government would help."

There is no sign of one yet, and that is deeply worrying.

The Government must begin soon to draw together the telephone and cable companies, the programme makers and software developers, and the leading commercial and public sector users into a national information infrastructure partnership. Britain can excel in developing the super-highway, but the Government must first show the leadership and vision that will allow that to happen.

The British model, in which competing operators provide local communications services, has been enormously influential, but it has one feature which is a growing embarrassment to us and which will not be copied elsewhere. Cable television operators are allowed to provide telephone services, but the established telephone operators cannot provide cable television. That asymmetry is understandable as a device to assist the fledgling cable carriers, but it is preventing telephone operators from developing their networks in the ways that are being proposed in the United States of America, Japan, France and Germany. We cannot allow our telecommunications networks to slip behind those others simply because we have got ourselves into a position in which our regulatory framework is wrong.

The Government say that they will leave the development of that infrastructure to the market, but, at the same time, they are tying the hands of the major players in that market. If that situation continues, the opportunity to develop a super-highway infrastructure will pass us by.

The Government have in this Session a golden opportunity to tackle the problem, by responding to the Trade and Industry Select Committee's report on optical fibre networks. The Committee has proposed that British Telecom and Mercury should be able to convey cable television in their networks, but initially only where there is no cable television franchise. That provides an imaginative way forward. It safeguards the interests of cable television companies and the existing investments that they have made. I hope that the Government grasp that opportunity.

Press reports today suggest that the Government plan to do nothing and will reject the opportunity that has been presented. I hope that those reports are not true. The Committee's proposal protects existing cable television investments. To leave things as they are is seriously detrimental to the national interest. If the Government do nothing, and thereby perpetuate the present exclusion from the market of organisations which should be key players, the economy and British competitiveness will be the losers, and we cannot afford that.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman misses two points. If we had not allowed cable television companies to have a franchise and a monopoly in local areas, there would not be such investment by cable television companies. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is nothing to prevent British Telecom from undertaking cable franchises in local areas? It has chosen not to do that. Indeed, it had several licences which it gave up.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful for that intervention. The Select Committee offers a proposal that would allow

[Mr. Timms]

existing telephone operators to upgrade their existing networks. That is the key. They must be able to upgrade existing networks on the ground in which they have already invested in areas where there is no cable television franchise. That would not threaten any cable television franchises that have been issued, but it would allow the main telephone operators the opportunity to develop their networks in line with developments that are taking place in all other industrialised countries. We cannot allow that opportunity to pass us by.

I now comment on what the European Union refers to as the trans-European networks—the key elements of infrastructure which, like the information super-highway, will underpin Europe's economic development in the next century—that is, a national high-speed railway network. I was pleased that the Gracious Speech referred to a Bill to enable at last the construction of the high-speed rail link from London to the channel tunnel. I accept the Government's assurances that the decision on the location of the intermediate stations will be made in a honourable way. As the Government have made it clear that they choose the present easterly alignment for the link in order to bring regeneration to east London, I look forward to long-awaited confirmation in the spring that there will be an international and domestic station at Stratford as well as elsewhere on the line.

I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Transport has told the House today that he will shortly meet representatives of the Stratford promoter group. However, the channel tunnel rail link is only a start. We need a national high-speed rail network, and Stratford international should be its hub. In that matter, too, we need Government leadership, vision and planning. Other European countries already have networks. As we recognise the limits on road building in future, so our need for high-speed rail services becomes more apparent.

An information super-highway and a high-speed rail network are vital components in the infrastructure for our economic development in the 21st century. We understand that the Government will not pay for them, but they have the key role in making them happen. The Government must take the lead in creating vision and setting up partnerships. The Gracious Speech was depressingly thin on those topics, but we cannot afford delay.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I remind the House that, between now and 9 o'clock, speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

7.8 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I wish to confine my remarks to education. I make it clear immediately that I am a parliamentary consultant to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

I have listened with interest to Opposition Members in recent weeks, but I have not been able to discover any blue water between their policies and ours; all I have found is a deep red sea. Labour Members have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. For them, choice and diversity remain mere words without significance for the nation's children. They still appear to think that there is only one type of school—that only one type of school holds all the answers to all the needs of all the nation's children. They maintain their opposition to grant-maintained schools, to city technology colleges, to grammar schools and to the assisted-places scheme. I notice that Opposition Members are nodding in agreement. But those schools provide education for about 750,000 of the nation's children, and they are doing a great deal to provide essential diversity, choice, quality and improved standards.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle)—I am sorry that he is not in his place—is now an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, a position I trust he will hold for ever. He was quoted in *The Times Educational Supplement* as being "an unequivocal opponent" of grant-maintained schools. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; he clearly says what he means and means what he says. At least one knows where one stands with him, which is rather more than one can say for his right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). Apparently, the right hon. Gentleman was considering sending his son to the London Oratory school, which—shock horror—is grant maintained.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): A good school.

Mr. Pawsey: Of course it is: most grant-maintained schools are good. Someone should introduce the right hon. Member for Sedgefield to his hon. Friend the Member for Walton so that they can get their act together and decide on their attitude to GM status.

It would also be extremely helpful if, at some point in the debate, Opposition Members found time to describe their education policy—assuming they have one. My hon. Friends smile at that, but they know it is true. Are the Opposition still abolitionists, seeking to cram all the nation's children into one type of school, or are they slowly being dragged, kicking and screaming, into a growing acceptance of the Government's policies? Incidentally, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) now believes that league tables are not all bad, perhaps we shall soon hear him talking about standards, excellence and discipline. Perhaps Opposition Members will eventually come round to believing that a measure of competition between schools is desirable.

I believe that the Government's reforms are delivering the goods. It has taken time and it has been a long hard passage from the anything-goes 1960s to the more demanding 1990s. The Education Reform Act 1988 signalled the Government's determination to improve the quality and standards of state education. It was this Government who introduced local management of schools, under which all schools now control 85 per cent. of their budgets. LMS quite naturally signposted the route to grant-maintained status—an imaginative concept much derided by Opposition Members but increasingly accepted by the nation's parents.

It was this Government who introduced the national curriculum and testing, it was this Government who introduced a new system of schools inspection—Ofsted—and it was this Government who introduced league tables, and the GCSE. This Government have expanded advanced education, so that there are now well over 1 million students.

All that has been achieved at great cost indeed. Spending per pupil has risen by almost 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Spending on books and equipment is up by 37 per cent. in real terms; and we have not forgotten teachers. I have long maintained in the House that the overwhelming majority of the nation's teachers are dedicated to their profession and the children in their charge. It is therefore entirely right that the Government should recognise that dedication in increased pay. Teachers' average pay has increased in real terms by 57 per cent. since 1979.

Another Government achievement has been the greater part now being played by parents in running their children's schools. There is a powerful argument to the effect that most parents know best what is right for their children. Parents do not leave their brains behind at the school gate when they go in to see their children's teachers. They have a contribution to make—I believe a great one.

Parents like a choice of school, for they recognise that children respond to different challenges and differing school environments. It is this Government who ensured that all parents now receive a written report on their child's progress at least once a year. Schools are now required to publish test and examination results.

The Government's reforms are working, I believe, and state education is improving. The debate initiated by Jim Callaghan in 1976 is beginning to reach a conclusion, despite the ill-conceived opposition of the Liberal and Labour parties to all our reforms. I am convinced that education is now much better than it was when Callaghan started that debate in 1976.

As a foot soldier in the long education battles throughout the 1980s and 1990s I must tell the House that these improvements have occurred not because of the Opposition but despite them. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am delighted to hear that support. The Opposition withheld support for the national curriculum and they opposed virtually every other education measure. Only belatedly are they seeing the educational light and ditching their comprehensive dogma and the old equality claptrap. Children are not equal; they do not have the same needs. Parents need freedom and choice to make the right decisions for their children and they will get that only from this Conservative Government.

7.16 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I propose to raise five simple points. I noticed that the Gracious Speech contained a measure to increase our contribution to Europe. I understand from the newspapers that I read at the weekend that the measure is somewhat controversial for Conservative Members—perhaps even for some Opposition Members. I certainly find it controversial.

Our current payments to Europe total £1.75 billion. I have a cri de coeur: if we are paying into a club we really should receive its benefits. Parts of this country have objective 1 status—Merseyside, for instance. Our problem is with obtaining the money. We are eligible for up to £700 million over the next few years—money that is desperately needed in parts of this country to make good the ravages of the industrial decline that has attended the modernisation of British industry. I recognise that some of that modernisation had to happen. All we need now is investment, but to get the full benefit of the European money the Government are supposed to match it pound for pound.

The problem is that the Government will not do so. Although they want to increase our contributions to Europe, they will not enable the areas with the benefit of European money to obtain what they need for investment. I should like a commitment from the Government to the effect that they will direct the European money to the parts of the country where it is desperately needed to replace aging infrastructure.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) did not allow me to intervene, although I only meant to be helpful. The Gracious Speech contains a measure to do with the hearsay rule in civil evidence. I declare an interest as a practising lawyer. The problem with civil cases is that there is already too much hearsay evidence. We know from the family division that tittle-tattle from the neighbour's second cousin's uncle's aunt can often influence the outcome of cases. The same applies to libel and civil cases. The Government have adopted the wrong measure and it is opposed by many lawyers. Instead, they should have taken up the Lord Chancellor's proposal—speedier trials and simplified costs.

My third point was one that I failed to raise on Friday, when I did not manage to catch Madam Speaker's eye. We Back Benchers find it a bit off-putting, to put it mildly, when Front Benchers take up two and a half hours of a five-hour debate, as they did on Friday. I appreciate that Back Benchers are not important in the minds of Front Benchers, but many Back Benchers will echo the sentiment that if Front Benchers continue to dominate 50 per cent. of debates many of us will begin to dominate the Back Benches in our own way. Let that be a warning. If my Whip, who is listening, wishes to report me to his superiors he is welcome to do so. With a smile, I tell him that I will take as much notice of him afterwards as I do now. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That shows the power of Back Benchers. We are united against the Whips in particular and against Front Benchers specifically.

I sought to raise a simple matter on Friday. The Home Secretary spoke for between 45 minutes and an hour but announced few measures that will ease the problems in the criminal legal system or the prison system. He spoke about cutting home leave, but the idea of rehabilitation and the integration and reintegration of long-term prisoners seems to have passed him by. The best way to rehabilitate prisoners is to reintegrate them. Those of us who know anything about the subject know that, but the Home Secretary seems to know very little about the subject. That might explain his mistakes.

The Home Secretary proposes to take 40,000 people out of the home leave system. We all deplore people who break home leave conditions, but for every one who does so those who keep it are legion. The Home Secretary is penalising the many for the folly of the few, which is not good penal policy.

There are currently 51,000 prisoners in overcrowded gaols, many of whom are living in deplorable conditions. They are bored to death and think only of the next crime to commit when they get out. That makes one wonder whether our penal system is right. As I think every hon. Member knows, I am not soft on crime but I am in favour of a penal system that reforms and rehabilitates rather than educates people in the art of further crime.

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

My fourth point is a serious one. The Gracious Speech mentioned legislation on mental health, and reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 is long overdue. The 1983 Act resulted from a European Court case with which I had some connection as I was senior partner in the firm of instructing solicitors. I have always had several grounds for concern about that Act. First, no provision seems to be made to allow the clawing back into the system of a patient who deliberately does not take his medicine. There have been several such serious cases, some of which have led to deaths. A patient who is on a loose rein, if I may put it that way, and who refuses to take his medicine and do all that is necessary becomes a risk to the public at large. I hope that the Government will bear that in mind for future legislation.

Another matter that causes me concern relates to people who, through no fault of their own, are beginning to deteriorate mentally. There should be a means to identify such people and a measure by which care can be exercised and facilities made available so that they can be treated before they become a danger to themselves or to the community at large. The problem of mental illness is serious and needs to be addressed. I warn the Government that a solution will not be cheap. We must have measures that cover many current deficiencies in the mental health legal system and in the way in which people are assessed and reassessed.

In a recent classic case a patient was told that he was not being sent home but was being returned to Broadmoor. That patient escaped, giving rise to family fear. There must be a system to prevent such happenings. When considering the Mental Health Act and amendments to it, we must look long and carefully at the flaws that have been exposed time and again and take steps to give the appropriate authorities the necessary powers to deal with patients who either refuse to take their medicine or are beginning to deteriorate. Facilities also need to be extended to treat mental illness, which is increasing.

My final point is a cri de coeur on behalf of those who were foolish enough to listen to insurance salesmen who tempted them out of occupational pension schemes. Many such people lost a considerable amount and now have pensions that are worth nothing like the pension that they would have been paid if they had remained in their occupational scheme. The Government should consider altering pension law to enable a pensioner, potential pensioner or investor who has left an occupational scheme to return to it, subject to paying the premiums for the time during which he has been absent from the scheme. That would place them in the position that they were in before they listened to the outlandish advertising gimmicks of insurance companies who sold them what can only be described as duff pensions. We are aware of a number of companies that have had to retrain their agents and take other measures. The treatment of many pensioners is a crying shame, but it can be rectified and I hope that the Government will do so in the year ahead.

I shall end as I began. I want to see us making use of European grants and thinking of social policies that will benefit a nation that has such a need for social policy changes.

7.25 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): The debate is about industry and education, and I should like to concentrate on industrial competition.

The British economy is growing faster than that of any other country in the European Union. Our GDP is growing at 3.8 per cent. a year, which is a higher growth rate than at the time of last year's Budget. Britain is the only major European Union country in which unemployment is falling. It has fallen by more than 400,000 since the recovery began. All that is happening at a time when, for the first time in 27 years, our growth rate is higher than the rate of inflation. Successive Governments over many years have tried to achieve that, and this is the first Government in 27 years to do so.

Productivity continues to improve, and by August it was up by 5.3 per cent. on August last year. Those are the best statistics on the economy for a generation, and the Opposition should be honest enough to recognise that and acknowledge the Government's achievements. We must continue to improve upon that performance, and in that context competitiveness is crucial. I shall concentrate on how we can build on our achievements and stimulate greater investment.

The CBI recently said:

> "In the 1980s, enterprise was reborn in Britain and many self-imposed handicaps removed. The 1990s must see an era of investment—so that we can compete successfully in the new Europe".

More importantly, we must compete in emerging markets. Investment is crucial to our industrial success, and lies at the heart of competitiveness. It leads to goods being produced ever more effectively and cheaply, and that leads to ever higher quality. In an increasingly technical and automated world, that requires investment.

Investment aids the development of more new products, and the United Kingdom is good at developing new ideas. Our scientists have won more Nobel prizes than any other country except the United States; we have achieved 14 times as many Nobel prizes as Japan. However, we are not always as good at exploiting our ideas. We need further investment and research and a little more guts.

Countries with high investment tend to have the highest rates of economic growth. Over the past 25 years, investment as a percentage of GDP—what I call gross domestic capital formation—in the Asian economies has been as follows: 27.7 per cent. in South Korea; 31.4 per cent. in Japan; and 41.7 per cent. in Singapore. In Britain, investment ran at 18.2 per cent. and has been comparatively low for a century, and significantly so since the war. Extra investment would boost capacity and block the inhibiting stop-go cycle, creating long-term, not cyclical, growth. Boosted investment would encourage companies to grow organically rather than through acquisition.

A commitment to long-termism and investment is not good enough. We need to introduce the conditions in which good investment emerges. During the 1980s, Britain's investment rose by 4.1 per cent. a year, compared with a 0.4 per cent. increase in the 1970s when the Labour party was in power. In the 1980s, investment rose three times faster than the European average, and was higher than it was in any other G7 country except Japan. Britain has emerged from recession, investment is taking

off again, and, for the first time in decades, it is paralleling the increase in the rate of consumer spending. However, there is still a great deal further to go.

Above all, increases in investment rest on rational decisions taken by business. Yet in the past, especially in the 1970s when the Labour party was in power, the economic environment was hostile to development and expansion. The cultural environment in industry was hostile to investment, and it was uneconomic for business to invest.

The aggregate rates of return from investment in Britain have been far below those of Germany and the United States. The cost of capital in Britain has also been far higher, as has been the risk premium to guard against the future. Thus, the required rate of return for an investment project in Britain is often as high as 25 per cent., while in Japan the comparative figure hovers between 5 and 10 per cent. On those grounds, we should continue to free up the economy to enable business to stride ahead and take the opportunities available.

Investment is most successful when taken freely by private companies, as is confirmed by the investment record of the recently privatised industries when compared with their former nationalised industry roles. Government intervention in the allocation of the market tends to confuse the process. As the OECD said recently:

"Industrial support has generally proved to be inefficient as a means of preserving jobs or of easing the process of structural adjustment."

A free enterprise culture, with an innovative, dynamic economy backed by the rewards for success, spurs on investment. A competitive environment disciplines and drives companies, and the penalties for failing have to be meaningful. Business needs an environment without burdens on free business activity. Unnecessary regulation needs to be squashed, with state expenditure and taxation cut. Trade unions need to be harnessed for the good of the company and the country. Those conditions, not state interference, have driven investment across south-east Asia.

Having got its economic policy wrong for the past five years, the Labour party has now conceived a new economic theory. It is proud to present it to the country as an endogenous growth theory. That has been accompanied by a number of pronouncements. However, airy rhetoric and new neo-Keynesian economic models are useless on their own. The Opposition cannot simply talk the economy up, as they have spent the past 15 years trying to talk it down. Investment has to be market-driven by business. The Soviet Union had the highest investment ratio in the world, but look what happened there.

What is the endogenous growth theory of which we have heard so much? As I understand it, it is about managing relationships. The Labour party has devised a system under which it believes it can tell the manufacturer, "You should do this or that. You should buy from so-and-so and sell to so-and-so, and manage a long-term relationship." Labour thinks that it can tell a pension fund, an investment fund or the City of London to invest in a particular company and then tell that company to invest in plant rather than in, for example, an advertising campaign.

Labour believes that it can go into boardrooms throughout the country and compel every company to take the investment decisions that Labour thinks are right. If that were to happen in Japan, I would take a step back, because the culture in that country might enable such an absurd policy to succeed.

However, the Labour party wants that to happen in Britain, where for generations the business community has been enabled by successive Conservative Governments to take investment decisions on the basis of the company knows best. Now, the Labour party wants to tell managing directors how they should invest. For example, it believes that if companies invest in plant they will get a higher rate of growth. That may be so in Japan or Singapore—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.35 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Conservative Members claim that the Gracious Speech contained radical measures. It stretches the imagination to hear that repeated cry. They know full well that it is a holding operation—a "keep quiet" measure—for the coming year. They know in their hearts of hearts that that is the truth.

I want to concentrate on two aspects of today's debate—small businesses, and the co-operative sector of Britain's industrial and commercial world. A healthy and expanding small business sector is vital to a competitive economy. Small businesses are often the driving force of technical innovation, and they provide a vehicle by which individuals can contribute inventiveness and drive to the marketplace—although not a wholly free marketplace. Major corporations can compete internationally only if they are supplied and serviced by efficient, reliable small businesses, especially now that many large companies contract out many of their service functions.

We have two additional motives in backing small businesses. Obviously, the first is our commitment to full employment. I do not think that any hon. Member would deny that growth in jobs is most likely to come from small and medium-sized businesses. Over the past decade, 2.5 million jobs have been created by businesses with fewer than 20 employees. There is a lesson to be learnt there, especially when that growth in jobs is compared with that of the larger companies.

Our second motive is our commitment to local and regional economic development. The Scottish Development Agency was one of the most important post-war agencies to be created in Scotland. Its remit on investment, intervention in industry and industrial regeneration provided a powerful instrument for economic development. The impact of the SDA made significant advances and improvements possible. Its regeneration imprint can still be discerned in the Scottish economy. It played a role for Scotland and Europe in attracting inward investment.

Both Scottish Enterprise and the Highlands and Islands development board have the potential to be significantly stronger organisations with their additional powers and responsibilities for skills training and programmes for the unemployed. That wider remit should be encouraged, but instead the Scottish Office continually cuts the amount of money available to local enterprise companies. Scottish Office Ministers have admitted that fact.

[Mr. Thomas McAvoy]

We are looking for a greater role for those organisations, but that is only one side of our approach to Scottish industry. The other wing of that movement is the introduction of political devolution, through a Scottish Parliament that will work hand in hand with Scottish industry to rectify the considerable damage done in the past 15 years.

I have always felt sympathy for small businesses that suffer the late payment of debts, which creates huge pressures. Late payment seems to be an established culture among UK businesses. It may be all right for big companies to pressurise small firms to accept late payment, but that puts at risk the financial base of the small business that is trying to survive and expand. I am extremely disappointed that the Government did not support legislation for interest on late payments.

Lord Ferrers, the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms, wrote to me explaining the difficulties of implementing such a scheme. However, if the problem were approached positively, I am sure that the difficulties of a blanket approach could be examined, to ensure that small businesses do not continue to be disadvantaged by big companies. I would have strongly supported legislation to impose interest on late payments.

I am sponsored by the co-operative movement, and proud to be so. Many hon. Members in all parts of the House could learn from co-operative principles how to conduct themselves in business. Co-operatives provide an attractive model of corporate structure that I wish to encourage. I am pleased that members of my Front Bench will introduce a co-operatives Bill as part of the next Labour Government's strategy. That will create a level playing field for co-operatives, and allow them to expand in future.

The co-operative sector can be split into four main areas—mutually constituted enterprises such as insurance and finance, retail co-operative societies, farming co-operatives and employee-owned businesses. I will concentrate on the last of those.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are vital to economic development. There are more than 2 million UK businesses, and 96 per cent. of them employ fewer than 20 people. Those firms are the lifeblood of the economy. Conventional business structures discriminate against a huge proportion of people who would tackle running their own businesses if provided with the right mechanisms. Many unemployed people have usable skills, especially in recent times—but structural changes in the nature of management and in working practices mean that such people are effectively barred from entering into an enterprise by lack of finance and skills and from personal pressure.

Conventional logic suggests that the lone man or woman has the best chance of succeeding with a new enterprise, but that view is too simplistic, because it ignores the realities of business formation and personal circumstances. In practice, few people have access to even relatively small amounts of finance, or possess the wide range of skills necessary to establish and run a successful business with the capacity to grow and to employ others. Understandably, few people are prepared to take personal responsibility for finance or management.

The option of forming a co-operative business addresses those barriers. By bringing people together in an equitable way, personal financial commitment can be reduced and access to outside finance increased. More importantly, the greater the number of people involved, the better the chance of even higher levels of finance and of securing institutional finance. A group of people can also offer a wide range of experience and skills, thus increasing the chances of the business succeeding.

Dissipating the burdens of financial commitment and work load and establishing a peer group forum can create the energy to drive the business forward, with competency increased to a high level. Those factors combine to allow the enterprise entry point to be at a higher level—and the word "enterprise" is not the exclusive property of any party in the House. Larger, more credible businesses can be formed with a higher capital base and greater in-house expertise. The latter is particularly important if capital-intensive enterprises are to be established.

In Scotland, the concept of co-operative development has been embraced by local authorities, but has so far been shunned by the local enterprise networks. Those networks, which are governed by Scottish Office policies, must change. In this day and age, working co-operatively must be the corollary of good management practice, never mind anything else. Real commitment and motivation are derived from a sense of ownership. The higher output of a motivated and committed work force produces a successful and expanding business.

Development of the co-operative sector, however, is not a panacea. We in the co-operative world do not claim exclusively to have the answer to Britain's industrial problems, but we certainly believe that the rest of the United Kingdom could learn from the co-operative sector.

7.45 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I will concentrate my remarks on education, and I so agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mr. Pawsey) that the debate on education has been well won by the Conservative party for many years. Sir Edward Boyle put it as well as anyone:

> "The purpose of the State in education is to give children an equal chance of proving themselves unequal."

That view contrasts completely with Labour's handling of education over many years and with the way that it still approaches the matter.

I am not saying that the Labour and Liberal parties do not have their hearts in the right place, but they are not prepared to think hard enough about education. Many Labour supporters argue, for example, that one must be gentle with immigrants and the deprived and not expect too much of them—but that is to do such children no favour. Immigrant children or those with home difficulties must work extremely hard, provided that they have the ability, to overcome difficulties that others do not have. If they have a language problem, they need to work extra hard, not be allowed to take it easy because they are thought to have difficulties at home. Labour's whole approach is wrong.

I was surprised to receive in my post this morning a letter from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), addressed to all parliamentary Labour party members. It stated:

"Education is due to be discussed next Monday evening as part of the Queen's Speech Debate . . . I am attaching two separate briefing notes to assist you with any press or public inquiries you may receive in connection with these events."—

[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I would prefer fewer interruptions—especially from the hon. Member for Rugby (Mr. Pawsey), from a sedentary position.

Mr. Greenway: I am surprised by the quality of speeches made by Labour Members, bearing in mind the paucity of the briefing sent to them by their spokesman. I will not describe that briefing at any length because it is not worth it—it does not say anything. However, on the question of accepting the value of publishing league tables, it states:

"There will also be separate league tables measuring attendance, which will for the first time distinguish between permitted absence and truancy."

Is not that bright? League tables on absence from school will take account, as they always have, of absence as opposed to truancy.

It is important to have league tables on attendance at school. It seems that the hon. Member for Brightside is accepting that, and in so doing is making an obvious comment. The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that his party will now accept the value of league tables, but on the radio this morning he did not punch home the fact that there are three essentials for a child at school: that he should work, that he must attend and that he must be punctual. If a child does not attend school and does not work, it is obvious that he will not achieve anything. If a child is not punctual, his achievement will be low.

The Labour party believes that

"comparative information should reflect the value added by a school to a pupil's education. The purpose of such information should be to highlight those schools which have achieved considerable improvements and to assist those schools which are not achieving their full potential."

I warn the Labour party that "value added" is an extremely difficult concept to write into tables that are designed to show objectively what schools and children are achieving. There is nothing wrong with the idea, however, and there is nothing new about it. It is what the Government and schools have been trying to do since 1979 and, indeed, before that. It is extraordinary, however, to write the concept into briefing material for Labour Members as if it is a new one.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth said, the Labour party does not have anything to say about education.

Mr. Pawsey: That is right—not a word.

Mr. Greenway: I agree, it does not.

From my early days of teaching—too many years ago—the Labour party's drive was towards uniformity at both the primary and secondary stages. It seems that it cannot get over that. It is only the Conservative party that regards each child as an individual and recognises that team games and many other aspects of school life enable children to express their individuality. Children profit from the competitive instinct; there is nothing wicked about it. Unfortunately, the Labour party has always assumed that competitiveness in children is wicked and evil, but it is natural. It is important to harness competitiveness for the advantage of children and to schools. We must not try to suppress it.

When a Labour headmistress banned the egg-and-spoon race on the ground that it was damaging to children because it encouraged them to be too competitive, and when in some London schools competitive games were eliminated by the Inner London education authority, enormous damage was done to many children, especially to those whose only talent lay on the games field. Competitive games are a valuable way in which some children can express themselves. Indeed, it is the only way in which some can do so.

I welcome the emphasis that has been placed on training and development, especially by the Government. I welcome also the Labour party's rhetoric. It seems that Labour has been won over by the Government's education and training policies. It talks about them all the time. It is extraordinary, however, that, upon gaining control of Ealing council, Labour's first act was to declare that it would close the Ealing training and development centre, at which 60 or 70 16 to 17-year-olds receive valuable training. It is their only route into work. I understand that it costs £400,000 a year. Those who are running the centre say that they can raise £200,000 from private sources and from their own hard work.

Ealing council is required only to give about 70 young people the opportunity to get into work, which they need and should have. That entitlement is something that the Labour party recognises in its rhetoric both locally and nationally. It says that it is vital to get young people in employment. Ealing council has only to pay the salaries of the instructors and teachers at the centre, which will amount to about £200,000 a year. It has inherited balances of £12 million from the outgoing Conservative administration, yet it will close the centre.

I visited the centre last week, and met some stupefied young people. They thought that the Labour party meant what it said when it claimed that it valued training for young people. How disillusioned they are. Without a thought, without blinking an eye, the local Labour party in Ealing—its action has not so far been repudiated in this place—is to close a training centre for young people, for the very young people who need it and ought to have it. It is a disgrace.

7.55 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It is a strange Chamber. For a change, I decided to make a rather non-partisan speech. As I listened to Conservative Members talk about education, it became more and more difficult to take that course. I shall try, however, to adhere to my original intention.

Mr. Pawsey: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Do you find it extraordinarily discourteous to the House that during an important debate on education and training and trade and industry, not one spokesman or member of the Liberal party is in the Chamber?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Sheerman: It is an extra minute for me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Mr. Sheerman]

I was disappointed by the omission from the Gracious Speech of any solid reference to British manufacturing industry or any sign that the Government intend taking positive steps to encourage research and development, skills training or investment in a vital sector of our economy, which now accounts for less than 20 per cent. of gross domestic product.

As today's debate has been focused on industry and education, I thought it appropriate to spend time on one sector of education that I believe has enormous relevance to our future industrial success. That is not to underrate other parts of the education process, but rather to acknowledge the strategic role of higher education in working with industry to achieve a substantial increase in wealth creation.

Universities have changed dramatically since the time when I and most hon. Members were students. Beyond the simple fact that there are far more institutions conducting research and teaching courses—129 are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council, including the colleges of London university—the entire sector has undergone what the pundits would call massification.

If we go back further than my student days, in 1938-39 there were 69,000 students in full-time education. By 1962-63, when I was at the London School of Economics and Lord Robbins was about to pontificate on the future of higher education, the figure had risen to 216,000. By 1979, we had 510,000 full-time students and 268,000 part time. In the academic year beginning in 1992, there were about 934,000 full-time students, and 475,000 part time. That is indeed massification. It is clear that higher education is no longer restricted to a small, elite group. Indeed, 30 per cent. of young people can look forward to a university career, not 3 per cent.

The size of the university sector is evident to all, but in parallel there has been a qualitative change in universities and what happens between their staff and students. That has had an effect on the very culture that is to be found within university higher education.

Many of us remember a generation of students who were typically between 18 and 22. There is now a much broader age profile. Students are generally older, they are more aware and they are often self-financing. They have a much better grasp of the significance of their time at university and what they have to gain by experiencing it to the full. It is not just the student population that has changed. Staff numbers have increased. The staff-student ratios have changed—often for the worst—and many more staff are on short-term contracts.

So what does that enormous growth from 3 per cent. to 30 per cent. mean? The prime responsibility of universities remains that of core teaching and research. I do not think that any enlightened Member of the House would gainsay that. Universities are increasingly called on to be actively involved in a variety of new roles. Some of them sit more comfortably than others. Some need more Government help and intervention. Those new roles and objectives may include—the best examples do—a real role in community regeneration. Where we see best practice, that means not only physical regeneration of the hinterland in which they are situated, but cultural regeneration and regeneration of the wealth-creating process.

Given the size and cost to the taxpayer of the higher education sector, it is natural that our constituents should have high expectations that universities will help to create a better life for them. Historically, Britain has thrived on its ability to produce talented men and women—inventors, research scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs. But today the difference is that so many more of our talented people will come through higher education. It is essential, therefore, that we carefully assess the key elements in a successful strategy for maximising the full potential of the universities.

Universities have a crucial role to play in assisting the development of our country and its wealth creation. Research and teaching are still vital and the universities' contribution to the cultural and intellectual life of the nation is as important as ever. But that traditional role is undergoing change as fast as the sector itself is expanding. Many institutions are broadening their core activities, complementing teaching and research by participation in partnerships with the private sector, in science parks and innovations centres, and through the growth of cross-discipline research and partnership. Indeed, much of our old conception of teachers and researchers working on their own, publishing papers, is really a part of history. We are looking at teams working together, with cross-disciplines, in social science, science and the arts—so often, disciplines are barriers to change and innovation rather than something that help the participants.

New methods of working and, consequently, of rewarding staff are gaining greater credence. The traditional model will change, and the Government—all Governments—should be helping that change, because the one thing that most hon. Members with one of the 123 universities in their constituency have learnt is that they are the greatest powerhouse for change. They are the greatest dynamism for change in our environment. They are also usually the biggest employer. They make the biggest use of taxpayers' money and, indeed, have the greatest potential to make the lives of our constituents better in every sense.

The present situation presents a series of challenges, which must be approached with care, seriously evaluating our own and overseas experience and attempting to share and spread best practice. Universities must above all approach private sector partnerships with a clear sense of priorities, purpose and objectives. They must also ensure that they manage the boundaries between their own institutions and the private sector in a competent fashion. The Labour party believes that to be important. Labour Members want the relationships to be right, but we also want and demand that universities be well managed. That deficiency sometimes crops up. There must be competent managers at the helm of those great institutions, which affect our constituents' lives.

Government should also understand and encourage a diversity of funding sources and realise that institutions of higher education are diverse in their nature and much better at some things than at others. Not all universities are good at basic, core, scientific research, but they may be very good at more practical research that is of equal importance to the British economy.

Governments and universities should be wary of one-dimensional solutions. Fashions will change, from science parks, to innovations centres, to venture companies. The trick will be in variety and learning by

success and failure. Some of the innovations will fail. Some will succeed. We must build on the successes if we are to have a successful partnership and economy.

Political parties must learn to be less doctrinal in assessing the patterns and potential for development, whether that means understanding what public-private co-operation really means in higher education, or how much more advantageous a more flexible contractual basis may be, for teaching as well as for administrative staff. I say that knowing that somebody may be jumping on me when I leave the Chamber, perhaps from the Association of University Teachers, of which I am still a member.

Universities are a major player in our future destiny, not just because we need a more highly skilled, adaptable work force, not just because we must continue to prize a critical mass of high-quality, basic research, and not just because the university sector is now the most potent force for productive change in our society. That is most important because, above all, universities can show all our citizens, not only their students, the quality of life that can be enjoyed working in a challenging, high-tech, modern, inclusive community.

The Gracious Speech could have addressed a number of measures to stimulate the exciting partnership between universities and the private sector. Unfortunately, it missed that opportunity. Indeed, it could have included measures that would have given back a feeling of status and self-esteem to the university staff and administrators who have made such a great success of the growth pattern of the university sector. But that is a missed opportunity.

8.5 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I am one who argued recently that the legislative programme contained in the Gracious Speech should be both short and well considered. It is certainly short and, at first glance, seems also well considered, but the devil is in the detail of such matters, as we have learnt from experience over the past couple of years, so whether in the longer term we shall take that view I cannot say, but at first glance I am pleased by what is in it.

I favour a short programme because the over-large programmes that we have had over recent years have undoubtedly led to Acts being put through which have had to be considered and reconsidered and which have not always led to the most felicitous results. I am thinking, for example, of legislation that established the Child Support Agency, the two criminal justice Bills, which had to be revised, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, the poll tax and so forth. The reason why we had that adverse result is quite simply that we tried to load on to our existing systems in the House an over-weighty, complex system of Bills, which it has not been able to take.

As someone who has had to spend the past eight years earning his living outside the House, and welcomed the fresh air of private business, I have been astonished by the inefficiency of our procedures, and also by the fact that there has been so little change. If one lives in the market outside the House, the fact of life is continual change. Our legislative procedures have changed hardly at all. I regret that.

We now have some good news. There is the Jopling Committee report, which, I believe, hon. Members on both Front Benches are working out with a will. I hope that we shall see some results from that in the not too distant future. I also hope that they will then follow through with some changes in our legislative procedures. They have the blueprint in the Hansard Society's report, which came out about 18 months ago and which set out very clearly the sort of criticisms that all of us make about our procedures. I hope that those criticisms will be noted and changes implemented.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) is raising the report aloft. I hope that one day he will raise it aloft in triumph, as we Back Benchers force the Front-Bench Members, but particularly the Whips, to come out with some radical proposals in that area, and then we can live up to our best instincts. The fact is that, if we had a privatised Chamber competing with us to produce legislation in a more efficient manner, we should be out of business and all of us would be unemployed. I am sure that, unless we changed our ways, we simply could not cope with the procedures that a private sector Chamber would have thought sensible over the past 10 years.

The second reason why we should keep a short legislative programme is that one does not have to have a large number of Bills to be radical. That is especially so when the important thing is to bring down the level of Government expenditure and start reducing taxes once again. The position is abundantly clear. At present, general Government spending takes about 43.75 per cent. of our annual national income—only a fraction less than in 1979. I expect my right hon. and hon. Friends to improve on that, and to lower the figure by £5 billion or so; but I think that they should exceed what inflation and unemployment levels will allow them to do anyway, and make further cuts in public spending. I believe that that is the only way in which we can make sensible progress in invigorating industry and lowering taxation. Both the Institute of Directors and the CBI have called for precisely such action in their Budget recommendations; I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has listened carefully to what they have said.

If my right hon. and learned Friend is looking at areas in which we can cut public expenditure—which he will naturally want to do—he need look no further than the Institute of Directors' charter for Government spending, which sets out a 25-year programme for reducing the total. Like the institute, I do not believe that we should reduce public spending in every area; indeed, in some areas we need to increase it. The problem is the relentless rise in the total, particularly as a percentage of our national income. That is intolerable.

As many of my hon. Friends have pointed out today, we have achieved a number of triumphs in the past 15 years. We have had a superb success with privatisation, which the Opposition have largely accepted; we have had a superb success with trade union reform, which they have largely accepted; and we have made excellent progress with education and training, which the Opposition—doing one of their usual U-turns—are accepting. If we can cap that with progress in reducing Government spending and taxation—which is, I think, implicit in the appeal of the Conservative party—we shall have increased our success substantially. Our current economic performance is the best that I have ever seen, and I feel that the Government deserve full credit. If they can maintain that performance over the next 10 years—and the approach that I advocate would enable them to do so—they will deserve to stay in power for a long time.

[Mr. John Horam]

The Queen's Speech includes legislation to authorise the construction and operation by the private sector of a high-speed rail link between London and the channel tunnel. I am particularly keen for that to be implemented in good time, because until the link is constructed, all the trains will go through Orpington. We welcome that in some respects, but we do not welcome the increase in noise, vibration and general nuisance.

Hon. Members will remember all the business about "leaves on the line". To reduce that problem, it was unfortunately necessary to remove all the shrubs, bushes and trees that lay between my constituents' back gardens and the railway line, which has now exacerbated the problems of noise and vibration. The obvious answer is to erect noise barriers, and—owing to the sensible and constructive approach of Bromley council—there are plans to erect such barriers on lines carrying mainly freight. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to reach an agreement regarding lines carrying passengers.

The Government can help my constituents, and many other people in Kent and south London, by improving their proposals for the noise insulation regulations that they are about to introduce. They should extend those regulations not only to new lines, but to existing lines that are substantially upgraded.

With that caveat and hope for progress, I broadly commend the Queen's Speech. I believe that it is one more step towards sensible progress for our country, particularly in economic matters.

8.13 pm

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): I was delighted to learn that the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) had been sent a copy of the Labour party briefing for the debate. In the past, even members of the parliamentary Labour party have not received that briefing; this is a clear sign of our improved performance.

It has already been said that the most noticeable feature of the Queen's Speech is what it lacks rather than what it contains. Obviously, the ditching of Post Office privatisation has been mentioned, but the absence of any education legislation is equally noteworthy. The Government have forced through some 20 separate education reforms over the past 15 years, but it would appear that the "permanent" revolution is over. No doubt that has been met with sighs of relief in staff rooms throughout the land, following the introduction of local management of schools, repeated changes in the national curriculum, the flop of grant-maintained schools and other reforms such as the new code of practice for special needs. Teachers are probably dizzy at the pace of change, and can be forgiven for craving a period of relative stability.

The Government were wrong to try to effect so much change so quickly; but it was less the speed of change than the nature of that change that was wrong. I believe that there is a compelling need for further change in education—indeed, the Government accept that to an extent: in the past fortnight they have introduced yet more changes in the national curriculum, which we welcome.

In my view, the Government have consistently got it wrong on league tables—not because it is wrong to give parents information about school performance, but because it is wrong to give them as little information as the Government do. League tables are a form of performance indicator, and the function of such indicators should be to improve performance and to drive up standards. Crucially, they should try to show the level of improvement in pupils' achievements—in short, to demonstrate the difference that a school can make. We want schools to have high academic expectations and good results; but the answer to the question, "What makes a good school?" is not simply, "One with good exam results."

One of the problems with the current league tables is that they are crude and relatively uninformative. A school with a comparatively bright intake achieving an average of five GCSE passes per pupil is not performing as well as a school with a less academically capable intake achieving the same result, or even less. In their current form, the league tables do not highlight such differences.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pope: I should like to, but I am allowed only 10 minutes for my speech.

The present system takes no account of either the circumstances faced by individual schools or the way in which they can boost pupil achievement. There is a better way and, after years of opposing Labour and the other Opposition parties' support for value-added league tables, the Government are now at last commissioning research, some of it from London's Institute of Education. Why on earth has it taken so long for the Government to see sense? The answer, of course, is ideology: the Government have seen teachers as producers and parents as consumers, free to exercise market choice.

Leaving aside the bizarre notion that parents are the consumers of education—I should have thought that, if anyone were a consumer of education, it would be the pupils themselves; surely they should be at the centre of our approach—the league tables are a blunt instrument. The idea that parents should assess the league tables and then make a market choice, so that good schools can flourish and failing schools wither on the vine—or become subject to education associations—simply is not working; or, if it is working, it is working only at the margins.

We need a more sophisticated system. It should, of course, recognise and identify schools that are performing well, and those that are failing; but, crucially, it should not just recognise schools that are failing, but understand and demonstrate how and why they are failing. If we do not know how and why they are failing, how can we remedy the failings? The league tables are a weapon with which to attack failing schools. We need more information which can be used to turn failing schools into succeeding schools: the market mechanism simply is not enough.

Much research has already been done—by the Institute of Education, by Keele university and by the National Foundation for Educational Research. Surely it is time for the Government to pull some of that research together.

League tables for non-attendance are also inadequate. Although such tables are well meaning, the idea of authorised and unauthorised absence from school is deeply flawed. It fails not least to take account of pupils

who register at school and then abscond from it. The Government have tried to deal with the problem by providing a £3 million grant to introduce computerised registration and pupil swipe cards, the idea being that pupils can register at the beginning of each lesson. However, according to yesterday's *Independent on Sunday*, even the company that makes the computerised system admits that it is a failure. The pupils at whom the system is most aimed lose the card, deliberately leave it at home or will not comply with the use of it. I should have thought that, before the Government spent £3 million of taxpayers' money, they might have dealt with that basic problem.

The Government's response to truancy has been woefully inadequate. Why do not they understand that the scale of truancy is almost certainly way in excess of the figures that the Government will publish next week? Tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of children are missing from our schools every day and they are missing out on their one big chance of education. Many of them will be exposed to crime. The Government, however, persist in treating the most important service that local education authorities provide in relation to this matter as a mere kid catcher.

The Government could start by recognising that non-attendance is a complex problem with varied causes. Some of the problems are school-based—bullying, poor academic performance and the unrecognised special needs of children—and some are home-based. It is not enough just to deal with the symptom of the problem—truancy. The Government should deal with its underlying causes. We should recognise that there is a national shortage of education welfare officers.

The debate is about not only numbers but quality. The Government should announce that, from now on, all education welfare officers must possess the relevant social work qualification. I hope that the Minister will soon announce that targets will be set for LEAs to ensure that all education welfare officers meet social work training qualifications.

Hon. Members know that part 1 general national vocational qualifications for 14-year-olds will be piloted next year in the subjects of business studies, health and social care, and manufacturing. That strikes me as being an extremely narrow range of subjects. I should have liked at least some emphasis to be placed on arts and the humanities. I hope that the Minister will say how much consultation will take place on course content to avoid a repetition of the fiasco over the national curriculum.

We are entitled to ask what the part 1 GNVQs are for. There is a danger that they will end up simply as an easier alternative to the GCSE. If that happens, we shall be back to where we were 20 years ago. We shall have a two-tier exam system, just as we did with the old CSEs and GCEs. If that happens, the danger is that low public esteem for GNVQs for 14-year-olds will permeate through to post-16 GNVQs, with catastrophic results. I hope that the Government will listen to that point before proceeding with the pilot scheme.

It is 22 years since Mrs. Thatcher promised universal nursery provision. As the Tories have been in power for 17 of those 22 years, when will the Government introduce such provision? Long-term supporters of universal nursery provision got used to the previous Secretary of State heaping abuse and scorn on us whenever the subject was raised. It appears that the current Secretary of State has done a U-turn, which I welcome. However, I should like to press her on some points. Will the commitment to nursery provision apply to all three and four-year-olds or will it, as the Prime Minister said, apply only to four-year-olds? When will it become available to all parents who want it? Have the Government provided a costed figure for it, a question that the Minister often asked Opposition Members?

In the past 10 years, the Government have won a great deal of praise for their policy on special educational needs, not least because that sector—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but it is the end of the lesson from the hon. Gentleman.

8.24 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Although education and industry are our themes today, neither word appears in the Gracious Speech. It includes several measures that are designed to encourage the improvement in the supply side of the economy, measures that will have an impact on the industrial performance of the country, but none specifically in the education sector, which is at it should be.

Thirteen Education Bills in 15 years have introduced an extraordinary range of reforms, from local management of schools to the spectacular growth of further and higher education. Looking through the education pledges in the Government's 1992 manifesto, I found that all of them have been fulfilled or are being fulfilled, whether it is a matter of completing the introduction of the national curriculum or of introducing regular testing for all children at seven, 11 and 14.

This weekend, I was delighted to learn that the Opposition have come round to testing in part. Having opposed virtually all our reforms in the past 15 years, they seem eventually to have embraced them. I look forward very much to a change of heart on the assisted places scheme. Who knows, we may hear of it in the Opposition spokesman's winding-up speech tonight. The scheme is helping some 30,000 children around the country, a good number of them in my constituency.

Given the extent and pace of reform in education, it is right to have a period of consolidation. I am not one of those who see the quantity of legislation as a measure of the Government's virility. The same number of Bills has been proposed for this Session as for the last and, although I welcome all of them, it must surely be quality rather than quantity that counts.

Since the war, the annual rate of legislation has shown little tendency to increase, but the length of that legislation has grown. The number of words has increased, and we should perhaps consider the quality of those words. I am one of those who would like privatising parliamentary draftmanship to be considered as one course that we might follow in our privatisation programme.

The cumulative effect of increased legislation is substantial. In the 49 years from 1945, I calculate that Parliament has enacted some 3,232 different Acts. Yes, the mind does boggle. It is no wonder, Madam Deputy Speaker, that at times you must feel a little bit daunted.

In other fields of endeavour, we tend to accept that less means more. The Government have been advertising the fact that the number of directives emanating from Brussels has fallen sharply in the past couple of years

[Mr. Gyles Brandreth]

and that they see that as something virtuous. I agree. The Government have managed extraordinary change in the past 15 years, but I should be happy if, 15 years from now, Her Majesty got to her feet in her Gracious Speech to tell us that, as her Government had done so much and so well in the past 30 years, this year there would be no need for further legislation of any sort. Therefore, I welcome the absence of education legislation in the Gracious Speech. Our manifesto pledges have all been fulfilled or are being fulfilled.

I do not recall that the privatisation of the Post Office was a distinct manifesto pledge. Although I would have welcomed the inclusion of a Bill on that, I recognise that many of my constituents would not.

While checking through the manifesto, I found an interesting pledge on page 34. I came across it only because it happened to be facing the section on education, which I was studying. Before my arrival at the House, that pledge would have made little impact on me. It reads:

"We will propose Parliamentary reforms to ensure that the House of Commons conducts its business more efficiently and effectively".

In that regard, I endorse all that my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said, and I shall not say any more about it.

In the hope of seeing further inward investment in my constituency, I recently visited all the businesses that have arrived in Chester in recent years to ask them what prompted them to locate in this country and in our part of the world in particular. Not one of them mentioned legislation of any sort, although several called for further deregulation and all acknowledged the role of Government in helping to create the right economic climate. They said that they came to the United Kingdom because of the exchange rate, because of low corporate tax rates, because of low interest rates, because inflation is at its lowest level for a quarter of a century, and because they believe that the Government mean business when they talk about sustained growth in a climate of low inflation.

Those businesses also talk of something that we now almost take for granted, although we do so at our peril: the transformation of the industrial relations landscape. Today, our strike rate is the lowest in Europe. Not only that, but we have the finest work force.

The largest recent example of inward investment in Chester was the arrival last year of the Maryland bank of North America. It is a £30 million project and one of the largest United States investments in the United Kingdom for several years. MBNA's chief executive, Tom McGinley, said that a principal reason for choosing Chester was the readily available work force, and the quality of the work force—a young and enthusiastic group of people of exactly the type that his bank liked to bring on board.

In recent years, Chester has been particularly successful in attracting inward investment. From America, the quality soap makers Original Bradford and NEBS Business Stationery are two recent examples. From the rest of Europe, Cacao Barry has invested the equivalent of £10 million in its factory. Even from the Isle of Man, another £10 million has been invested in a business manufacturing thermostatic controls for kettles and jugs.

Private sector investment in Chester has reached about £150 million in the past year, creating some 1,500 full-time new jobs. That is an exciting achievement. Those businesses join already well-established businesses with headquarters in Chester ranging from North West Securities and M and S Financial Services to Shell Chemicals and BICC.

In manufacturing, it is interesting how we have got so much into the habit of running ourselves down that we do not recognise reality. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was a good example of that this afternoon. In the past decade, Britain's output of manufactures has risen by 22 per cent. compared with 21 per cent. in Germany and 11 per cent. in France. Our productivity growth has outstripped theirs.

I welcome the Government's contribution to that success story. I welcome the encouragement of inward investment and in particular the work of INWARD in relation to the arrival of MBNA in Chester. I welcome the Government's commitment to competitiveness. We have recently opened our business link in Chester. I particularly look forward to the success of our bid for single regeneration funds. The Chester bid is a brilliant one and it needs to succeed because, despite our successes, we face very real challenges.

Unemployment in the city of Chester is down again. It is 7 per cent. lower than last month, 13 per cent. lower than last year, 16 per cent. lower than two years ago and 41 per cent. down on the level in 1986. Yet we do not live in cocooned isolation. In our area, unemployment is running at 12 per cent., against a national average of 9 per cent.

I am particularly worried about what has happened recently just across the border in north Wales and the fate of the work force at Raytheon Corporate Jets. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) in his place. Many of the people who work at Raytheon live in my constituency. Until September this year, the plant had been a major British industrial success story. When Raytheon acquired the Hawker Corporate Jets business from British Aerospace in 1993, the management and work force together set about undoubtedly the most impressive restructuring programme undertaken in the world's aerospace industry. In 12 months, a transformation was achieved. That transformation was recognised by the Department of Trade and Industry when it carried out a formal assessment of the company and confirmed its status as a centre of excellence under the "managing in the 90s inside UK enterprise" initiative.

Productivity increased by 33 per cent. The overhead cost was reduced by $19 million. The labour charging rate was reduced by 16 per cent. The product cycle time was reduced by 20 days. At Broughton, a world-class team is creating a world-class product. A significant track record it has, too. In the past 30 years the Hawker products have generated some $7.5 billion in exports for this country. In September, all that was threatened when Raytheon decided to transfer the production of the Hawker aircraft to the United States.

I am concerned at two levels. The first is the human level, with the future of the 900 and more men and women who work for Raytheon in Broughton, many of whom are my constituents. Secondly, at the industrial level, the loss of skills involved, which is an issue not only for north Wales or Chester but for the whole of the United

Kingdom. The DTI should be concerned, too. I have written to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade asking for the fullest details of what the DTI did or did not know about Raytheon's intentions for the business at the time of its acquisition and asking for as much helpful intervention as possible, not before any particular meal but before it is too late.

8.34 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Earlier this afternoon we had some remarkable self-justification from the President of the Board of Trade. First, he told us that he was right about privatising the Royal Mail but he was unable to deliver the goods. Secondly, and more astonishingly, he told us that in retrospect he was right about the privatisation of British Coal. No collieries had closed. Unemployment was not spiralling in coalfield communities. Those phrases will bring hollow laughter in coalfield communities across the country and in particular in Nottinghamshire.

Unemployment in Nottinghamshire and in the Mansfield travel-to-work area is higher now than it was at the last general election. The most worrying thing is that although unemployment is falling across the country, the gap between unemployment in the Mansfield travel-to-work area and the rest of the country is increasing. It has increased from 4 per cent. at the time of the general election to 7.5 per cent. now. The gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider. That should not surprise us because pits have closed in Nottinghamshire. At the general election there were 13 pits in Nottinghamshire; today there are just six. At the general election, 12,270 men were working in the coal industry in the county of Nottinghamshire. Today there are 2,440. In the space of 30 months 10,000 jobs have been lost.

The future of the coal industry has yet to run its course. The preferred bids are now on the table. It is up to the bidders to put the money on the table. There are doubts about whether that can be achieved. I hope that the Government will insist that the bid that was made is the bid that is finally achieved. I hope that there will be no talking down of the bid. I also hope that the Government will look carefully at some of the preferred bidders. Some of them have a history of directorship of companies that have gone into liquidation. There must be real probity among the people who buy the coal industry. The worst is yet to come, so it is clear to me that whoever buys the coal industry will immediately throw the contractors out of work. There is a real possibility that further pits will close.

The coal industry has been in chaos in the past two and a half years because there is no energy policy. The only policy that can be identified is one in which the market operates. The energy market does not operate on a level field. Nuclear power, for example, has real advantages because of the levy. One is tempted to ask what has happened to the nuclear review that the Government promised. When will it report? What are the timetables? What will the conclusion be? There is an air of silence about the great debate that we were promised.

In the Gracious Speech another part of the energy industry—British Gas—is to be opened up. The domestic market will be subject to competition. Clearly, there will be winners and losers. As competition occurs, there will be more transparency in the market. We saw that last week when we were told that people who had a bank account and could afford to pay by direct debit would in effect get cheaper gas. People who paid by standing order or had regularly paid promptly would not benefit. The average bill payer would pay an extra £10 a year for the privilege of paying on time but not by direct debit. Clearly, there will be winners and losers. People who had paid regularly were annoyed about that. They are angry today about the massive pay increases that the directors of British Gas are to receive.

Clearly, the gas market will have to be regulated. Regulation has to ensure that all suppliers operate on a level playing field—that they take the rewards and the responsibilities. It may well be that that cannot be achieved by regulation alone. I hope that, as they produce the Bill, the Government will look at the notion of a levy on all suppliers so that everyone can take their share not just of the rewards, but of the responsibilities, too.

The Gracious Speech talked about continued economic growth, rising employment and plans to promote enterprise. But what has happened to the notion of enterprise, as in the phrase "enterprise zone"? Two years ago we were promised that 16 enterprise zones would be up and running producing 16,000 new jobs. Not one enterprise zone has yet been established. It looks as though, at best, it will be another two years before enterprise zones are operating.

There is wide-scale unemployment in Nottinghamshire. We have a private and public sector partnership at the Sherwood business park which could create 3,000 new jobs. The Government should put people first: they should cut out the bureaucracy, get the enterprise working and get the people back to work.

We also need some enterprise in the Department of Transport. We have to plan for a flagship business park north of Ollerton. It would create 3,300 new jobs through a private and public sector partnership. But it cannot go forward because a lack of enterprise in the Department of Transport forbids the construction of an access to the trunk road. It argues that the Ollerton roundabout is too small. But it is the Department's responsibility to do something about it. Why does it not create enterprise and new jobs and put people back to work?

What about the great unresolved mystery in British Coal? What will happen to its property and landholdings? The company is a major landholder across the country. That land should be put to work to create new jobs. Local authorities and English Partnerships want to develop that land and put the nation back to work.

But there is a lack of clarity about what will happen. I suspect that the valuable land will be sold to the private sector, leaving the contaminated land to the public sector for it to pick up the liabilities.

Much has been said about the value of inward investment. But, given the scale of problems in Nottinghamshire and coalfield communities, it is important that there be a mechanism to make that happen. In the east midlands we have a fledgling development company. Two years ago its budget was £250,000, now it is £400,000. But there is talk about cutting the grant from the Department of Trade and Industry next year. The other partners want to keep the company going; they want to expand it. A real commitment to coalfield communities and to promoting economic growth would be to increase the grant and give new firms an opportunity to come to the east midlands for a new future.

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

For that to happen, we need to raise the landscape too. That is why I hope that the environmental protection agency and the new legislation when it is produced will contain a clause which makes it clear who is responsible for mine water discharge. At the moment, everyone denies responsibility.

The Gracious Speech gives us the opportunity to clear up this matter. It also gives us the opportunity to plan the landscape— new industry in a new landscape; a new community forest. If British Coal landholdings were sorted out, we could create that forest across Nottinghamshire. We could create a new Sherwood forest; a place in which to live and work.

In Nottinghamshire today 7,498 young people aged 16 to 19 years are looking for permanent work. There are just 121 available job vacancies— none in Hucknall and one in Newark. There are 62 youngsters chasing every vacancy. They are our future; we need to invest in them. Investing in them is investing in our future.

8.44 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am extremely pleased to make a contribution to the debate on the Queen's Speech because I believe that the legislative programme which has been outlined for this Session is not only comprehensive, but reflects an extremely steady hand on the tiller of government.

I wish to raise merely two matters in my brief contribution to the debate—one about proposed legislation, and another that has not been raised at all. I was surprised that many Opposition Members concentrated chiefly on matters that were not included in the speech rather than on what has been laid down for our legislative programme in the coming Session.

I am also surprised by the omission in Opposition coverage of the two privatisation measures proposed in the Queen's Speech. I say now how delighted I was to see the privatisation of Atomic Energy Authority technology included in the speech. It will no doubt be seen as legislation which reflects the Government's confidence in the operation, products, services and staff of AEA technology.

I have visited AEA twice this year and on both occasions members of the AEA team have expressed great eagerness to make progress on privatisation. I am pleased that we have been able to satisfy its requests.

The nuclear industry receives its fair share of attention—indeed, some would say more than its fair share. But the focus is normally placed on power generation, and I do not wish to cover that ground again tonight. Instead, I want to draw attention to some of the so-called by-products of our original investment in nuclear research and development. As a result of that investment, we have several centres of expertise: of highly skilled and world-acclaimed scientists and engineers using their skills to the benefit of mankind.

AEA technology is not a nuclear energy business and should not be confused as such because of its name. It is a science and engineering services business which is solving technical safety and environmental problems for Governments and industrial clients throughout the world. More than 70 per cent. of its contracts require a combination of skills in product development, plant and process performance, safety management and environmental protection. The business offers a large, multi-disciplinary capability, independent and impartial advice, and integrated solutions to a broad range of industries and markets. If I sound like a commercial, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I make no apology for my recommendation of this organisation.

Science and engineering is a huge growth market in the world. It is an area in which the United Kingdom has long been recognised as having particular strengths, and it is exactly these types of high technology areas in which we must invest and on which we should build our economic future. Our future will depend on our industries being not only at the front edge of technology, but competitive in international markets.

A privatised AEA technology will do better in the private sector because it will be liberated from the constraints of the public sector and be able to raise capital more freely to invest in the business. So long as it is part of the AEA involvement in nuclear power, which dominates the rest of the business, it will inevitably be impeded by the shadow of the nuclear power industry. If it is independent, it will be free to exploit the expertise that it has developed in the international market place.

This is not a pipe-dream born out of political conviction. We have only to look at my constituency and Amersham International which, following privatisation in 1982, has grown into an international business with 90 per cent. of its turnover outside the UK.

Amersham International represents only 9 per cent. of the United Kingdom's nuclear industry turnover, but it generates more than 50 per cent. of the industry's overseas earnings. It is no longer a nuclear company. It is a help science group, depending only in part on radiochemicals to produce its products. Its contribution now to health care, life science and research is indisputable and is one of the great benefits to come from nuclear science, as I am sure hon. Members on both sides of the House agree.

Before leaving the subject, I introduce a cautionary note for my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench. In some respects, AEA technology is intertwined with the rest of AEA simply because of its parentage. I hope that great care will be taken not to damage its prospects by the demands of the nuclear energy sector or the anti-nuclear lobbies. The new industries that have descended from the original nuclear programme have developed sufficiently to justify reorganisation separately from the nuclear generating industry. They have special needs and their problems, such as low-level nuclear waste disposal, are different from those of the rest of the industry.

In addition to privatising AEA technology, our programme involves creating a new environmental agency, a nuclear review and a review of radioactive waste management and policy. Although I welcome those initiatives, I do not want the benefits and the position of the nuclear-related companies strangled by the provisions that might be deemed necessary for their parent industry. I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment—and, in due course, the environment agency—will establish separate machinery for consulting the smaller nuclear-related industries, especially in relation to regulation. We should not forget that low-level waste disposal is a problem faced not only by those industries, but by a whole range of organisations, including hospitals, clinics and research laboratories. Their needs are totally different from those of the nuclear

power-generating industry and must be reviewed in a different light. I know that Amersham International would be willing to bring the benefit of its scientific knowledge and its business experience to produce safe, sensible and economically beneficial solutions to these difficult problems.

I now move on to a subject that was not raised in the Queen's Speech; I am sure that the House will be relieved to know that it is not Post Office privatisation. I had the privilege of raising on the Adjournment before the recess the question of space, expenditure and benefits. As we face such an important year of decisions on future space activities, I make no apology for touching on the subject again. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) who, since his appointment as Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology, has taken such an active and intelligent interest in space. I believe that he now has the opportunity to make an important personal contribution during the preparations for the European Space Agency ministerial council meeting next year as well as at the meeting itself.

I am sad to say that our involvement and expenditure in European Space Agency programmes has been diminished in recent years. Frankly, we are at serious risk of damaging the industries that we have built up through our past contributions, primarily to ESA. We have now reached the stage where we can no longer just depend on the Department of Trade and Industry for funding for space. Virtually every Department now has a present and future identifiable interest in space and its development. I listed a few in a recent article in a magazine for the Bow group. The Home Office may have an interest in space in terms of drug traffic monitoring and drug crops growth monitoring. The Department for Education may have an interest in space in terms of communications and science and technology education. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office may have an interest in terms of aid to the third world—in water discovery, crop growing and the identification of natural resources, for example. I should like to see more cross-departmental co-operation and funding, and now is the time to start.

We should not neglect the increasing convergence between military and civil systems. I know that the military in all countries has a penchant for its own systems and that it talks about security requirements as a justification. Obviously, those requirements need consideration. Even in the Gulf war, however, the United States' military depended on the French SPOT satellite for some of its observation data and on communications satellites, some of which were civil systems. There are real problems in transforming convergence from a comforting buzz word into a common-sense and money-saving reality. Instead of debating the pros and cons of a European defence earth observation satellite system, it might be more practical to identify the actual data needs. We might find that much of the required data were available from the existing civil systems or that it could be provided by the private sector. It would be well worth an impartial evaluation before we went further.

We certainly need some new thinking about the way in which we approach space. I hope that in this Session, the Department of Trade and Industry, as well as other Departments, will take a special interest in the area and will increase their co-operation. It can only be for the advantage of our industries and the benefit of this country.

In common with all my colleagues, I wish the Queen's Speech and the legislation that it proposes a safe and speedy passage.

8.54 pm

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): We are getting to the point where we have covered almost all the ground of what was in the Queen's Speech and what was not. I intend to touch on matters of industrial competitiveness and to look at other matters on a micro and a macro level.

Laissez-faire policies have not improved Britain's competitive position. Throughout the 1980s, the message to business was that fewer rules led to greater prosperity. I am afraid that that dogmatic approach to the economy ruled out useful Government intervention of the kind that has assisted our competitors.

It was hoped that in the labour market the agenda of deregulation would reduce labour costs and improve Britain's ability to compete. It is certainly true that our wages have fallen compared with those in other European countries. Even the Secretary of State for Employment now accepts that Britain cannot compete simply on low wages. Wages rates in the newly industrialised countries are often 50 per cent. lower than ours and unless we are all prepared to take cuts of 50 per cent. or more in our standard of living—that is what is implied—to hope to compete on wage levels is pure pie in the sky.

Whenever we asked the Government to tell us what they felt minimum wages should be, their answer was always the same: "Whatever the market demands. People will price themselves into jobs." The Secretary of State for Employment now tells us:

> "Low-wage economies present formidable competition. Their wages are so much lower than ours that we cannot hope to compete by driving down our wage levels."

We have heard a lot about U-turns in the newspapers and in the House this evening. As a U-turn, that is breathtaking from the person who, above any other, has talked about the need for people to price themselves into employment. He now says that we cannot hope to compete with the low levels obtaining in other countries. Is not it remarkable what responsibility brings to people? The Secretary of State made those comments to the Institute of Personnel Management. It is interesting that once Ministers understand the subject they soon start to trim the cloth a little.

What the Secretary of State for Employment said represented almost a triumph of the virtue of good management over political ideology, and that is very welcome. As the Opposition know, it is true that cost alone does not make an economy competitive. Innovators seek a quality work force, with high skills and team work, who can make quality products. Successful British companies all recognise that competitive advantage relies on investment, innovation and training.

The Government, who have deregulated British industry, cannot credibly offer something different. There is nothing in their tool box to suggest that they have anything different to offer. Despite the fine words of the Secretary of State for Employment, the policies of his Government foster short-termism, which destroys the long-term relationships between investors, management and the work force which are necessary to encourage investment.

[Mr. Ken Purchase]

Investment, of course, has been another theme of the Tories. "How successful we are", they say, "we attract more inward investment than any other European country." I do not doubt that that is so. As we advertise ourselves across the European continent as a country of low wages and low costs, it is hardly surprising that we attract some inward investment, which has been running at about £9 billion per annum.

That is only half the story. The other half is that outward investment has been running at an annual rate of about £18 billion. That leaves, in my humble estimation, a net shortfall of about £9 billion between income and expenditure—not a very good record. Much of the inward investment has been made merely to acquire shares. Has the Rover-BMW deal produced one more car? Not yet, but we are told to wait and see.

British industry is now littered with foreign holdings. Profits generated by the work force are being exported to the country of origin, from where the capital is gained. Britain lags behind every G7 country on the scale of investment. More than 29 per cent. of Japan's gross domestic product is reinvested in its infrastructure and industry. In the mid-range, even Italy reinvests 21 per cent., but the UK lags well behind—bottom of the table. The average level of GDP invested in Britain is 17.6 per cent—more than 12 per cent. less than the Japanese.

The lack of investment has, of course, led to British industry falling behind. We have also declined in innovation. We have specialised and have been very good at, for example, formula 1 racing and—I say with tongue in cheek—arms production, but we have failed to produce the mass products that would have made Britain a real leader in new technology.

Britain should be able to capitalise on the undoubted talents of its people and prevent the loss of our innovations to our competitors. One of the themes of our history is that we have invented—we have had the brain-wave and have done the brainstorming—but have had to go to overseas entrepreneurs to launch our products on the market.

Having looked at that side of the equation—the macro side, broadly speaking—I shall consider some of the micro issues, especially those affecting small firms. As hon. Members have expressed an opinion on the matter, I was very disappointed to find no mention in the Queen's Speech of the recovery of debt by small and medium-sized companies from large companies. Last weekend, the black country witnessed the failure of Bean Industries and the Reliant motor car company—I know that it produced only a wee three-wheeler, but it was the only remaining British car company and it went down the pan this weekend. Part of the reason for the failure was, according to the Bean company, that it had not been paid on time by its debtors. It is an important problem that must be tackled, and it could be tackled on the basis of a British standard along with a statutory right for industry.

Small companies do not always have access to finance. Time and again, we find that relatively small amounts of money—up to £150,000—are not available to small companies. The loan guarantee scheme, for which I applaud the Government, has simply not been taken up, mainly because the banks believe that its setting-up costs are too high and often because the premium that they levy on the interest rate is too high for a small company to bear. The irony is that the greater the risk the company has to take—usually with the owner's own money—the higher the interest rate the bank wants and the more certain it is that the company will not be able to keep to the schedule of payments.

In an attempt to offer proper funding to small and medium-sized companies in the west midlands, Midland bank and West Midlands Electricity have got together to start a small investment fund, which they are having managed for them. It is providing loans of up to £150,000. I commend that on the basis that utilities throughout the country could be required to pay into regional industrial development funds—perhaps managed by finance houses, banks or whatever—and have their tax remitted at a level commensurate with the amount of the surplus, windfall profits that they were prepared to put into regional development funds. Those utilities would benefit themselves because there is not a company on the market that does not need a supply of electricity or water, so there is a self-interest element. I hope that, at some stage, we shall consider that in depth and quite seriously.

Training for business is also important. The focus is now on skill training. We had such a focus in the 1960s and 1970s, but it was lost in the early 1980s. At last something is now being done to bring a new focus to skill training.

On many occasions, people with excellent skills and a good product know nothing about business. Such people very quickly experience difficulties. We need a system in which business skills can be taught to the smallest companies, comprising three or four people, as well as the largest companies.

When asked whether we should copy the American system whereby MBAs are available in every down-town university, Sir John Harvey-Jones said that he would be very pleased if his employees could read a balance sheet let alone obtain an MBA. I believe that business skills in smaller companies in Britain leave rather a lot to be desired. In that regard, I want schemes that will assist.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) revealed her interest in science and technology. Even if it is simply a sandwich course in science and technology training, instruction should be given in business principles so that the arguments that need to be made in the boardroom for product development can be made with the force with which they are usually made only by accountants and the legal profession.

There is so much to be done. The Queen's Speech must be seen as a miserable disappointment because it fails to recognise Britain's big problems in terms of its world relationships and competitiveness and because of its lack of attention to the detail and micro matters which, alone, can make Britain competitive.

9.6 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): My right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) laid

about himself today to some good effect, but the President of the Board of Trade was over-sanguine; he tried to make his brick, but there was no straw for it.

There is no shred of policy in the Queen's Speech on British manufacturing industry. There is no Cabinet policy to promote, assist and develop Britain's remaining manufacturing industries. The glaring inadequacy in the Queen's Speech is that no thought is paid to tomorrow or the next century. There is no thought, plan, strategy or consideration of the needs of Britain's manufacturing industries.

As the new century hurtles towards us, the future of our nation and of our manufacturing must be defined as serious for as long as the Government are not prepared to produce plans, proposals and strategies. Without manufacturing, there will be no wealth, and without wealth we will not be able to sustain in the next century the welfare state as we now know it.

Having said that, I take issue with the President of the Board of Trade. I seek his active intervention in an industrial problem facing my constituency. It relates to a company called Raytheon, which is a worldwide conglomerate. Raytheon has decided to move 900 jobs in the aerospace industry in my constituency to Wichita in Kansas. That has perplexed and greatly appalled my constituents and I look to the Government, even at this late stage, to intervene. Ideally, the President should go to the Wichita headquarters of Raytheon and argue our case with the company's chairman.

The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) raised an issue that I have raised consistently in the House. It is of the utmost importance to Wales and to the north-west. Our problem relates to the decision of the British Aerospace board actively to canvas the sale of the corporate jet division of British Aerospace. It approached Raytheon, which saw a bargain and made the sale. A British Minister with responsibility for aerospace sanctioned the sale, and now my constituents are in a predicament. Time is running out, and we need intervention by the President of the Board of Trade and the Prime Minister.

Tomorrow, I shall take a small delegation to the United States embassy. We will plead with the American ambassador to intervene and persuade the company that it has made the wrong decision and that it should retain the 900 jobs in my constituency, where the great, world-beating, competitive twin-engined corporate jet should remain in production.

I emphasise that the Raytheon issue, although it might be called scandalous and unjust, highlights the problems from which Britain suffers when the Government, despite sanctioning the sale, will not face their responsibilities and will not support manufacturing in a meaningful way.

Before the end of the year, the Government will probably place an order with another American company, Lockheed, for 20 Hercules aircraft. At the end of this century, it surely cannot make sense for the British Government to place an order with an American aircraft company while sanctioning the loss of 900 jobs and the loss of production of a jet aircraft. It cannot make sense for those jobs to be taken by the United States. That is offensive to my constituents.

The issue is complicated further because my constituency is an aerospace constituency. At the moment, 2,300 of my constituents make European airbus wings. They are desperate for the Government to place an order for the future large aircraft, but, by the end of the year, there will be orders for 20 or more Hercules aircraft. At the same time, the Government will permit an American company to take from my constituency 900 jobs and a complete production process that is part of the great British aerospace industry. That cannot be right.

The President of the Board of Trade is present. I have said that I want his active intervention. I want him to journey to the United States, go to the Raytheon boardroom and insist that the chairman, Mr. Dennis Picard, reverses the board's decision. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to intervene and tell me whether he can offer any assistance to my constituents. In recent months, his Department has been of great assistance to me, as have his Ministers. So serious is my constituents' predicament that I beg him to intervene at the last minute to save not only my constituents' jobs but the aerospace industry.

We cannot allow any more of our great aerospace industry to be whittled away; it must have assistance. It needs cash for research and development and an order for the future large aircraft. It needs the intervention of the President of the Board of Trade. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to say that he will intervene and insist that Raytheon reverses its decision.

As there is no active, urgent intervention by the President, I suggest that the Gracious Speech is seriously flawed. It has no plan, no strategy and no proposals for British manufacturing. As long as members of the Cabinet are prepared to opt for day-to-day short-termism the future of British manufacturing will be very bleak indeed.

9.13 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I pay tribute to the work of my predecessor as shadow Education Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), to the listening that she did and to the success that she enjoyed, as shown by the fact that the former Secretary of State for Education left his post in July after one of the least-ever satisfactory contributions from a Cabinet full of people with least-ever satisfactory contributions.

The contrast between what has happened over the past six years in education and what the country needed is a sad reminder of the Government's lack of direction. Tonight I thank my hon. Friends for their efforts to bring home in this debate the truth of what is happening to our manufacturing industry, our skills and our education service. Is that service equipping us for the challenges of the 21st century; is it providing sufficient special needs education in our schools?

One word that is not mentioned anywhere in the entire Queen's Speech this year—there is not even a hint of it—is education. Despite what the Prime Minister said at the 1993 Conservative party conference and despite his eulogy to nursery education only six weeks ago, there was not a word about education, training or skills in the Gracious Speech. The Government are not committed to

[Mr. David Blunkett]

the necessary investment for lifelong learning or for improving the chances for young and old alike to make a contribution to our future.

It ills behoves the Secretary of State for Education to accuse me of doing U-turns, as she had the audacity—nay, the political effrontery—to do yesterday on "Breakfast with Frost". The Government, and the Secretary of State, have done nothing but perform somersaults for the past 12 months—over the Post Office, over the national curriculum and over their favourite ideological experiment, grant-maintained schools. They have been doing double flips when taking policy or ideological decisions. The Secretary of State has crossed the motorway barrier and is driving on the left-hand side of the road—erratically and out of control, but still moving over to our side of the road. The super-highway of which the President of the Board of Trade spoke is now being travelled along in our direction.

The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) offered the national curriculum as an example of how the Government were implementing their policies. Let us take the 1992 Tory manifesto. In fact, anyone can take it, because virtually none of it has been implemented. Certainly the ideological thrust that the Tories inherited from the former Prime Minister has not been carried through. It said:

"We will complete the introduction of the national curriculum offering 10 subjects at a nationally defined standard—English, mathematics, science, history, geography, technology, art, music, PE and, in secondary schools, a foreign language."

Anyone who knows anything about education knows that what was announced two weeks ago represented a complete volte-face by the Secretary of State, who capitulated after an ideological experiment that made children guinea pigs in the laboratory. It also failed the nation. Time and again those in the profession, in the Labour party and in local government had pleaded with the Government not to implement the curriculum in the way that they intended.

As for the commitment to testing, the manifesto said:

"Regular and straightforward tests will be in place for all seven, 11 and 14 year olds by 1994."

We know what has happened on tests. I welcome the decision that future tests and assessments will have equal weight. I welcome the fact that common sense has prevailed on balance and consensus and on the way in which standards can be achieved and quality attained if those who are committed to national education and those who are teaching in the classroom and the laboratory work together.

What about the Government's commitment on grant-maintained schools? Targets were set, there were commitments in the White Paper and it was said that, by now, almost all the 3,000 secondary schools would be grant maintained. It was believed that a substantial number of pupils in primary education would be in grant-maintained schools. Let us look at the reality. Nationally, 8 per cent. of pupils are in grant-maintained schools and 80 per cent. of secondary schools remain within the local education authority fold. The experiment has failed. It is a sideshow that is completely irrelevant to the future of our children and of education.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman is making quite a point about grant-maintained schools. What is his party's policy on grant-maintained schools? Will it leave them where they are or take them back into LEAs? What is Labour's policy on education? We should like to know.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not surprised that a Conservative Member wants to know our education policies because Conservatives have certainly abandoned all theirs. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) may be interested in the commitment to grant-maintained schools of the previous Prime Minister, now Baroness Thatcher. She said, in a press conference on 25 June 1987:

"Schools which opt out will have precisely the same budget as they would have had under the LEA. They certainly will have more latitude"—

that is an interesting word—

"as to how they deal with it."

That is to say, how they deal with the money. What does the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth have to say about the way in which that promise has been broken? In August 1991, the present Prime Minister said:

"We have made no secret of the fact that grant-maintained schools get preferential treatment in allocating grants to capital expenditure."

We are against preferential treatment for schools. We favour equity. We are against some children getting preference over others and some children in some schools being given either extra capital or revenue resources that give them an advantage over others. We are against unequal access to schools, with schools choosing pupils rather than pupils and parents being able to choose schools. We are against inequity wherever it exists, and that is why we oppose grant-maintained status.

As I have said, in debating education, I will talk to those working in, and currently committed to, grant-maintained schools to win them over so that they enter the fold of a wider community of education which offers real chance and opportunity to children from all backgrounds and in all neighbourhoods and situations. If I can win them over, so be it.

I make no bones about the fact that we oppose the Government's ideological payment to grant-maintained schools, the bribing of such schools. We shall seek an equitable education system for the future so that parents will not be bribed any more. They now understand the situation. The subject of Monmouth West school was raised at the last Education Question Time. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said that videos had been supplied at public expense to every household because the first time round the parents had not voted for grant-maintained status. In other words, they had not followed the ideological line and had to be given a second opportunity, at which public money provided them with the latest technology to get them to change their minds.

The efforts were in vain because, on the second ballot, 70 per cent. of parents voted against grant-maintained status—some 10 percentage points more than had voted against it the first time round. I recommend that the Government either get a better video or link up to the cable network advocated by the President of the Board of Trade this afternoon.

The truth is that, in every sector, the Government have either capitulated or admitted defeat. For example, on nursery education the Conservative party conference took the great decision that four-year-olds would be provided with nursery schooling, and that has been trumpeted ever

since. Let us examine exactly what the Secretary of State now says, and the problems that she is having—not surprisingly, because at a conference fringe meeting she said that she was having difficulty winning over her colleagues to the notion of investing in early education.

The right hon. Lady recently did an interview with David Frost on the programme to which I referred earlier. It was very revealing. David Frost asked her:

"Do you agree that you can do it by the year 2000—place every four-year-old whose parents want it in nursery education?"

The right hon. Lady said:

"I'm not putting a date on it."

David Frost said:

"The cost—£400 million, £2 billion? What do you think the figure is? It's new money. How much?"

The right hon. Lady replied:

"I'm not putting a figure on it."

Then, David Frost said:

"A universal primary school place for four-year-olds—that's still an aspiration?"

The right hon. Lady said:

"Early years education for children below the statutory school age, that's what we're to provide."

That is not nursery education for four-year-olds, never mind three-year-olds. It is a change in the policy and a change in the commitment. That is not surprising as it was only a year ago that the Under-Secretary of State for Schools declared that it was impossible to provide all three and four-year-olds with nursery education. Of course, not long before that, the previous Education Minister, Michael Fallon, declared at a Carlton club dinner that it was not even desirable. It is not a U-turn; it is a series of U-turns—a complete capitulation in terms of the previous agenda and, now, of the new agenda. Everything that the Government have said on education is being reversed.

I shall take head-on the issue of league tables—the crude, flawed league tables; the sugar beet we would not put in our tea until it had been refined. What is the Secretary of State now saying? It is that perhaps, on their own, they are not so good after all. What is the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority about to say? It is—the right hon. Lady has accepted this—that added-value league tables and improvement indices are the way forward, not crude figures provided at a national level. She has even accepted—I congratulate her—that breaking down the national league tables into local authority areas and packaging them by alphabetical order is the best way to deal with the crudity of the information currently available, and that is what will be published tomorrow.

Let us be clear about the fact that the issue for children is standards and achievement in the classroom; it is opportunity at every level and in every part of the country—the opportunity to get the first foot on the ladder of lifelong learning. It is the opportunity to have the education for which, in the past, only the privileged could pay. That is why we will root out mediocrity wherever it exists. We want inner-city children to enjoy the opportunities that others have taken for granted, and we want to lift standards in every school. If that means intervening and using the information and drawing the comparisons provided by modern technology so as to spread the best to the rest, we shall do it.

We shall ensure that good example is spread from one school to another. Where a school is failing, we shall establish whether prior attainment in nursery and primary school has affected the progress of that school's pupils. We shall determine also whether the gender gap is affected by social and economic circumstances or by achievable intervention in the classroom.

We shall make sure that improvement indices tell us how schools are changing and improving their performance, so that we can reward them, changing the funding formula under local management of schools to help schools that are deeply disadvantaged. They will then be able to help children who are in difficulties, be it because of their language or because of the high incidence of special needs.

We shall make sure that no school can choose pupils simply because of their academic background and success, and that no school can exclude a child because of the cost of meeting his or her special educational needs. That is why we favour comprehensive education and reject the crudity of past league tables, which used the market and not intervention to punish and to denigrate rather than to lift and to bring about greater achievement.

At the heart of our policies is using information to bring about change and improvement, and providing the ability to use intelligent information to enable those in the classroom to do their job. We shall work with teachers and give them the backing that will ensure that the ideological experiments of the past few years are a forgotten nightmare. Those experiments to implement, revise and further implement the national curriculum alone cost £744 million, and brought constant turmoil and change that affected the life chances of many children in recent years.

If one views the whole vista of our education, one can see why it has been failing compared with industrial competitors in every other part of the world. Eighty per cent. of Germany's 18-year-olds are in some form of education or qualification training, compared with 43 per cent. in Britain. That is a disgraceful record, and to catch up with other countries that have already invested in the future will be an enormous task. That will be achieved not by turning college against college or by establishing super leagues at universities, but by ensuring that we get the best out of the investment that we make and design the system to be accountable and accessible, and by offering the diversity that meets the challenge of a learning society for the future.

We do not want a system that results in business ethics that turn colleges and universities into places that some people believe are commercial enterprises—as was clearly the case at Derby college, where the buying of French restaurants and the purchase of night clubs despoiled and undermined confidence in public investment and accountability. That is true whether it is St. Philip's college in Birmingham, or the situation that arose in Huddersfield, which my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) vigorously revealed.

We want new probity in the education system. I moved from health to education only to find that the same problems of nepotism and of potential corruption are raising their heads in the education service because the same market-driven attitudes exist there as in the NHS of the 1990s. In the week of youth awareness—a week when we should be turning our minds to how we can help to provide a confident future of citizenship and achievement

[Mr. Blunkett]

for our young people—it is time that we had a positive agenda for the 750,000 young people who are not in a training scheme, who are not in further or higher education and who do not have a job.

The Government have abandoned 750,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 25. Those 750,000 illustrate why investment in education and training is an investment for our economy and for social cohesion. The two go hand in hand and lead to the ability of people to earn their living, to use their enterprise and to take advantage of the information technology explosion that faces Britain and the rest of the world. They must have the ability to provide for themselves and for their families—independence and interdependence going hand in hand.

The Labour party's agenda is one for the future. It is focused on how lifelong learning can be achieved for everybody, not for the few. It should no longer be the privilege of those who went to public school or those who previously were able to get into university. We want to see the opening up of education as a central tool of the next Labour Government in implementing our economic and social policies. That Government will ensure that investment is directed to giving everyone the life chance that we wish to extend to him or her, wherever the individual comes from and whatever his or her background. Their future is assured with us.

9.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): We have had an extremely wide-ranging debate. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade opened the debate by reminding the House of the Government's successes over the past decade. He made it clear that higher levels of skills and better qualifications are the keys to the long-term competitiveness of the United Kingdom.

In reply, the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), rather disappointingly, demonstrated that, first, he had not been in his Opposition Front-Bench job for too long and, secondly, that he prefers to rely for his material on leaked letters and press cuttings rather than on facts—for example, that the economy is in good shape, that output and productivity have increased, that unemployment is lower, that exports are at record levels and that inward investment has safeguarded 600,000 jobs since 1979.

On privatisation, one wonders when the flip-flop, to take the memorable phrase of the right hon. Member for Copeland, will occur within the Labour party. He failed to say that in 1979 the taxpayer paid £35 million a week in subsidies to the same industries that are now returning more than £50 million a week to the Exchequer. The right hon. Gentleman omitted all those facts from his contribution.

Other colleagues, thank goodness, made more constructive contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) talked of the importance to competitiveness of sound basic education. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) spoke of the importance of vocational qualifications. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) emphasised the importance of choice and diversity in education to produce quality, a cause to which Opposition Members are not yet converted but, I think, will be.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) was right to draw attention to developments in technology and the explosion of associated knowledge. The Government will shortly publish their response to the Trade and Industry Select Committee's report on fibre optic networks. In the meantime, I can point out to the hon. Gentleman that the United Kingdom has the world lead in the curriculum use of information technology, backed with cash and teacher training.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) should be reassured that developments in nursery education do not need legislation. They just need the commitment of new money, or new places, which I am happy to confirm to him and to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett).

The hon. Member for North Devon also confessed himself unable to see the link between a successful economy and education. But my hon. Friends, whom I thank for their constructive contributions to the debate, do see that link. Conservative Members have always understood that education is crucial to the competitive future of this country. It is on the skills of the work force that the economic success of the nation will depend in the 21st century, and that is why over the past decade the Government have introduced a profound and comprehensive programme of reform across all sectors of education. It is a reform the nature of which the hon. Member for Brightside has clearly demonstrated that he does not understand, but a reform whose benefits the rest of us can now see: a doubling over the past 10 years of the proportion of young people gaining five or more good GCSEs or the equivalent vocational qualifications.

Mr. Wilson: For the third time in the few minutes in which she has been speaking, the Secretary of State has referred to the past decade or 10 years. Is there something unspeakable about the first five years, or is it just a convenient point from which to extract bogus statistics?

Mrs. Shephard: I am very happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that all the improvements date over the past 15 years. He will know perfectly well why I choose that date and that statistic. I am sorry to say that the contributions from Opposition Members this evening will reassure no one that things would be better if ever there were a chance for the Labour party to come to power, which there most certainly will not be.

Some 73 per cent. of 16-year-olds are now choosing to stay in full-time education, and the great majority of the rest are continuing with their education and training part time. Nearly one third of 18 to 19-year-olds are now going on to university, and a higher proportion are successfully completing their degrees than in any other European country.

In schools, colleges and universities, the emphasis on standards, put in place by this Government, is working. We have a success story to tell and it is welcomed across the board by business and industry. But, as my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade pointed out earlier today, our competitors are not standing still, and our businesses know only too well that resting on today's success risks courting tomorrow's disaster.

I see three major challenges: first, to raise the standards of attainment of the less able, who otherwise may be ill equipped to play a full and productive part in our society; secondly, to embody a culture of life-long learning and development across the whole of the population; and, thirdly, to ensure that the new system of vocational qualifications, long overdue in this country, takes root and flowers alongside our more traditional educational routes.

That is why we have insisted in our education reforms on higher standards across the board, successful, effective vocational qualifications and ever-closer links between education, business and industry. *[Interruption.]* I thank Opposition Members for their close attention to my every gesture. I am delighted with the attention; I wonder how well they may have dined.

As for standards, first and foremost has been the establishment of the national curriculum, which has put in place a structured framework that is long overdue. The House will know that I have accepted in full the recommendations of Ron Dearing and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority; the slimmed-down national curriculum will remove the work overload from pupils and teachers, strip out unnecessary bureaucracy and give teachers more freedom to exercise their professional judgment.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the right hon. Lady tell the House who was responsible for the overload in the first place?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall be happy to do so. I think the hon. Gentleman will understand that, when establishing something as new as the national curriculum—and we needed it; the French curriculum has been in place for 200 years—and asking subject specialists to contribute what they think it should contain, Ministers are bound to suffer from over-enthusiasm. That is what happened in this instance. I accept that the national curriculum was overloaded, but the Office for Standards in Education has made it clear that—even in its original form—the curriculum raised standards from the outset, and that it continues to do so.

It was right to note the overload and the concerns of teachers, however. I feel that the fact that teachers now have more freedom to exercise their judgment constitutes a vote of confidence in their professionalism, and that is how they have seen it.

Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils, with the emphasis on the basics of English and maths, will clearly help to continue the improvement. Moreover, the curriculum's effectiveness will be closely monitored by means of rigorous tests in English, maths and science for all pupils aged seven, 11 and 14. We shall have an annual check on schools' progress with the arrival of performance tables: as the hon. Member for Brightside said, this year's will be issued tomorrow. We shall also have regular four-yearly cycles of inspection of all schools, instituted by Ofsted. With the curriculum, test and exam results, performance tables and Ofsted reports, there will be copious information about schools for all of us—but especially for employers and parents. With that wealth of information, no school or college should be able to get away with a shoddy performance.

The hon. Member for Brightside was clearly very upset by his experiences on "Breakfast with Frost". As his right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland said, he performed a political flip-flop; he declared that he was a convert to higher education standards and performance tables. He and his hon. Friends have come late to the party. It is a pity that, over the past 15 years, they have merely sought to obstruct our drive for higher quality in education; they have opposed the national curriculum, tests and the establishment of Ofsted and better teacher training.

Mr. McLoughlin: Many of us were very surprised and, indeed, heartened by the conversion experienced by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett).

A number of examining boards are currently seeking examiners for the national curriculum. Does that concern my right hon. Friend? I fear that the boards may appoint members of the National Union of Teachers to supervise examinations and mark papers. Bearing in mind the NUT's opposition to the exams involved, does my right hon. Friend agree that such people should not invigilate?

Mrs. Shephard: That may be a dilemma for the NUT.

Opposition Members have sought to obstruct every improvement that we have sought to put into place in every sector. The hon. Member for Brightside still shows no sign of fully understanding the nature of the education reforms that the Government have introduced. Grant-maintained schools, however, will be the litmus test. We shall find out whether political flip-flops are performed in relation to policies for more variety, more choice and more diversity in the school sector.

Opposition Members have not shown much constructive enthusiasm for new developments in vocational education, which we have long needed in this country. We need vocational education of a quality equal to that of the academic route, putting job-specific NVQs and broad vocational GNVQs alongside traditional GCSE and GCE qualifications.

GNVQs have got off to a flying start. In just two years, the total number of GNVQ registrations has risen to almost 250,000. They are very popular and they are giving fresh motivation to students of all abilities. There is no room for complacency. The recent Ofsted and Further Education Funding Council reports confirm the high standards of GNVQs, but also emphasise the need to make them even more rigorous and more manageable for teachers. We shall ensure that work continues apace on an action plan that the Government announced in March. We have asked for it to be taken forward with renewed urgency because it is immensely important.

To achieve excellence in GNVQs, we must have constructive partnerships with employers—their active support and involvement is required. We need employer support for the pilot schemes, announced last week by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Education, for the new part 1 GNVQs. Those schemes provide an exciting opportunity for pupils aged 14 to 16 of all abilities to develop vocational skills. We must be confident that the new qualification commands broad acceptance, that it enables young people to achieve high standards and that it is manageable and deliverable by schools and teachers. That is why we have decided that from next year part 1 will be piloted, using the lessons that we have learnt from advanced GNVQs and that we have evaluated carefully, before we take final decisions about making it available to all secondary schools.

As I said, Opposition Members have performed a spectacular U-turn, finally accepting that standards matter and that it helps to be able to measure them. At this rate, can we assume that they will eventually also accept that

[Mrs. Shephard]

an education system needs diversity and choice to flourish? Time will tell. Time will also show whether they can sink their traditional dislike of business to endorse the importance of links between education and industry. The importance of that partnership and of choice and diversity is well illustrated by the technology colleges initiative. Fifty schools have been approved since February this year, covering about 45,000 pupils. More are coming forward all the time. They are particularly relevant to the debate because those schools are committed to raising their standards in technology, science and maths, subjects which, as the hon. Member for Brightside said, are vital to the success of our economy.

The initiative is a natural development of the city technology colleges programme launched in 1986 to provide more and better technology and science education for pupils in disadvantaged urban areas, those very areas that the hon. Member for Brightside says he cares so much about.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Will the right hon. Lady explain why Kingshurst city technology college was criticised in the Ofsted report for its technology teaching? Why is it that city technology colleges have a lower percentage of students achieving five or more grades of A to C than the average comprehensive?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to see the performance tables tomorrow. They will give the lie to the allegation that he has just made.

With unprecedented levels of private sector sponsorship and commitment, the CTCs are now well established. They have achieved some marvellous successes and innovations and some impressive results with their all-ability pupils. But, of course, that is what the Opposition cannot bear.

There have been other important developments in links between employers and education. We have adopted the employer-led national targets for education and training. Young people at 16 now have more choice of education and training options than ever. So it is particularly important that they make the right decisions to maximise their opportunities. That is why the Government are committed to providing high-quality careers education and guidance, which will help them to improve the match between the country's business needs and young people's skills and ensure a smooth transition from schools and colleges to the world of work. There will also be work experience for all young people before 16 and between 16 and 18, more teacher placements in business and industry and more local partnerships between education and business.

In all that, the role of employers is crucial. That is not much mentioned, it has to be said, by Opposition Members, but then they have traditional hostility to employers. We are working to secure the closest possible co-operation between colleges of further education and training and enterprise councils at national, regional and local level to ensure that college strategic plans take account of local labour market needs. That is being promoted by a new funding arrangement set out in the competitiveness White Paper, which provides a £300 million package to give young people and adults the skills that they and businesses need as we head towards the 21st century.

Mr. Blunkett: I have been confirmed tonight in my suspicion that the Secretary of State was put in place to bury education rather than to praise it. Perhaps the right hon. Lady will tell me what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Employment, who made it clear in August, shortly after his predecessor and the right hon. Lady's predecessor launched a White Paper, that his ambition as Chief Secretary and his programme as Secretary of State for Employment was to cut the training budget rather than to expand it.

Mrs. Shephard: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that my relationship with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is entirely constructive. We speak of nothing but training.

Higher numbers of students than ever are now moving on to higher education: one in three compared with one in eight in 1979. There has been a similar increase in further education. Nowhere can the welcome interface between education and industry be seen more clearly than in the innovative and developing work that is happening in higher and further education. Our task is now to ensure that the welcome increase in quantity is accompanied by even higher quality and that we encourage the innovation in those sectors that is essential to our continuing economic prosperity.

Of course, the Labour party does not have much interest in all that. Its policy paper published in July this year made no mention of higher education. Indeed, Labour's policies in further education, vocational training and higher education are few and far between. So far, all that the hon. Member for Brightside has said about the 16-to-19 age group is that it is a major challenge. The Government have been dealing with that challenge for the past 15 years and Labour has opposed us at every turn.

To disagree with our policies is one thing, but to show hapless disregard for the future of young people and their place in the economy is another. Yet that is what the Labour party has done. Labour Members have voted against every major measure designed to improve standards and quality in education. Their so-called "White Paper" on education was introduced last July by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who said that it had been based on "wholly exceptional consultation". It must have been very exceptional, since it did not include either the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) or the hon. Member for Brightside, who have lost no time since in rubbishing everything that the paper contained.

Will Labour come to understand that it is business and not Governments that creates wealth? I doubt it. The Government will continue to insist on high, measurable standards in education, wholehearted development of vocational further and higher education, and close and continuing co-operation with employers, business and industry to ensure that a well-educated population will produce a healthy and prosperous economy.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Thursday 24th November

(i) put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Deregulation (Procedure) not later than two hours after their commencement, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendments to the said Motion which she may have selected and which may then be moved;

(ii) put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to two and three-wheeled vehicles not later than one and a half hours after their commencement; and

(iii) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1994 not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon; and

(2) at the sitting on Monday 28th November put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the European Communities' 1995 Budget not later than one and a half hours after their commencement;

and the aforesaid Motions may be entered upon and proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITIONS

VAT on Fuel

10 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I beg to present a petition signed by 1,525 of my constituents on a day when the chief executive of British Gas saw his salary rise by £205,000 to a staggering £475,000. It reads as follows:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of the Citizens of York declares that the Government's decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in 1995 will place a heavy financial burden on pensioners and others on low incomes, which they will find hard to meet.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons votes down this proposed increase and legislates to fully compensate pensioners and others on low incomes for the 8 per cent. VAT already introduced.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

The Hon. Mrs. Fiona Rudd, 19 South Parade, York.

It is also signed by more than 1,500 other of my constituents.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Like my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley), I also rise on the subject of a petition about the increase of VAT on fuel. I am pleased to say that my petition is signed by no less than 6,300 people from one small part of Birmingham, Northfield and surrounding areas. The petition reads:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of Birmingham Northfield and Neighbouring areas

Declares that the decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in April 1995 breaks Conservative election promises and is unfair, hitting those who can least afford it.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons pass legislation to stop the increase in VAT on domestic fuel and power from going ahead.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

That petition has been signed by almost 10 per cent. of the constituency of Birmingham, Northfield.

To lie upon the Table.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I wish to present a petition from my constituents in Cambridge who are equally outraged about the decision of British Gas to raise the salaries of their own officers to the quite outrageous levels that we have seen over the past couple of days. The petition reads as follows:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of the Constituency of Cambridge

Declares that the decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in April 1995 breaks election promises and is unfair, hitting those who can least afford it.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons pass legislation to stop the increase in VAT on domestic fuel and power going ahead.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

Rosie Turner, 27 Leys Road, Cambridge.

It is also signed by 500 other of my constituents.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I have a petition from the constituents of Carrick,

[Mr. George Foulkes]

Cumnock and Doon Valley. As in the case of the petitions presented by my hon. Friends, my petition is not appropriate today just because of the obscene British Gas salary increases. I have been led to believe that, if the VAT increase goes ahead, the Chancellor has it in mind not to give an additional 50p compensation to pensioners, but to give only 25p, which makes it even more disgraceful.

That is why the constituents of Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley have asked me to present this petition, which declares:

the decision to increase VAT on fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in April 1995 breaks election promises and is unfair, hitting those who can least afford it.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons pass legislation to stop the increase in VAT on domestic fuel and power going ahead.

The petition is signed by Mary Garrett of 2 Drumsuy court, Coylton and by hundreds of other constituents of mine in Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. It is a great pleasure for me to join my colleagues in presenting a petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Like my hon. Friends, I share a concern today about British Gas salaries. This petition from the people of Delyn was drafted and signed before that decision, but it is equally valid today. The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of the People of Delyn constituency sheweth

That the Government plans to increase VAT on fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in April 1995. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House demand that in this November's Budget, the Chancellor stop this increase from going ahead. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition is signed by Beverley Bradley of 143 Windsor drive, Flint and by more than 1,000 others. In the past week, I have received 750 postcards with stamps on from constituents which show their real concern. They have not just signed petitions, but have sent cards back to their Member of Parliament. I am proud to present the petition today.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): This petition has been raised mainly by the Merseyside Pensioners Association. There are 7,000 signatures to add to the 7,000 already handed in to No. 10 Downing street today. The petition reads as follows:

To the House of Commons. The Petition of the citizens of the United Kingdom declares that the Government's decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in 1995 will place a heavy financial burden on pensioners and others on low incomes, which they will find hard to meet.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons votes down this proposed increase and legislates to fully compensate pensioners and others on low incomes for the 8 per cent. VAT already introduced.

Those people will also regard today's news as an outrage. They are quite aware of the way in which taxation has moved from direct taxation, which is fair, to indirect taxation of this sort, which undoubtedly bears most on the shoulders of the very poor. I agree with my constituents and others who have signed the petition. It is signed by W. Edwards of 78 Parkhurst road, Liverpool 11 and by 7,000 others.

To lie upon the Table.

Royal Marines School of Music, Deal

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10.8 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): In July this year, a tragedy befell my constituency. For many years, my constituency has had the Royal Marines school of music located within its boundaries. The 26,000 people of Deal have welcomed and loved the school, and have taken it very much into account as part of their normal lives. The proposal by the Government to close the Royal Marines school of music in April 1996 is not only a disaster but is regarded by many, including myself, as a disgrace. It is a wrong decision, and a wrong idea.

The tragedy comes about because there are effectively some three sites in Deal over some 42 acres of my constituency. There is a north barracks, a south barracks and an east barracks site. The site is under-utilised and has two large listed buildings. It has not really been given the attention that it should have been given over the years. There were some proposals some years back in the 1980s to have a combined school of music in Deal; a combined school of music which would have given Deal a strong, new lease of life as the centre of a defence school of music.

The bandsmen who are trained in Deal are commonly regarded as probably the best in the world. Our Royal Marines bandsmen, once trained, play on the royal yacht Britannia and support this country's export drives all over the world. They support the Queen and the royal family at major events. They are always called out whenever this country hosts the G7 conferences and other major conferences.

The bandsmen are trained in a unique way. They are trained on two instruments, which is not common in military music training. They are trained to perform in marching bands, concert bands, dance bands and in an orchestra. That level of training, which, as I said, is probably the highest in the world, costs money. There can be no escaping that if we want the sort of quality that the Royal Marines bandsmen have delivered.

There are strong feelings among the people of Deal that they want those bandsmen to continue to be trained at such a high quality, uninterrupted and not disjointed. Local school children are concerned. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister how he would have felt if he had had to go round his local schools recently and had talked to the schoolchildren. They asked me about the Royal Marine school of music. Eight-year-old girls came up to me and said, "What about the Royal Marines school of music and its future?" Also, business men in my constituency are concerned. Pensioners and the retired all feel strongly towards the Royal Marines school of music in the constituency.

In 1989, there was a terrible tragedy, of which my hon. Friend will be fully aware. It was the most outrageous abuse, the most cowardly attack, that has ever been seen on the mainland of the United Kingdom. The IRA planted a bomb—not aimed against people actively involved in military service, not aimed against people actively involved in the firing of weapons in this nation's defence, but aimed against people who played music. It also injured a number of civilians in my constituency.

The effect of that bomb was to cement even more closely the bonds between the people of Deal—the schoolchildren, the business men, the middle-aged, the pensioners and the retired—with the bandsmen of the Royal Marines.

It was an emotional occasion when the Royal Marines played on in my constituency and 11 spaces were left in the band for those who died, as the bandsmen walked through the constituency and through the town of Deal. It was an extremely emotive event. It was not surprising that many local organisations joined together to get 14,000 names on a petition to support the retention of the Royal Marines school of music in Deal.

The Royal Marines Association, the Deal Society, the Royal Naval Association, the Charter Trustees, the Mayor of Deal, the Burma Star Association, the local Rotary, the Deal Lions, the Deal chamber of trade, the Deal branch of the Men of Kent, the British Legion Downs band, the British Legion of St. Margaret's bay, the Deal Lionesses, the Inner Wheel of Deal and the Women's Institute of St. Margaret's Bay all joined together. Many other local businesses, including the Cinque Ports Music Company, also collected signatures. Many local restaurants, proprietors and customers contributed their signatures and organised the petition.

It was a petition of the people of Deal. It has also been supported by hundreds of letters from people in my constituency. I have passed those letters to the Ministry of Defence, and I thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for reading them.

It is not just the strong emotional ties that are important. The Royal Marines school of music is the largest employer in Deal. It may not be an enormous employer—with 250 people directly employed and probably 250 to 300 people employed indirectly—but it is the largest employer in a town of small employers. It is very important to the economy of Deal and to the economy of my constituency.

With regard to earlier proposals to examine military music, studies have shown that the figures were wrong. A study in 1986 by Ernst and Young showed that the figures were wrong. The figures constantly showed that Deal was the best place to have a combined school of music. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the figures once more.

There has been talk, which has gained much publicity, about a so-called cost of £300,000 for training Royal Marines bandsmen. That figure is not correct. It is arrived at simply by taking £6 million—the cost of Deal—and dividing it by 15. There are more than 15 trainees at the moment, and there would normally be more than 15. There could be more than 15 trainees if other military musicians were trained at Deal. Deal also has outputs other than just training bandsmen.

Existing bandsmen and trainee bandsmen are trained at Deal. We also run the library for the Royal Marines music service. That library does not just supply the Royal Marines with music: it also supplied the United States marines band when it came to commemorate the D-day landings. In front of President Clinton, Her Majesty the Queen, the Prime Minister, many lords and ladies and distinguished guests, the bandsmen played music supplied by the library at Deal.

[Mr. David Shaw]

Musicians at Deal have their instruments repaired by a very successful repair service. Deal also advises the Army bandsmen on how to purchase military instruments. As I understand it, the Army does not have a properly co-ordinated purchasing facility, while the Royal Marines do. That is all handled from Deal, and it is a cost and output at Deal.

I want to pay tribute to Councillor Paul Watkins, the local councillor for the area.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Needless to say, all Conservative Members greatly admire the fight that my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is putting up for his school of music in Deal. However, he referred to comparative costs. I remind him that, on 20 June in this House, the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), told me that the costs of training at Deal were £72,000 per man a year, while at the Royal Military school of music, Kneller Hall, in my constituency, it cost £16,000 a year to train a bandsman. As Kneller Hall is one of the glories of our country, I hope that my hon. Friend will not do anything which would be detrimental to Kneller Hall.

Mr. Shaw: I must pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) for managing to keep Kneller Hall open for so long. Having regard to the fact that aircraft noise interferes with music practising, I understand that there are no rooms for musicians to practise in at Kneller Hall. They must practise in their bedrooms, whereas in Deal we have wonderful rooms. The property value of Kneller Hall is £10 million to £15 million, which would be of enormous benefit to taxpayers.

Nevertheless, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham for his skill in keeping Kneller Hall open for so long, when all the evidence suggests that the Army bandsmen should move from Kneller Hall and go to Deal, where they would be most welcome.

Several serious questions about the consultative document must be raised. We have to ask whether the comparative costs between Deal, Lymnestone and Portsmouth are accurate. We have asked for more information. Kent county council and Dover district council support the east Kent initiative to investigate costs thoroughly, but we need more information. Ernst and Young, a leading firm of accountants and economic consultants, has been retained to investigate costs.

We question the security costs at Deal. They are enormous because of the three sites. Electronic security such as that which hon. Members have for their offices would enable much manpower to be released. For obvious reasons, I do not want to discuss the extent of manpower that can be released in the public arena, but it could be substantial. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look again at those costs.

I question whether building maintenance costs will be as low as suggested at Lymnestone and Portsmouth. No cost has been put in the consultative document for maintaining the two listed buildings at Deal if they cannot be sold. They are not easily saleable. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister also to say what he proposes for the graveyard and the memorial garden at Deal. They cannot be swept aside.

My hon. Friend the Minister must examine the cost of covenants to maintain the listed buildings and consider whether they would result in a negative value on the site at Deal. If the Deal site is sold, my hon. Friend might receive negative proceeds—that is, he might have to pay somebody to take it off the Ministry's hands. As I have said, Kneller Hall might have a value of £10 million to £15 million.

In the 1980s, the Government felt that the employment issue could be considered. Why has that changed? Why are the Government not considering the worsening employment in my constituency? On Saturday, a constituent came to my surgery who had tried to get on the self-employment start-up scheme. He was not able to do so, because there is not enough money under the self-employment start-up scheme for my area.

I know that it is not the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Minister, but how can the Ministry of Defence be allowed to close something that employs so many people if not enough money is being put into the Department of Employment programmes to get new businesses off the ground in my constituency? If employment was a major consideration in the 1980s, it must be a consideration today. We cannot allow the channel tunnel and the single European market to have a negative impact on employment in my constituency. The Ministry of Defence is ignoring those issues.

What is happening to the defence intelligence centre at Ashford, which, it is understood, is likely to close? I hope that it will be moved to Deal, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take every step to make sure that it does. That would provide employment in my constituency.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence wrote to Conservative party chairmen on 14 July, saying that the defence changes were being brought about in order to make

"the most effective use of the money voted in the Defence budget by Parliament."

He went on to say that the most effective use of the money could best be carried out by

"moving troops from expensive city centre sites to vacant MOD owned sites with little capital value, and replacing three single service establishments by one joint facility."

I ask my hon. Friend to make sure that what our right hon. and learned Friend said to Conservative party chairmen on 14 July is implemented—move the troops, move the military schools out of expensive city centre sites, and move them to one joint facility with little capital value. Let us ensure that letters written to Conservative party chairmen and Government policy are consistent.

We must examine the alternatives. There is a proposal in my constituency for a national centre for band studies to be based at Deal. It is an imaginative proposal by Lieutenant Colonel John Ware, a former director of music at Deal. We will bring my hon. Friend the details. I want his assurance that he will look at it. It would involve creating a new centre for band studies on the south barracks. It complies with the Ministry's requirements to

move ultimately to civilianisation. We need my hon. Friend's support for this. I hope he will ensure that it is properly scrutinised.

I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend has to say.

10.24 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on finally securing this debate and on the persuasive, clear and moving way in which he presented the greater part of his case. I shall try to deal with as many of his points as I can in the time available.

This debate will most certainly not be the final opportunity for him to put his constituents' case during the formal consultation period, which runs until 16 December. I immediately give him the assurance that he sought—that we shall consider whatever papers he presents us with. I would, however, urge him to get them to us as soon as possible, because we intend the consultation period to end, as I say, on 16 December.

The consultation document issued by my Department was intended to provide an overall resumé of our proposal—not a volume containing every minute detail. As such, it forms the basis for further inquiry and discussion within the consultation period. My hon. Friend has taken this up on behalf of his constituents with great vigour.

It is our policy and practice to ensure that in putting forward proposals for consultation we are as open as humanly possible.We aim to provide all the details that my hon. Friend might reasonably wish to have on the rationale for our proposals to transfer the training of Royal Marine bandsmen from Deal, and on the figure work involved.

I feel that I must, however, reiterate the background to our proposals for relocation. Before I do, it would be most remiss of me if I were not to recall the long and historical ties that the Royal Marines and the school of music have with Deal.

Deal's association with the Royal Marines goes back to the second Dutch war when on 28 October 1664 an Order in Council called for 1,200 men to be "raysed". These troops, the Duke of York and Albany's Maritime Regiment of Foot, were the forerunners of the Royal Marines of today.

Deal's particular association with royal naval music began in 1930. In 1950 musical training for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines was concentrated at Deal when the divisional bands were amalgamated with the Royal Navy school of music, which was rechristened the Royal Marines school of music.

Since that time, successive generations of recruits have passed through the depot at Deal, and I know that all have experienced tremendous support from the people of the town. This close relationship was epitomised in the granting, in 1945, of the honorary freedom of the borough of Deal to the Royal Marines.

Since 1981, Deal has effectively been home solely to the Royal Marines school of music, housing only students and teachers of music and their support staff.

The fact that there were no operational units located in Deal made the bombing of the school by the provisional IRA on 22 September 1989 all the more cowardly and outrageous. The House, I know, shares with me the continuing great sadness we all feel at the death of 11 fine Royal Marines as a result of the bombing. The House will also recall the exemplary support and affection afforded to the Royal Marines during those unhappy days by the people of Deal.

Given these very close links between Deal and the Royal Marines, and the mutual respect shown by one to the other, it is no surprise that our proposal to transfer the school of music has been greeted with dismay locally. I know that my hon. Friend truly represents the feelings and emotions of his constituents in his campaign for the school to remain.

However, I must stress that which my hon. Friend knows—that there is absolutely no question of our singling out either the Royal Marines or Deal. Our proposals to transfer musical training must be seen within the context of the changes in the international defence environment, which have led to alterations in our force levels and structures, and have had to take account of the present and future commitments likely to be faced by our forces.

My hon. Friend known as well as anyone that reductions in the size of the armed forces following "Options for Change" had to be accompanied by equal or perhaps greater savings in support and headquarters. We had good reason to believe that even further efficiencies could be achieved in the support area, allowing the maximum proportion of the defence budget to be spent on the fighting capability of our armed forces.

It was in this context that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence initiated the defence costs study "Front Line First". It was quite right that, as part of that scrutiny of the way in which my Department supports the front line, we should look at the provision of military music and musical training.

It was made abundantly clear that there were to be no sacred cows in the examination of the costs of support activities. In his role as a vigorous guardian of the public purse, my hon. Friend will know about the quite extraordinary success of the defence costs study, and the benefit that it will bring to the front line.

Much has been said about a possible future location for a tri-service school of music. Earlier internal studies had recommended rationalisation of this sort, and had identified some suitable locations, including Deal. But that form of rationalisation is not what we are planning now. The recent studies have pointed to the more radical approach of placing basic musician training with civilian schools, and we expect these changed methods to secure greater economies while maintaining the highest standards of military music. That is the basis of the proposal set out in the consultative document.

Our thoughts about moving towards a bursary training scheme for our musicians fall exactly within the parameters of "Front Line First". We intend to preserve the excellent standards of our service musicians, but to train them in a more cost-effective way. Therefore, we are starting a three-year pilot scheme for training all military musicians at civilian colleges. If this proves as successful as we expect, by the turn of the century no basic training school of music will be needed anywhere.

Even on a contingency basis, in the unlikely event that we might need to revert to in-house arrangements for service musician training, we see no financial case for

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

keeping the Royal Marine school of music at Deal in the interim. I regret that the simple fact is that there is no reason to forgo the massive savings which we will achieve by not delaying a decision on Deal for another five years.

When a potentially highly emotive issue such as this one on Deal is debated, it is vital that the House does not lose sight of the essential facts. I shall outline some of those facts about Deal.

As my hon. Friend knows much better than anyone here, the establishment consists of three separate, predominantly 19th-century barracks covering 41 acres, which are surrounded by more than 3 km of security fence.The establishment contains 69 buildings, of which three are listed and more than 30 are now shut down as surplus to the diminished requirements of the school of music.

To give an idea of Deal's surplus scale and capacity, its Royal Marines population totalled over 1,000 in its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was a major training depot for the corps. The service personnel now needed to run the school of music, its sole remaining Royal Marines function, total 170. Of those, 57 make up the staff and 34 conduct musical instruction in various forms. However, a further 79 personnel are needed purely to run the establishment as such and guard it.

There are also some 82 directly employed civilians. I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about employment, and I have certainly hoisted that aboard and appreciate it. Set against the large number of personnel required to run Deal is the fact that the numbers of initial musical trainees have dwindled to the point where they today total some 50 musicians, in various stages of their initial specialist course of two years and eight months.

Three, or at most four, bandmaster students are also undergoing higher training at Deal in any given year. Between 20 and 25 other band service personnel pass annually through the gates of Deal to undergo various other forms of higher musical training, although, as my hon. Friend knows, they are certainly never all there at the same time.

The initial trainee intakes may sometimes be as few as 14. These are all facts, and render the ratio of support staff and real estate costs to trainees at Deal a patently cost-ineffective use of taxpayers' money.

Another key factor which impacted on future projected trainee numbers and which cried out for another look, was our decision last year to reduce the overall Royal Marines band service by nearly 100 musicians to a long-term total of 358.

Inevitably, the smaller size of the Royal Marines band service leads to the reduced requirement for trainee musicians, and there is no reason to believe that training activity will ever increase markedly again.

As the investment appraisal published with the consultative document indicates, the annual running cost of Deal—even at its most economical retrenched into south barracks for the next five years as we have examined—would never be much lower than £6 million.

Of that, almost £3.5 million annually is attributable simply and solely to Deal's nature as a stand-alone establishment. Much has been said about the way in which the financial case has supposedly been weighted against Deal. That is simply not so. No amount of worrying at the edges of the figures will make their magnitude disappear. There is absolutely no getting away from the harsh reality that the Royal Marines school at Deal finds itself in costly isolation from the main body of the naval service, for which its role is to train musicians.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Soames: I cannot, I am afraid, as I have no time.

Mr. Jessel: I give notice—

Mr. Soames: To bring the cost-effectiveness issue into even sharper focus, existing buildings at HMS Nelson in Portsmouth could be adapted into a musical training facility for some £450,000. That is less than a month's worth of the overall annual running cost of Deal. Such a facility at Nelson would quite simply avoid the £3 million or so annual burden imposed by Deal's nature as a stand-alone site.

There is no escaping the fact that immediate, significant and sensible economies are achievable by relocating the school of music to the centre of an existing naval concentration.I cannot and do not deny that our proposal that the Royal Marines should leave Deal is unwelcome to many people in the town and those with memories of having served there.

My hon. Friend regularly reminds all those who care to listen to him, and there are many, of the importance of not frittering away public funds. I have to say that I do not believe my hon. Friend can have it both ways. There is a compelling financial case for closing Deal, and it would be irresponsible for us not to proceed. It is for that reason that we examined the potential to transfer Deal's training activities elsewhere, and concluded that it would be sensible to move down this path. The fact is that the sharing of facilities, security and administration all result in economies of scale.

I find myself in a difficult position in having to promote the closure to my hon. Friend, who has fought a heroic battle and continues to make the most positive representations to us. But I want to be quite clear on one very important point—it was the Royal Marines themselves who identified the relocation of musical training as their best course, and they remain firmly convinced that there is no viable alternative to leaving Deal.

It is the Royal Marines who have been foremost in recognising that they must not ignore changed circumstances or turn their backs on this kind of common-sense saving in the support area—the very essence of the "Front Line First" initiative. With regretful realism, that is why the Royal Marines are firm in their wish to relocate the school of music from Deal, and at the earliest opportunity—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 22 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Northern Ireland

1. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for British service men in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in Belfast on 21 October:

"it is our firm objective to return to exclusively civilian policing"

in Northern Ireland. In the meantime, the armed forces will continue to provide support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary for as long as the security situation makes it necessary.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Will he reassure the House that there are no plans to remove troops while the terrorists still possess weapons and that, indeed, the troops will remain in Northern Ireland until a permanent peace is established? Will he confirm—indeed, give a commitment—that when, finally, peace is genuinely established and it is time to consider bringing home some troops, there will be no plans to reduce the overall size of the British Army?

Mr. Rifkind: The precise level of British troops in the Province at any one time must be considered in the light of advice from the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland. I agree with my hon. Friend that the possession of military hardware by the terrorist organisations must be a major factor in determining the proper level of military presence.

I happily confirm the final part of my hon. Friend's question. Even if we are able, as we all hope, to make a significant reduction at some stage in the military presence in Northern Ireland, that will not result in any further reduction in the overall size of the Army. Instead, it will enable us to deal with particular problems of overstretch and to provide increased opportunities for training, and other opportunities, for our armed forces.

Indonesia

2. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met representatives of the Indonesian Government to discuss co-operation between British and Indonesian armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman): My right hon. and learned Friend last visited Indonesia in May 1993 for discussions on security and defence matters of mutual interest. He met the Indonesian Minister of State for Research and Technology for similar discussions when he visited the United Kingdom in June 1993.

Mr. Mullin: It is common knowledge that a huge arms deal is being negotiated with Indonesia. Is the Minister aware that the regime in Indonesia is one of the most odious tyrannies in the world and that it came to power on the back of a bloodbath that has been matched only by Pol Pot in Asia in recent years? Has not much of the hardware that we previously sold to Indonesia been used for internal repression and will not some of the hardware that we are about to sell also be used for internal repression? What assurances can the right hon. Gentleman give the House that that will not happen?

Mr. Freeman: A good deal of what the hon. Gentleman said comprised assertions and I would not agree with him. I shall deal with the three key issues. First, I am not aware of any so-called huge arms deal, other than the already announced 1993 contract for the supply of further Hawk aircraft. Secondly, the Government do not share the hon. Gentleman's judgment that the Government of Indonesia are an odious tyranny. Thirdly, on the use of aircraft against the civilian population— *[Interruption.]* I have studied the assertions made by the hon. Gentleman in the House recently, but I can find no evidence to support what he or the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) have said.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has sought and obtained assurances from the Indonesian Government that weapons bought from this country will not be used against civilians in East Timor?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who exactly states the position as it is now and, indeed, as it has been for the past 20 years under previous Governments. Assurances have been received—

Mr. Mullin *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. Why does he not listen to the answer? Assurances have been received that the aircraft in question will not be used against the civilian population.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the Minister aware that, since the illegal occupation of East Timor, more than 200,000 East Timorese people have been killed by Indonesian Government forces? Is he further aware that information has now been published by the Timorese people showing that Hawk aircraft are used to bomb them and their positions? Is that not evidence enough to stop any further arms sales to an appalling regime which has perpetrated such a bloodbath against the Timorese people?

Mr. Freeman: I think that the House would share with the hon. Gentleman the view that any repression of the civil population in East Timor is to be regretted. Representations have been made to the Indonesian Government by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. If the hon. Gentleman will forward any allegations to me for my personal attention, I shall investigate them again.

Compensation Payments

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on compensation payments made to women dismissed from the armed forces on the grounds of pregnancy.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The Ministry of Defence has now dealt with about two thirds of the claims for pregnancy dismissal. Following successful appeals by my Department in July, most awards by industrial tribunals have since been at a more reasonable level. The overall average payment is currently about £10,000.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. How many women are involved? How much compensation is expected to be paid? What about those service women who have not had babies, for their own or other reasons? How does all this contribute to the defence of the realm and where will it all end?

Mr. Soames: I do not think it would be proper for me to speculate about where it is all likely to end. My hon. Friend raises an important point. Clearly, the judgment that led to the claims was very disturbing for us. Some 4,500 people have claimed and 3,127 of those claims have been settled—more than two thirds. The average payment has been about £10,000. So far, my Department has paid out £32 million. The outcome is likely to be less than £50 million. This has come at a bad time for the defence budget. We have done everything possible to keep the payments at a reasonable level in the interests not only of the defence budget but of the taxpayer.

Mr. Martlew: Surely the Minister must accept that the reality is that, for more than a decade, the Ministry of Defence pursued an unfair and illegal policy of discriminating against pregnant service women. The result of such a sexist policy is that the United Kingdom taxpayer will have to pick up a bill of £50 million for the incompetence of the Conservative Government.

Mr. Soames: That is pretty rich coming from a party that never complained about it. As the hon. Gentleman would know, had he bothered to do the work, anyone who was discharged on pregnancy between 1978 and 1988, before the services introduced maternity leave, can make a claim under a court judgment in 1991. Clearly, the Government did not know that the policy of discharging service women on pregnancy was unlawful; nor did anyone else—otherwise, the lawyers for the pregnancy claimants would have brought the claims at another time. No such claim was pursued until the end of the 1980s. It is a regrettable episode and a waste of an amount of money that we could well do without spending.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is absurd for the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) to describe the outrageous claims as unfair? The women knew when they signed up precisely what the terms were. They signed to that effect. May I congratulate the Ministry on appealing and having some of the more ludicrous payments reduced? They are still too much, but the situation is better than it was.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing some sanity to the matter. My hon. Friend is right; in July, the appeal tribunal agreed that some awards were manifestly grossly excessive and issued fresh guidance. That has proved helpful and has reduced the level of awards and settlements from about £25,000 to £10,000. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her support. She brings some clarity to this otherwise absurd issue.

Royal Navy

4. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the size of the Royal Navy's surface fleet by the year 2000, under the current plans.

Mr. Rifkind: The Royal Navy's surface fleet currently consists of 98 commissioned vessels, supported by 21 ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Mr. Byers: Does the Secretary of State accept that, if that programme is to be achieved within the available budget, value for money will need to be obtained? Does he share my concern that, with the demise of Swan Hunter, if the takeover bids by GEC and British Aerospace for VSEL in Barrow are successful, a monopoly will be created? In those circumstances, and in the public interest, should not both bids be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot comment on the reference, which is before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Although we all regret the sad closure of the Swan Hunter yard, Yarrow, Barrow-in-Furness and Vosper are still all building naval ships. We also have civil yards that are capable, in certain circumstances, of building Royal Navy ships. So the Ministry of Defence still has quite a significant amount of choice to meet its needs.

Mr. Viggers: As the question mentions the year 2000, can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, by that year, the replacements for Fearless and Intrepid, the assault ships, will be at or near completion? Together with the helicopter carrier, will they not give us the best amphibious capacity we have had for decades?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. Eleven Royal Navy ships are being built at various yards throughout the United Kingdom. In addition, as my hon. Friend says, we have issued tenders for the design and build of replacements for the two assault ships, Fearless and Intrepid, and for an oceanographic survey vessel—not to mention the batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines. There is thus a heavy programme of building to meet the large needs of the Royal Navy in the years to come.

Mr. Fatchett: Although the House understands why the Secretary of State for Defence cannot comment on the reference to the MMC of the bids for VSEL, can he tell us his own thinking on the matter in the context of future procurement policy? Does not the Department claim that its key criterion for procurement policy is competition? Without such competition to supply the Navy, there is a real danger that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's departmental policy will be put at risk. Should he not tell us his views now, instead of hiding behind those of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry?

Mr. Rifkind: Despite the hon. Gentleman's latter comments, may I say that we welcome him to the Dispatch Box as a shadow spokesman on defence?

The Ministry of Defence has made it clear that competition is, of course, an important factor which has benefited the Royal Navy and, indeed, all three services, when procurement needs have been able to be met by competition. We are conscious of the fact that, for all western Governments, procurement is now significantly less than in previous years. Nevertheless, we believe that it is important to ensure value for money to meet the needs of our armed forces. That influences our judgment of these difficult matters.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the future size of the Royal Navy demonstrates that there is enough warship procurement in the pipeline to sustain two competing warship yards in the United Kingdom beyond the turn of the century? Will he further confirm that such competition will ensure that British taxpayers will be the winners, because they will get the best value for their money?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the thinking behind my hon. Friend's question. We very much hope that VSEL in Barrow, Yarrow and Vosper will all continue to meet the needs of the Royal Navy. All three yards are viable assets, and we very much hope that they will continue to build ships for the Navy for many years to come.

Plutonium

5. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to counteract the risks from the increased volume of plutonium on world markets.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government are naturally concerned to ensure that plutonium is not misused. My Department is involved as appropriate in Her Majesty's Government's stringent policies in this area.

Mrs. Campbell: Is not the Secretary of State being extraordinarily complacent about this matter? Is he aware that British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. has opened an office in South Korea and is prepared to offer plutonium to its Government? Does he consider that satisfactory, or is he taking measures to prevent it?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Lady should direct questions of that kind to the relevant Minister. I am happy to answer questions relating to the MOD's responsibilities, but I am not clear about why she chose to put that question to me.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his recent speech about the strengthening of the NATO alliance. As for the threat of the illegal transportation of plutonium, does he agree that it supports his view that what is required is to keep the United States heavily linked with us, not least to combat the illegal transfer of plutonium and the nuclear threat?

Mr. Rifkind: I very much agree. NATO recently identified the fact that work to combat the proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear materials must have increased priority. The combined forces of the United States and the European members of the Atlantic alliance are needed to ensure the maximum impact to achieve that particular objective.

Mr. Llew Smith: Is the Secretary of State aware that, if the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield is allowed to operate fully, following its accident in March, it will add 90,000 kg of plutonium to that already stored at Sellafield? That seems to me to be an open invitation to terrorists. When will the Government see sense and ban all trade in nuclear explosives such as plutonium?

Mr. Rifkind: I must give the hon. Gentleman the same answer that I gave the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who asked a comparable question, addressed to the wrong Department.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, although it is most important that we take every possible step to prevent the proliferation of plutonium and other fissile materials, the only way to protect our own population from those potential threats is to maintain our nuclear shield? It comes very ill from the Labour party to lecture us about proliferation when it wants to wind up our own nuclear defences.

Mr. Rifkind: It is, indeed, appropriate for my hon. Friend to remind the House and the country that a large number in the parliamentary Labour party, from the Leader of the Opposition down, either are or have been members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—*[Interruption.]*—and it seems that most of them present today, if not the Leader of the Opposition, are still proud of that fact.

Land Mines

6. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the export of anti-personnel land mines.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom has not produced or exported anti-personnel land mines for some years.

Mrs. Roche: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he confirm that that also includes anti-personnel land mines that contain a self-destruct mechanism? Is it not correct that the United Kingdom is still exporting them?

Mr. Freeman: No. The United Kingdom has never possessed such anti-personnel land mines, never had them manufactured and never owned them; therefore, the question is hypothetical. We do not have them and therefore cannot export them. We have in place a unilateral moratorium on the export of land mines that we do possess, which are those that do not have a self-destruct mechanism.

Mr. Robathan: Is my hon. Friend aware of the work of an organisation called the HALO trust, which clears mines in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola and, I believe, Mozambique and which has done work for the United Nations? Is he aware that, during its work, it has never found one anti-personnel mine of British origin? Does he not think it rather sad, therefore, that Opposition Members should try to make political capital out of anti-personnel mines and the frightful work that they do in some countries, and blame their own Government, when the blame should be laid at the feet of, for instance, the former Soviet Union?

Mr. Freeman: The Opposition totally ignore the need to have our own armed forces properly equipped to defend our country. I agree with both my hon. and learned Friend and the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who asked the original question, in the sense that I have seen with my own eyes the problem in the Falkland

Islands, where mines were strewn indiscriminately by the Argentine armed forces. Those mines will be on the beaches for many years to come.

Dr. Reid: The Minister must know that it is not a question of Opposition Members in any way undermining the capacity of the British armed forces to have the resources that they wish to have. *[Interruption.]* Some of his hon. Friends at the back are jeering, but they may not have seen the consequences. There are some 800 deaths a month and thousands more are injured because of the estimated 120 million bombs and land mines that are strewn throughout the world. Most of those people are civilians, most of them innocent and many of them children.

If there is no economic interest in the export of mines from this country, why will the Minister not express a Government policy and join President Clinton in calling for a total moratorium on the export of all land mines, including the so-called "self-destruct" land mines? He must know that more than 10 per cent. of them do not self-destruct, and contribute towards the horror and the maiming of innocent civilians throughout the world.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who appears to accept the rationale for Great Britain to possess land mines and, by definition, self-destruct anti-personnel land mines.

Dr. Reid: What about the export of mines?

Mr. Freeman: I am about to deal with that. No Defence Minister can rule out future possession of that weapon by the United Kingdom's armed forces, which do not possess it at present. As for the United States, I share the hon. Gentleman's view; the United Kingdom Government will work very closely with the United States to establish whether we can negotiate for the world community a ban on trade in, and export of, mines.

Senior Officers (Housing)

7. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of his policy on expenditure on housing for senior officers.

Mr. Soames: All service personnel are entitled to public accommodation appropriate to their circumstances and responsibilities, for which they pay charges. I have made it clear that I will report to the House in due course following the outcome of the reviews we have announced of expenditure on senior officers' residences and the requirement for official entertainment.

Mr. Hall: The Ministry of Defence announced in February that it was conducting a review, but we are still awaiting a reply. Will the Minister acknowledge that, in parliamentary written answers, the MOD has already published the information that £5 million in taxpayers' money is being spent on subsidised housing for 77 of the MOD's top brass? The Air Chief Marshal has had £386,000 spent on his home; £205,000 has been spent on the Chief of Staff's home, £260,000 on the RAF Strike Commander's home and £205,000 on the Air Vice-Marshal's home. That is a large amount of taxpayers' money.

Who sanctioned that expenditure? How does the Minister justify the spending of such an amount of taxpayers' money, given that he and his colleagues want to cut £1.7 million from military expenditure? Is this not a case of being penny wise, pound foolish?

Madam Speaker: Order. This is not an Adjournment debate; it is Question Time.

Mr. Soames: The report to which the hon. Gentleman referred is making good progress. We have commissioned an independent external investigation of the circumstances surrounding expenditure on Haymes Garth, one of the properties that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, with a separate and wider audit of expenditure on other official service residences. The report by Sheila Masters is not yet with Ministers; once it has been received, we shall want to give its findings careful consideration, taking account of the work that Sir Peter Cazalet is undertaking in relation to representational entertainment in the armed forces.

It is wrong to trivialise the importance of official service residences. Senior commanders in all three services have important representational roles to play and must undertake a significant amount of official hospitality. It is right for such matters to be dealt with properly, and we intend to ensure that that happens.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in addition to their important command responsibilities, commanders-in-chief fulfil a vital representational role for their armed forces, particularly in their local communities? Would it not be wholly inappropriate if they could not, for example, entertain local mayors, council leaders, heads of industry, Members of Parliament, civil servants, diplomats and even Ministers of the Crown?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, as a former service man, understands the need for requirements of this nature. He is quite right. The armed services are one of the jewels in Britain's crown; it is wrong to trivialise such important matters, which need to be put on a proper basis so that the House and everyone else concerned can have confidence in the arrangements. I wholly agree with my hon. Friend and assure him that that will remain the case.

Dr. David Clark: Now that the Government have been forced to abort their plans to privatise the MOD's housing stock, how does the Minister plan to make up the shortfall of £500 million in next year's budget? Are we to expect further cuts, or will there be an increase in the MOD's budget?

Mr. Soames: No further cuts are planned in the Ministry of Defence budget in this respect. We will be bringing forward clarification of the plans very shortly and the hon. Gentleman will be the first to hear about it.

Military Music

8. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the total costs associated with military music training and performances in the current year.

Mr. Soames: We expect to spend approximately £8,750,000 on such training across the three services

during the current financial year. The costs associated with military music performances are not recorded centrally.

Mr. Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that if Ministers really want to save money in military music training the long-term proposal for civilianisation can be best implemented by basing it in the south barracks at Deal, and that it will be a complete waste of time, money and effort to close Deal in 1996 if civilianisation can be achieved by that time? Does he also agree that we should not be looking at civilianisation in 2000, but that we should bring the date forward?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who made a compelling and formidable speech last night in the Adjournment debate. I regret to have to tell him that there are clear and very compelling financial reasons why we have to remove the Royal Marines school of music from Deal, not least being the cost.

As I have said, the total cost of music training is £8.7 million per year, of which £6.7 million accrues to Deal and £2 million to Kneller hall.That is not good value for money and I am afraid that, however my hon. Friend tinkers with the figures, we will not be able to come to a more satisfactory conclusion. I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend and others of his colleagues in the near future to go through the figures.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister agree that the Deal school of music would have had a greater chance of survival if the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) had spent more time in Deal and less time in Monklands?

Mr. Soames: On the contrary, the hon. Gentleman—who is not an uncharitable man—should know that my hon. Friend has fought, quite rightly, with great vigour and determination for the interests of his constituents, as indeed the hon. Gentleman would have done. His is an outrageous suggestion.

Bosnia

9. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit Bosnia to examine the military situation.

Mr. Rifkind: I have made several visits to Bosnia. I plan to make a further visit in the near future.

Mr. Clappison: Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me in paying tribute to the skill, professionalism and courage of British service men in Bosnia, both in providing aid and in deterring aggression? Does he agree that they are serving a very important purpose in responding firmly to appalling acts of aggression, which have included the use of napalm?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the courage required of British service men, and we had further evidence of it this morning. At 8.15 am two United Kingdom Sea Harrier aircraft, which were patrolling on offensive counter air combat operations over central Bosnia observed that two ground-to-air missiles had been launched. The missiles passed two miles from the aircraft and were seen to explode at a height of about 35,000 ft. This serious incident is presently being investigated by UNPROFOR commanders.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: In light of that answer, will the Minister give the House an assessment of how many such missiles are available in the former Yugoslavia, their capability, and the counter-measures available to Royal Air Force air crews in the event that they apprehend that such weapons have been fired at them?

Mr. Rifkind: I can say to the hon. and learned Gentleman that, so far as we are aware, this is the first time that a missile airburst has been observed over Bosnia Herzegovina. Our aircraft have certain facilities which enable them to deal with threats of this kind, but the hon. and learned Gentleman will understand that I do not intend to go into detail about that.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. and learned Friend visits personnel in Bosnia, will he remember the sheer professionalism of the ground crews and air crews of the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy and the Army on the ground and the fact that these people are commanded by the officers who have been unjustifiably attacked for changes that have been made in their accommodation which they made no decision to make?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House that it is the senior officers of our armed forces who have been responsible for some of the splendid achievements of those forces, whether in Bosnia, the Falklands, or the Gulf, in recent years. I believe that their record of service to this country has been outstanding.

Dr. David Clark: Our relief that the Sea Harriers and their pilots escaped unscathed today is tempered by the increasing danger faced by our troops in Bosnia. Will the Secretary of State inform the Serbs that if they take shots at United Nations and United Kingdom planes which are trying to operate Deny Flight they will be bombed further?

Mr. Rifkind: I can give the hon. Gentleman and the House a categorical assurance that the United Kingdom Government would support any measures that are required to ensure the safety of our armed forces and other United Nations forces serving in Bosnia. The United Nations commanders are currently considering the implications of this morning's incident and they will have the full support of the British Government if any action is required as a result of their investigations.

Former Soviet Union (Weapons)

10. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the threat from bacteriological and chemical warfare weapons held in the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty's Government see no current threat from Russia or other former Soviet Republics. However, Russia inherited offensive chemical and biological warfare capabilities from the former Soviet Union. Her Majesty's Government place a high priority on confirming the elimination of the former Soviet capabilities; we are pursuing this objective through discussions with Russia and in multilateral arms control negotiations.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his full reply and for alluding to the biopreparat programme which was in place during the days of the former Soviet Union. What action will he take in practical

terms to stop the proliferation of not only nuclear weapons, which was mentioned earlier, but germ warfare and biological weapons?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question and for his minor tutorial. The United Kingdom is making a practical contribution on nuclear weapons. The distinguished British company, GKN, is manufacturing transport containers for moving warheads that are being removed from current Russian use. We have agreed to look at ways in which we can co-operate with Russia to end production facilities for biological weapons. On chemical weapons, I note that the United States is willing to discuss with Russia ways in which its chemical warfare munitions plants can be decommissioned.

Mr. Gapes: In view of the danger of proliferation of chemical weapons, will the Minister announce today that the Government will immediately ratify the chemical weapons convention so as to encourage other countries to go down the same road?

Mr. Freeman: We have signed the convention and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is responsible for bringing forward legislation. I can tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that he intends to do so as soon as possible.

Mr. Key: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the threat would be infinitely greater and the assessment quite impossible without the outstanding work done at the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down in my constituency?

Mr. Freeman: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. He is right to pay tribute to the excellent work done by Porton Down and long may it remain so.

Ministerial Responsibilities

11. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Minister is responsible in his Department for the interests of veterans, war widows and dependants.

Mr. Soames: On those issues upon which my Department has direct dealings with veterans, war widows and dependants, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence is usually the Minister responsible.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Minister speak to the Prime Minister about the House's decision on 1 July 1994, which called for a dedicated Minister for the affairs of ex-service men and women? Will he reflect on the fact that it has all-party support and that the Royal British Legion has argued for it on behalf of war widows, the prisoners of war from the second world war and the countless people who bear the physical and emotional scars of past conflicts? Is not it time that we had a Minister for veterans' affairs as do the other allies?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman has a fine record of supporting the interests of veterans and their dependants. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend. The Government are certain that it is in the best interests of ex-service personnel that provision for them is integrated as far as possible with that of the wider community. It is our intention to ensure that they have a high quality of service, which they do. All experience shows that the sort of organisation suggested by the hon. Gentleman would only add to bureaucracy. A meeting is taking place tomorrow with my hon. and noble Friend, Ministers from the Department of Social Security and officials from the Royal British Legion at which these representations will be discussed. I shall ensure that a report is sent to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jessel: In upholding the interests of veterans, is it not necessary to uplift the spirits of veterans, like those of the Royal British Legion, who my hon. Friend saw marching in Belgium two months ago on the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Belgium? They marched behind the bands of the Welsh Guards and Grenadier Guards, which were trained at the Royal Military school of music at Kneller Hall, Twickenham, whose high standards and excellence are the envy of the world. Will he uphold that too?

Mr. Soames: Veterans are not the only people who are upheld by the emotion and brilliance of our military music. My hon. Friend is right. He is a vigorous champion for the marvellous Royal Military school of music at Kneller hall. No occasion on which veterans gather would be complete without the sound of British military music.

Defence Contractors

12. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department is providing to defence contractors as a result of reductions in the procurement budget.

Mr. Freeman: We believe that defence contractors are better placed than Government to identify new products and uses for their facilities. We do share with industry as much information as we can about our long-term defence requirements to help it to adjust its industrial capacities.

Mr. Dunnachie: That reply shows the Government's utter contempt for the workers and skills employed in defence-product manufacture in this country. Why do not the Government establish a defence diversification agency to enable and to aid firms to diversify into the public sector? Without such an agency, high-tech skills in the defence industry will be lost for ever.

Mr. Freeman: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's sentiments, but there is a different way of achieving the aim that he and I share. I do not believe that there is any evidence from the United States of America that using Government money, federal funds in the case of the United States, achieves a quicker or better solution than the private sector deciding what to produce. The right way, therefore, to deal with previous military facilities and with workshops, for example, that are no longer required is for the Government to ensure that all the agencies of central Government and local government, including local representatives from that community, work together for an alternative use. I will give the hon. Gentleman and the House an assurance that, where I am involved in such closures, I shall commit my time to ensuring that there is a sensible, alternative private use.

Mr. Gallie: With acknowledged pressures on the defence budget, does not my right hon. Friend agree that competition in defence procurement will become even

more important? Does not he further agree that the GEC takeover of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. will threaten that competitive element?

Mr. Freeman: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has already said, it is a matter for the President of the Board of Trade, who will make a decision about the offer by British Aerospace and GEC for VSEL. Competition is important in the provision of defence equipment and we shall do everything possible to encourage and facilitate competitive tenders for defence equipment, which represent the best way of achieving value for money.

Departmental Property

13. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many (a) farms and (b) occupied houses owned by his Department in Northumberland are not connected to a mains electricity supply.

Mr. Soames: My Department owns a number of farms in Northumberland, all of which lie in the operational training area. Fifteen of those farms, comprising 18 occupied houses and cottages, are not connected to the mains electricity supply.

Mr. Beith: Does the Minister agree that hard-working farmers and shepherds in the Cheviot hills deserve to have mains electricity supplied? Does he not think that the time is opportune, after a decade of discussions, for the Ministry of Defence to put forward a scheme since European finance may be available under objective 5b? Furthermore, the Army may wish to emphasise that it has a long-term role in that region and that it wants to be a good landlord.

Mr. Soames: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Army is not only a very good landlord but an extremely good employer, providing by far the greatest employment in that area. The right hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the time that these matters have taken. The options for electrification are being studied and assessed. Until the report is ready it is too early to say whether electrification is feasible but, in parallel, the Ministry of Defence and one of its farm tenants will jointly be conducting a trial of the feasibility of a stand-alone farm power system. If it proves successful, we shall consider extending its use to other farms. I note the right hon. Gentleman's point and can assure him that I shall keep a careful eye on this matter.

County Regiments

14. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received calling for the restoration of county regiments.

Mr. Soames: I am not aware of any such representations being received by my Department in the past year.

Mr. Field: As my hon. Friend is newly appointed, he probably has not heard my representations. May I tell him how popular it would be if we were to reintroduce the county regiments as Territorial Army units, such as the Isle of Wight Rifles, the Hampshires and the Surrey and Sussex Yeomanry, which would preserve not only the great regimental history of our nation but our regimental processions?

Mr. Soames: There is no doubt that we have all heard my hon. Friend's views now, and he is quite right. The Isle of Wight Rifles, of which he has been a splendid champion and which are now members of C company, the sixth and seventh battalion of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, are a very fine unit and will be glad to have my hon. Friend's support. Our many other county regiments are well supported and highly successful and they bring honour and credit to our armed forces, which are one of the greatest jewels in the crown of this country's life.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hutton: Does the Prime Minister agree with the deputy chairman of the Conservative party that huge salary rises for the directors of privatised companies cause real public offence? What action is he going to take to stop these abuses?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say on many occasions in the past, I do not agree with excessive and unjustifiable salary increases. I have made that perfectly clear, but for companies within the private sector that must be a matter for their shareholders and not for the Government.

Q2. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the Prime Minister confirm that he will press ahead with extending choice in education? While welcoming the Opposition's recent conversion to league tables, does he agree that the Opposition's plans to abolish grant-maintained schools and assisted places means that they can never be trusted on education because they are still wedded to the failed policies of the 1970s?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the performance tables have been a huge success. Anyone who looked at any of the national newspapers today would see the enormous interest in them. They are printed in many cases in full and I think that parents are very glad to have the information. I very much welcome the belated recognition by the Opposition that they are now in favour of performance tables. I regret that they opposed them for so long. I also regret the fact that they continue to oppose

grant-maintained schools and the assisted places scheme and I look forward to yet a further U-turn in their education policy to adopt them in due course.

Mr. Blair: Yesterday the President of the Board of Trade justified the grotesque increase of £200,000 to the chief of British Gas. Will the Prime Minister now join me in condemning it unequivocally?

The Prime Minister: I indicated to the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend just a few moments ago that I did not approve of excessive increases. I also made the point that in the private sector that was a matter for the shareholders of the company, not a matter for the Government themselves but, since the right hon. Gentleman asks for my view, I have made it clear.

Mr. Blair: As a matter of fact, the right hon. Gentleman did not condemn the particular increase. Will he not understand that people want him to speak, not only for the shareholders but for the millions of British people who feel disgust and outrage at this excess and greed? Why will he not act to give the regulator the power to put a stop to this kind of abuse so that the privatised utilities, which are monopoly services that the public have no choice but to use, are managed as proper public services, run in the public interest?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about the monopoly aspect, presumably he will support the Gas Bill, which will introduce competition, later this Session. In the light of what he has just said, I look forward to his support for that. As for condemning the increase, I suggest that he looks again at what I have said on many occasions over the past few years. I fear that the right hon. Gentleman misunderstands the regulator's position. The prices charged by utilities are legitimately a matter for the regulators but, as in all companies, boardroom pay is a matter for the shareholders. The sooner Opposition Members understand that, the better.

Mr. McLoughlin: During his busy day, will my right hon. Friend consider the pay increase of about 200 per cent. for a person who is about to join the Commission gravy train? When that appointment was made, was it because the former Leader of the Opposition was the only candidate that the Opposition could put forward, or was there a shortage of candidates for the post, making such a pay increase necessary?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman to whom my hon. Friend refers is to be a Commissioner, and as such he will represent the United Kingdom. I think that he will do that fairly and honestly in the future, and I do not therefore have any criticism of his appointment.

Mr. Ashdown: Why does not the Prime Minister see the 75 per cent. pay increase for the head of British Gas for what it is—a metaphorical V-sign to all the customers whose prices he has increased, to the employees whose jobs he has cut and to the Prime Minister's begging and pleading for restraint? Is a weak whimper and a "Nothing to do with me, guv," the best that the Prime Minister can do?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman, as usual, exercises before the House his customary ignorance of the way in which the private sector works. I have made it absolutely clear what I think about that rise, but what the right hon. Gentleman—and, no doubt, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—wants is a quasi-pay policy for some executives in the private sector. That, effectively, is what the right hon. Gentleman is asking for. The right way to deal with the matter is for the shareholders who own the company to take the action that they consider right.

Mr. Budgen: In view of my right hon. Friend's statement that the successful passage of the European Communities (Finance) Bill is a matter of confidence, will he confirm that he has discussed the Dissolution with the monarch? Will he further confirm that the monarch has told him that in the event of his asking for a Dissolution, it will be granted?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend, who has been here for a long time, should know, neither I nor any other Prime Minister is likely to discuss any conversation that he or she may or may not have had with Her Majesty the Queen.

Q3. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Clwyd: Has the Prime Minister anything to add to the Maples memorandum, which says that the Government have broken their promises and let down the electors, and that they are out of touch, stupid and blind?

The Prime Minister: I am tempted to quote from the memorandum by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), who had some very crisp things to say about the Labour party—but no doubt the hon. Lady would find that unfortunate. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I have something to add. I add that, with growth at more than 4 per cent., inflation at 2 per cent., unemployment falling and exports growing at record levels, the hon. Lady would be most unwise to assume what may happen in future.

Q4. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alexander: Will my right hon. Friend commend to the House the statement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary over the weekend that there would no longer be an automatic right of temporary release for prisoners serving sentences? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when a judge sentences someone to a term of imprisonment, the public do not expect to find that person taken out to dinner by prison officers and do not expect to find another person cycling through the community two years into a rape conviction, and that a sentence of imprisonment must mean just that?

The Prime Minister: I very much welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said last week. It is the latest in a long list of measures, crowned by the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, to protect the public and to punish the criminal—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) seems unwilling to punish the criminal. That is not what I should have expected of him. We should certainly clamp down on any

examples of abuse of home leave or temporary release. That is precisely what my right hon. and learned Friend has said he proposes to do. In that he will, I believe, have the overwhelming support of people throughout the country.

Mr. Dalyell: Are the Government's certainties hitherto about Libyan responsibility for the Lockerbie crime in any way dented by what President Mubarak said to the Prime Minister yesterday or, indeed, by the film of Mr. Alan Francovitch, a copy of which was delivered to Downing street on Sunday and which, I gather, the right hon. Gentleman has looked at?

The Prime Minister: None of the evidence I have had and none of the conversations I have had dent in the slightest the position that I have set out before the House on many occasions.

Q5. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winterton: Although I fervently hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget next week will give the necessary boost to manufacturing industry by introducing 100 per cent. capital allowances, will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that unemployment is down by half a million, that inflation is at an all-time 27-year low and that growth in this country is currently at 4 per cent.? Will he ensure that that information forms part of a highly confidential Conservative central office memorandum so that the press and the Conservative yobs can give it the attention it deserves?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes his point in his usual crisp manner. It is the case that the economy is doing extremely well, as my hon. Friend has set out. I hope that more people will begin to observe that as month succeeds month. There is no doubt that added to the list that my hon. Friend so accurately mentioned a moment ago are the facts that unemployment is falling and has been falling for around 20 months, that unemployment is lower here than in any other major country in western Europe and that unemployment is continuing to fall here while it is rising in many other countries. The economic opportunities that exist at the moment are extremely good and I have no doubt that they will get better.

Cyprus

Q6. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the President of Cyprus; and what issues were discussed.

The Prime Minister: I last met the President of Cyprus, Mr. Clerides, in October 1993 at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. We discussed Commonwealth matters and the state of the intercommunal discussions on Cyprus. I shall meet the President again in January on his next visit to London.

Mr. Cox: I note that reply. Is the Prime Minister, aware, however, of the scathing criticisms that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has recently made about Mr. Denktash and his total unwillingness to enter any meaningful discussions on Cyprus? As this country is one of the guarantor powers, when will the Prime Minister himself become actively involved in Cyprus affairs in the hope of promoting a settlement that both Mr. Denktash and his friends and supporters in Ankara will be expected to honour?

The Prime Minister: I am, of course, aware of the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I continue to believe that the main focus of our effort should be to support the United Nations Secretary-General's mission. He has made some progress. The Security Council called for further effort on confidence-building measures in June, as the hon. Gentleman will know, and for a process of consultation. That latter aspect has been given effect by means of face-to-face talks between the two community leaders. I hope that those will continue. We will do all that we can to persuade both sides to continue talking, but until and unless they are themselves prepared to reach an agreement, it is difficult to see how one can be imposed.

Engagements

Q7. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jenkin: Will my right hon. Friend keep telling everyone about the low inflation, the falling unemployment and the strong growth? Will he also explain that we have achieved that by establishing an extremely successful economic framework and that, as night follows day, Labour would wreck it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right, both in the scenario that he sets out and in the charge that he lays about such economic policy as the Labour party has yet divulged. There is no doubt that the present circumstance has come about because of a consistency of policy for some time designed to get inflation down. We made it clear in 1990 that getting inflation down to a low level had a very important, central part to play in economic management and we have achieved it. The Labour party achieved record high inflation. We are achieving record low inflation.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I ask you for some advice? During the passage of the private Member's Bill that I promoted last Session, the Tobacco Advertising Bill, there were denials in the Chamber about the involvement of people who were against that Bill and denials about the involvement of lobbyists. On the front of *The Guardian* newspaper this morning, it has become quite clear that the lobbyists Ian Greer Associates have been approaching individual Members of Parliament, including Ministers and, I must say, even the Prime Minister's former Parliamentary Private Secretary, in relation to assisting them in cutting back on the Bill and on any tightening of a voluntary code on tobacco advertising, which was taking place at the same time.

I have now received a copy of a letter, which clearly states that on one occasion that company was also approaching Members of Parliament on the basis that bus shelters in their constituencies would be provided free by the advertising industry. It is quite clear that the company was using that issue to get at Members of Parliament. Would you, Madam Speaker, advise me what redress there may be and whether such lobbying is a breach of the rules of the House?

Madam Speaker: I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to raise his long point of order. I listened to it very carefully as I, too, saw the report and was very concerned about it. But, having listened, I am afraid that I conclude that what he has said does not raise a matter on which the Chair can rule and, as he knows, I do not offer advice across the Floor of the House. He will have to find other ways in which to raise the matter. Indeed, I would not rule him out of order if he wished to use the information in the debate today. If the hon. Gentleman would like to come and see me, I will advise him as best I can on the issue that he has raised.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to the motion on the Order Paper concerning the business of the House, which, as you will see, has no second paragraph? You will recall, Madam Speaker, that in the motion on the business of the House tabled yesterday, there was a second paragraph—a sittings motion concerning the European Communities 1995 budget. That motion would have limited discussion of a very important matter to one and a half hours.

You will know, Madam Speaker, that a number of us objected to the sittings motion last night, which meant that it had to be tabled for consideration again today. It has been tabled again, but in truncated form. Paragraph (ii) has been omitted, which means that those of us who believe that we should press the Government for lengthier and more detailed discussion of the European budget have lost the opportunity of raising the matter on the Floor of the House.

I am sure that it will not be argued by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that paragraph (ii) was unnecessary yesterday. If it was necessary yesterday, it is necessary today. The grave suspicion is left in the House that the rights of many hon. Members are being denied as a result of the threat of dissolution, and that we are even being deprived of the right to debate properly the European budget.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It is conceivable that the Government realised very quickly that they would be unable to allow a debate on the motion. May I suggest that they leave it on the agenda, which means that the matter will be open-ended. The advice that I should like to give, through the Chair, is for the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) to join those of us who will oppose the Government closing the motion. In that way we can put a stop to it all.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) has rightly observed, the motion on today's Order Paper is not the same as that which was objected to yesterday, and also last Friday. There is nothing wrong, however, with the Government tabling a different motion today. They are at liberty to do that.

Mr. Budgen *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not finished yet.

The motion that the hon. Gentleman is discussing is not on the Order Paper. We have to discuss that which is on the Order Paper. If he had cared to consult the Clerks, I think that they would have been able to demonstrate to him that there may have been some purpose in the original text which he has failed to detect.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, that's right.

Madam Speaker: Exactly.

If the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West is asking for further time, that is a matter not for me but for the Leader of the House.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that you will share my concern about the matter that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). As you will be aware, the Select Committee on Health produced a report on tobacco advertising. If Chairs of Select Committees agree to one-to-one meetings that are arranged by lobbyists, are there any rules obliging them to report back to Select Committees after those meetings? I am a member of the Select Committee on Health and I have no recollection of being told of the meeting that took place, involving the Chair, which was arranged by a lobbyist. The members of the Select Committee have an interest because we produced a report.

Madam Speaker: I must tell the hon. Lady clearly that there are no rules of the sort to which she is referring. I hope that that makes the matter clear.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to press the issue, but is it not true that when a Chairman of a Select Committee meets a person who otherwise might be in a position to give evidence to that Committee, there is an onus on the Chairman or Chairwoman to report the meeting to the members of the Committee? In this instance that clearly did not happen. Will you ask your Clerks, Madam Speaker, to ascertain specifically what happened in this case? On what date did the Chairwoman

meet representatives of the tobacco industry? On what occasion did she indicate to some members of the Committee—

Madam Speaker: Order. Of course I shall make further inquiries. I was correct in saying that there are no rules. It is for Committees and Chairmen to regulate how they proceed. As I have said, I shall make some inquiries, as the hon. Member has asked me so to do.

BILL PRESENTED

Health Authorities

Mrs. Secretary Bottomley, supported by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Redwood and Mr. Gerald Malone, presented a Bill to abolish Regional Health Authorities, District Health Authorities and Family Health Services Authorities, require the establishment of Health Authorities and make provision in relation to Health Authorities and Special Health Authorities and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 2.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:

In paragraph (4) the word 'thirteen' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 44; in paragraph (5) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 46;

(2) Standing Order No. 90 (Second reading committees) shall have effect for this Session with the following modification, namely:

In paragraph (2) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 23;

(3) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 20th and 27th January, 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th February, 3rd, 17th, 24th and 31st March, 21st and 28th April and 14th July.—[*Mr. Newton.*]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[Fifth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—[*Mr. Dunn.*]

Question again proposed.

Health and Social Security

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.39 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Address, at the end of the Question to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech omits measures which either address the fears or advance the hopes of the British people; calls instead for a commitment to provide a National Health Service which offers equal access to care for all, is run for the public good and has clear accountability to those it serves, and for a commitment to build a Social Security system designed to take people out of poverty, offer opportunity and enhance skills; and further calls for a legislative framework for occupational pensions fully implementing the Pension Law Review Committee's report, for regulations to control the mis-selling of private pensions, for the abandonment of Incapacity Benefit and the Jobseekers Allowance, which both target vulnerable people in society, for the early and urgent reform of the Child Support Agency, and for the introduction of comprehensive civil rights legislation outlawing discrimination against disabled people.

The Queen's Speech has left a dominant impression with everyone, from Members of the House, through the news media to the nation as a whole: it is of a Government not only dithering, divided and demoralised, but hopelessly out of touch with the reality as well as the challenges facing the people of Britain. It is a Queen's Speech which could have been computer-generated. Like three-dimensional computer graphics, it allows the Prime Minister and his colleagues at least to imagine that they are interacting with reality. However, like computer users with their mouses or space balls, the image and view of the world reflected back through the speech is a virtual world. It is an encounter with virtual reality, not with the real world.

The Prime Minister and all his colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Health, have retreated into a two-dimensional world of their own. It is a world in which the Maples memo so clearly and chillingly reveals the priorities set by the Government. We are told that it contains a long analysis of what the Tory party should do about health—not, please note, what it should do to redress the damage done to the national health service, but what the Government should do to conceal that damage from the public.

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

Mr. Maples recommends slowing down the process of change, to conceal its full effects, if possible, until safely after the election. Meanwhile, he says that the Secretary of State should silence the staff and keep flannelling away with so-called killer facts. However, the Secretary of State for Health has been doing that for years. That is how the Tories ended up 55 points behind in the polls.

What are those killer facts? They seem to me to be what Norman Mailer famously called factoids. According to the dictionary, they are statements that take on the reality of a fact simply by virtue of being uttered and repeated and repeated. They are factoids like, "The national health service is safe with us." They are factoids like the Prime Minister's, "The national health service will not be privatised while I live and breathe." They are factoids like, "The old NHS was a centralised bureaucracy," when, in 1986, there were only 500 general and senior managers in England in the NHS and by 1992, there were 16,700. They are factoids like, "The national health service now treats 3,000 extra patients a day," when the truth is that those figures refer not to patients, but to finished consultant episodes. Patients can be double counted if they see more than one consultant or if they are discharged too soon and have to be readmitted.

Those are factoids. The killer facts are those which the Government seek to suppress. They are killer facts like that pointed out by the chairman of the British Medical Association recently:

"there is no longer one National Health Service. There are 100 purchasing consortia and 400 provider units each with its own self-serving view of its best interests."

Another killer fact is that there are fewer nurses in the health service today than 10 years ago and more accountants. There are killer facts like the one in the press today that 18 county councils are close to running out of money for community care. There is the killer fact that thousands of families in every part of Britain are finding out that there are no longer any NHS dentistry facilities in their area.

In the real world, there is deep disquiet about the state of our national health service. In an Opposition day debate a few days ago, we referred to the Secretary of State for Health as the Madame Mao of the health service, embarked on a process of continual revolution. The structural proposals contained in legislation to abolish regional health authorities are the latest development in that process.

Those proposals, together with the others referred to in the Gracious Speech, demand and will receive careful scrutiny in the House. Both on Second Reading and in Committee, we shall want to explore in depth the worth of the Government's justification for their proposals; what else might be the effect—intended or otherwise—of them as they stand and thus what amendment might be required; and last, but by no means least, the background against which the legislative changes will operate.

The questions that we want to ask about the structural changes, which will be explored in depth when the Bill is introduced, have been thrown into sharp relief by other statements made during the past few days—statements far more revealing than the Secretary of State's factoids about what the Government's so-called reforms are doing to the national health service. They are revealing, too, of what her public relations drive seeks to conceal and what the reforms are intended to achieve.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I take it that the hon. Gentleman is in training to be one of Ryder's wreckers.

Mr. Duncan: Before my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) gives the right hon. Lady some cream to cure her factoids, will she refer to the amendment, which demands clear accountability to those whom the NHS serves, and explain in detail what she means by structural reforms? Is she suggesting that, once again, local councillors should have a hand in deciding how the NHS is run? *[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Beckett: I hear from my hon. Friends behind me that that is precisely the idea being floated in Wandsworth, but I would not care to take responsibility for anything that the Conservative council there might propose.

I say to the hon. Gentleman what has been said repeatedly in the House, in the hope that neither he nor anyone else will feel the need to raise the matter again for a while—that we have produced a consultation document that is being considered across the country. I know that Conservative Members are unfamiliar with such a process. We have identified the key questions and problems raised by the Government's reforms and we have invited suggestions on what should be put in their place. We have given people months to complete that process. Conferences have been held by a variety of interested bodies, such as the British Medical Association, to discuss what should replace the Government's reforms. That process is under way and we expect responses within, we hope, another couple of months. We shall then consider what policy to put forward.

I fully understand that that process is completely foreign to Conservative Members. They think that consultation means that first they make up their mind, then they give everybody else three weeks to digest at least some sign of what they have in mind and then they rush through the legislation and we all pick up the pieces afterwards. That is not consultation as the Opposition understand it. It is because we want to preserve the NHS as the British people cherish it that we are undergoing a proper consultation process. I hope that I have made the matter quite clear to the hon. Gentleman.

The first of the observations to which I referred emanated from one of those people hand-picked by the Secretary of State to carry out Government policy—Mr. Roy Lilley, the chair of the Homewood trust. We have questioned the degree to which those appointed to trust boards have overwhelmingly, although not exclusively, been drawn from the ranks of members and supporters of or contributors to the Tory party. We recognise that within even those exclusive and fast-diminishing ranks there appears to have been a bias in selection towards those so in tune with the Government's health policy that they can be instinctively relied upon to understand what the Government are really about and so quietly help them to pursue their objectives, stated or unstated.

Mr. Lilley has always been seen as, in the Secretary of State's terms, the creme de la creme; one of her red guards. When he says that the first duty of a doctor is to

the organisation in which he works and that his duty to patients comes in only third place, we know that the British people are absolutely right to be deeply distrustful of the intentions of both the Government and the Secretary of State. Now, the truth is out. Roy Lilley has done for trusts what Gerald Ratner did for his jewellery business—he has told us what the consumers are really getting from the Secretary of State.

Again, Mr. Lilley said:

"The proposition that a doctor's first duty is to his patient, is without question, definitely, positively, wrong . . . The more I think about it the more I am convinced it is not only wrong. It is stupid and dangerous to entertain the thought that it might be, even partly, right. No it is out of the question. The doctor's first duty is not to the patient."

Those words, coming as they do from one of the Secretary of State's hand-picked appointees and one of those closest to the pace and direction of her reforms, carry more significance than do 55 copies of the patients charter.

Astonishingly, despite what the Secretary of State said in our previous debate, the view that patients should not come first does not seem too unhinged to command her support. To be fair, at first she dithered a little. One member of the Department's army of press officers was instructed to issue a press release that seemed to distance her from Mr. Lilley's remarks. But when she was questioned at another press conference, she blurted out a ringing endorsement of Mr. Lilley and his bona fides. The Secretary of State endorses Roy Lilley's vision that a hospital should be run like a giant store, with the major imperatives being maximum throughput and commercial gain. That may be Mr. Lilley's vision of the national health service. It is not what the British people expect, or what they were told to expect, from the Government.

I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will argue that her vision is a little more upmarket. She prefers, after all, to shop not in such a giant store but in Marks and Spencers when there is no one else about. She took a lot of stick, I know, after her special treatment was made public. I could not set foot in Marks and Spencers for weeks afterwards without complete strangers stopping me to chortle, "I see they have not made any special arrangements for you, then."

It is much more worrying that, when it comes to health, the Secretary of State can tolerate a two-tier system which allows people like herself to sail through undisturbed while most of the community are expected to jostle and muscle their way through the crowds for a little service from their consultant and a little decent health care.

I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will tell us that the social attitudes survey published recently shows a smaller degree of dissatisfaction with the health service than has been the case on some occasions in the past 10 years. I certainly accept that, but lest the Secretary of State intends to dwell at length on what the social attitudes survey reveals, let me make sure that the House is clear that from 1983 to 1989 there was a continuous increase in dissatisfaction with the health service which reached major, unprecedented proportions. All that we have seen is that in the past 12 months or so there has been a slight decline in the degree of dissatisfaction.

Moreover, we are indebted even more recently than we are indebted to Mr. Lilley to Eric Caines, professor of health service management at Nottingham university, for a further revealing insight into today's national health service. Professor Caines said in an article in *The Times* on 17 November this year:

"public service never had a very solid foundation, and is now commonly regarded as something either to be avoided or exploited."

Professor Caines is not any old professor of health service management, but a former senior civil servant in the Department of Health, a deputy secretary no less, and the former director of personnel for the NHS.—*[Interruption.]* I will say that again, especially as the Minister of State seems to find it amusing. The man who tells us that public service has never had a solid foundation was, until last year, the director of personnel for the NHS. What, for heaven's sake, was he doing in that job? He was the man responsible for the employment of doctors, nurses and ancillary staff.

What does he say in praise of the new system over which the Secretary of State presides? He says:

"Competition is the new form of motivation—based on the recognition that when all else fails, anxiety is the most effective motivator."

That is his vision of the health service in the hands of the right hon. Lady and her colleagues. He describes a climate of fear—fear in the absence of a public service ethos. That climate of fear ties in all too well with existing and expected developments in the NHS.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Everything that I have heard the right hon. Lady say so far supports the case for the reforms and shows how well they are working. While she is quoting professors, should she not also quote Professor Julian Le Grand, founder of the Socialist Health Group, who has said:

"Few in the NHS would want to go back to the old pre-reform system"?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman cannot conceivably have been listening if he thinks that that is what I have just said. I have been quoting supporters of the Government and of the reforms, to show that they believe that they are there to build a health service in which competition is king; a health service that is run as a business; a health service in which members of staff are to be set at each other's throats and put in fear of their jobs. That is not the health service that the hon. Gentleman promised the British people at the last—or any other—general election.

Professor Caines is describing a climate of fear, as I said, and it ties in all too well with what is happening in the NHS. There are, for instance, what I understand to be the Secretary of State's long-standing instructions that, nationally and locally, it is the job of press officers to keep bad news about the health service out of the media. Their task is to keep the Secretary of State in the limelight but out of the firing line. Suppression of information and/or promoting misinformation along the lines advocated by John Maples is already much too widespread a feature of the health service under the right hon. Lady.

Quite apart from the misuse of civil service press officers to serve political interests instead of the public interest, there are also the notorious gagging clauses which are now widely imposed in the new health service contracts that staff at all levels are being required to sign.

Just in case anyone is in any doubt as to where performance-related pay might lead us, Mr. Lilley gives us a helpful steer. Staff are expected to promote the trusts'

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interests, not patient care, and it is presumably on that basis that the quality of their contribution, and presumably their pay, will chiefly be judged.

I am well aware that in recent days the Government have been claiming that there has never been any suggestion that pay should be related to the performance in service of individuals; rather it should be related to the overall performance of a trust. That still raises questions about the dangers of giving trusts a greater incentive to concentrate on more straightforward or more lucrative areas of treatment at the expense of those that are difficult or costly. Of more significance in this context, however, is the fact that it appears to be untrue that individual performance-related pay is not what the Government first proposed or intended.

As I recall, in November last year the Government referred to performance-related elements for doctors. On 19 October the Minister of State spoke of local pay being based on organisation-wide performance, but the fact is that trusts will still have complete freedom to organise whatever pay structures they want, and individual PRP is still on many of their agendas.

In any case, as I have said, organisation-wide PRP does not appear to be what the Government initially proposed. In 1993 they said:

"each scheme should have clear objectives linked directly to the organisation's business needs"—

yet another sign of how the Government see the health service. The Government maintained that

"systematic assessment should be the backbone of performance pay schemes",

and went on to refer to the

"positioning of staff on PRP scales".

That has to mean individual performance-related pay: the statement can be read in no other way. I recognise, of course, that it suits the Government now to pretend that they had something less direct in mind, but their own statements do not bear that out.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I thank the right hon. Lady for giving way, but I have to say that her script, which clearly is produced for her by her spin doctors, is serving only to alarm and to frighten patients. Is she aware that my constituents, who are patients of the St. Helier trust hospital, are delighted with the service that they are getting? They are grateful for the result of the health service reforms, which are giving them faster and speedier treatment.

Perhaps the right hon. Lady might care to comment on one factor. Does she regret the fact that, when she was a member of the Labour Government, she supported a programme that cut doctors' pay, cut nurses' pay and cut health spending?

Mrs. Beckett: I think that the hon. Lady does not need lessons from anybody on how to perform to a script. I am delighted, of course, if the patients in her part of Britain are receiving exactly the treatment that they want and deserve from their local trust. It is just a pity that that is not the case everywhere else. I will say quite bluntly to the hon. Lady that it is not Opposition Members who are raising fears that are unjustified. It is not we who are ignoring the reality of the health service. Why, I ask the hon. Lady, does the Secretary of State come lowest—even among the Cabinet—in the public ratings for sincerity? Why, I ask the hon. Lady, does she think that the Conservatives are 50 percentage points behind in the opinion polls if it is not we who are describing the reality of the national health service? She is living in an unreal world.

The Minister tried to pretend that the Government did not originally intend to create a system of individual performance-related pay. I am afraid that that is not the only recent example of a Minister being parsimonious with the actualité. In the previous debate on the health service, the Minister for Health was good enough to quote a headline in a recent edition of the Derby *Evening Telegraph*, my local paper, which talked about the people whom we can trust. Because it referred to the people who manned the boards of the health trusts in our locality, he said that that showed that what we were saying—about how difficult it was to get information on why the matters were not in the public domain—was ill founded and untrue.

I have, especially for the Minister, a fresh copy of the Derby *Evening Telegraph* from the following day. As he will see, its headline is, "No Minister!" In a most interesting observation, the editor said:

"Mr. Malone has shot himself in the foot. It took us . . . weeks to prise those names out of the authorities.

No-one would tell us who was going to be in charge of running our hospital, how much they would be paid or how they came to be given the posts.

And when we did manage to find out who the chairman would be, and that he was to be paid £20,000 a year for a few hours work a week, the powers-that-be went into an immediate sulk and refused"—

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. After some years as a Member of the House, I thought that it was not usually the done thing to read verbatim at length from a newspaper report during the course of a debate, but merely to quote.

Madam Speaker: I thought that the right hon. Lady for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was quoting from a newspaper. It did not seem to me to be unduly long. Perhaps I was distracted from what was happening. Has the right hon. Lady finished her quote?

Mrs. Beckett: Only a very few more words, Madam Speaker.

As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) will realise, I am most anxious to be accurate, because I do not wish to be unfair to the Minister.

The editor went on to say that the spokespeople

"refused to tell us anything about the rest of the unelected board members."

He continued:

"When you consider that the old district health authority was required by law to hold public meetings every two months, while the new trusts are obliged to have one public meeting a year, it makes a mockery of the minister's assertion that there is no secrecy."

I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to make clear the view of public commentators in our locality. I do him the justice of assuming that—at least on that occasion—he simply did not know any better. Somebody gave him a handy headline and he did not bother to make inquiries about the facts behind it. It is part of our charge

against the Government, as it is our charge against the Gracious Speech, that, on so many occasions, they are simply and completely out of touch with real life in Britain today.

In fact, the Secretary of State is not only out of touch with the people; she is out of touch with her party—whose activists attacked her at its conference on just that basis—and with the experts, the City of London, the chattering classes and even some of her ministerial colleagues. The City of London clashed with her over Bart's. Hardly a journalist in the land will write copy in defence of her new health service.

Indeed, things have become so bad that the Secretary of State is not even in touch with the *Daily Mail* any longer. Let me quote—briefly, of course—what Lynda Lee-Potter wrote in that paper:

"Maybe Margaret Thatcher will finally concede that she made the greatest error of judgment of her political life when she instigated the so-called health reforms without any consultation with the medical profession."

The Secretary of State is out of touch even with her own colleagues. Only two weeks ago, the Secretary of State for Wales—who does not seem to be with us now—complained to a conference on health managers that there was too much jargon, and that it was about time that they got out from behind their desks. He said:

"When I visit a hospital I would like to be greeted with news of medical triumphs . . . not with more views on hospital reorganisation."

I never thought to see the day when I would agree with the Secretary of State for Wales, but it has clearly dawned.

It already seems clear that, whatever the merits of the legislative proposals for reorganisation contained in the Queen's Speech, they will need careful examination so that their potential drawbacks can be explored. We are prepared in principle, for example, to give a fair wind to proposals to allow the General Medical Council to address the question of the service and care provided by general practitioners; and we have no great quarrel with the strategy to bring together the work of family and district health authorities.

We view with a degree of mild cynicism the trumpeting of claims that abolishing regional health authorities will be a triumph for the reduction of bureaucracy, coming as they do from a Government who have presided over an unprecedented explosion of bureaucracy and costs in recent years, most of which will be left completely untouched by their proposals. We shall, however, want to explore the practical effects of those proposals.

As the Secretary of State must know, there is concern about the consequences for medical education and training. We shall be seeking assurances that some of the specialised patient services that are provided at regional level will not be disbanded if they cannot be provided at district level: there is real anxiety about services such as cancer registries, NHS screening programmes, surveillance and control of communicable diseases, health promotion and environmental health.

There is also anxiety about the implications for the wider community of the alternative means of consultation and representation that will be created. Medical, nursing and other staff wonder if and when their voice and experience will find an outlet.

All who noticed the Secretary of State's first stab at a replacement for existing sources of advice about such matters as appointments—the idea that a respected local figure should be the main and perhaps even the sole source—will have been strongly reminded of the Home Secretary's attempt to draft Lord Lieutenants into service to nominate the chairs of police authorities, one of the more ludicrous examples of the Government's striving to escape from the consequences of the richly deserved electoral hammering that they took at local level when the lies that they had told to win the general election had been exposed.

In the light of that great deceit, and of the lesser, almost daily examples of the Government's economy with the truth, we shall look in the legislation not only for clear, categorical assurances but for practical measures to ensure that there is no loss of hard information enabling the public to test their own experience and the wealth of anecdotal information available against published evidence.

Let us take waiting lists, for example. In common with most health service staff and the general public, we regard them today as fiddled figures; but at least some figures used to be centrally collected and readily available. In Wales, I understand, that has not been the case to anything like the same degree, the reason being the different structure of the service there. NHS administrators in Wales are civil servants, responsible to, and with a duty of official secrecy to, the Welsh Office. Consequently, what information is supplied is supplied when it suits the Secretary of State rather than when it is first available and might be most useful to those judging the worth of Ministers' statements.

Under the legislation proposed, English regional staff, too, will be civil servants, owing a duty of official secrecy to that fine exemplar of open government, the Secretary of State, whose press office was charged with keeping news away from the public even before she had the benefit of Mr. Maples' wise advice.

We shall want to look very carefully at the legislation, as will my Welsh and Scottish colleagues. In view of the existing organisational differences, they have asked me to seek guidance from the Secretary of State about whether there will be, as we assume, separate legislation for them.

We shall also want to give much thought and scrutiny to the Government's proposals for supervision orders for the small number of patients whose violent behaviour makes them a danger to the public. That is a proposal about which, as the Secretary of State will know, those in the field are expressing considerable anxiety.

Our concern will be not just for the specific proposals in the legislation, but for the background against which they will be implemented. For example, the Opposition are very conscious that the Ritchie report, which was issued following the tragic death of Jonathan Zito, contained 21 pages of recommendations, of which supervision orders was only one. His widow, Jayne, is on record as describing such orders as "a cosmetic response to a critical situation"—inadequate without more far-reaching change.

Recently, both the Audit Commission and the Mental Health Foundation published serious and weighty studies which suggest greater difficulties with implementing care in the community than the Government seem ready to acknowledge.

I give the Secretary of State fair warning: while we will look constructively at whatever proposals the Government make, we shall expect and demand evidence that, outside

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the legislation itself, the Government are taking action to address the issues. We will not be party to any process which seems destined primarily to create scapegoats to take the rap for the Secretary of State.

The fear that that may be the outcome of the legislation is fuelled by the record and approach of the Tory party in the past 15 years. One of the Government's first acts on obtaining office was to bury the Black report, which highlighted the consequences of poverty and deprivation. Ever since, they have sought to ignore and deny not only the steady increase in poverty and deprivation to which their economic failure has led, but its inexorable consequences for mental and physical health: the knock-on effects and the costs, especially to the health service itself.

A few days ago the Government signalled that nothing has changed when, having commissioned from York university research to assist in finding a better measure of health need to guide the distribution of health money, they decided to avoid taking too much notice of it until after the next election because, inconveniently, it suggested that less money may be needed in the kinds of leafy suburbs represented by the Secretary of State.

We want to see the greatest measure of public money going to where there is the greatest need. We want to see it used sensibly for investment and not wasted as it was on Health Care International, the Wessex health authority and in the west midlands. We want the available resources to be used in the front line for patient care. I again quote Lynda Lee-Potter:

"When we're sick, frightened and in pain . . . We want to believe that the most important thing in any hospital is not its bank account, but its commitment."

The Government and the Secretary of State believe that patients, like the unemployed and pensioners, have to learn to stand on their own. For 15 years, the Government have been telling people to stand alone when, increasingly, it means that people live in insecurity and fear. For example, the Government have encouraged people to take out costly health insurance which is needed only because the Government have put in jeopardy the quality and security of the national health service.

We in the Labour party believe that everyone's self-interest is inextricably intertwined with the common interest, and that the national health service is the greatest expression of that common interest and of the spirit of community that this country has ever known—community not just as an aspiration, but as a living and breathing daily experience.

That is why the NHS is not just valued by the British people; it is loved. That is why, contrary to the notions of Professor Caines, Labour will rebuild a public health service and run it in the common interest.

4.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The Gracious Speech has shown that important social reform will be at the heart of the agenda for the new parliamentary Session. I welcome the measures that it contains to improve the working of the economy, because it is wealth that makes welfare possible. I shall address in a moment some of the prejudiced, short-sighted and blinkered comments that we heard from the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). I want to start with some of the most important issues.

The Labour party is disqualified from ever again being trusted with our national health service. Perhaps the most serious reason for that is that its current policies and its history in office show that they would destroy our economy. Listening to the radio yesterday, we heard the serialisation of the diaries of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). We were all reminded again of the time when volunteers had to man the hospital kitchens, when the economy suffered under the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, and when the NHS suffered bitterly. Unlike the right hon. Member for Derby, South, I was at that time working with the national health service, and I remember that only too clearly.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green) *rose—*

Mrs. Bottomley: At that time, the right hon. Lady was one of the culprits. She sat on the Government Benches during that time. She was a Member of the grim reaper Government who cut doctors' pay, cut nurses' pay and cut real terms spending for the only time in NHS history. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for pointing that out once again to the House. Before the right hon. Lady lectures us, let us look at the disgraceful record of the Government of which she was a Member.

The background to the Gracious Speech this year is very different. We have an economic climate that is as favourable for long-term growth as it has been for decades.

Mrs. Roche *rose—*

Mrs. Bottomley: Inflation is firmly under control, unemployment is falling and exports are surging. We have been able to make Britain, in the words of the President of the European Commission, a paradise for inward investment. We have been able to do that not least because we have rejected the social chapter, which the Labour party would foist upon us. The Government's programme for this Session will help us to build on those prospects. That is good news for the country and good news for the national health service. The longer the faces on the Opposition Benches grow, the louder patients should cheer.

Thanks to our health reforms, we are better placed than ever to maintain a comprehensive service, available to all, at a cost that our economy can afford. I notice that the right hon. Member for Derby, South is happy to recite a vision of what might be achieved in the health service, but that she is totally devoid of any mechanisms by which the Labour party would deliver that objective. As a result of the reforms, we now have the potential to achieve more and more.

Last week, I was invited to address the conference of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on health care reform. The OECD experts have looked at the United Kingdom health reforms, and they like what they see. Their report highlighted a series of positive results stemming from the reforms.

Mrs. Roche: Does the Secretary of State agree with the vice-chairman of the Tory party, who advised his party

that the only way in which it could deal with the Government's record on the health service was to have a total news blackout?

Mrs. Bottomley: I would certainly like a blackout of the endless denigrating comments from the Labour party.

It is bizarre. I am keeping a check on how long it is before the right hon. Member for Derby, South gives a single word of credit to the people who work in the health service in Derby. We had no mention last time of the £48 million programme in Derby and we had no mention this time. I am just waiting until all those thousands of people who work in and serve the national health service in her constituency get any recognition. What matters is that we continue to deliver the results.

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry that the Secretary ofState is so at fault. She has clearly forgotten that, during our previous debate only a few days ago, I opened my speech by praising the staff of the national health service.

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Lady made no recognition of the achievement of that team and of how the service has seized the opportunity of the reforms to reduce waiting times and to improve the quality and the quantity of patient care.

It is an example of the way in which the Labour party behaves that it does not hesitate to denigrate, for example, the work of Roy Lilley, but I wonder how many Labour Members have visited the Homewood Trust, which is a Rolls-Royce service for patients. That is the Rolls-Royce that I mind about.

The trust cares for some of the most severely—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting that the Labour party derides and jeers a trust providing care for some of the most severely mentally ill patients. When the right hon. Member for Derby, South was busy as a trade union official, my life's work involved trying to improve services for those patients. If I thought then that there would be the quality of service—*[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) is right. He has long been a champion of the cause. I invite him to visit the Homeward Trust and to see for himself the quality of care and the commitment of staff to that group of patients. He, as much as I, has long wanted to ensure that they are given the recognition and respect that they deserve. Before jumping to vituperation and personal attack, the Labour Members should visit and see with their own eyes some of the quality care that is being provided.

Rather than dwelling further on the gossip and on the pasting together of press cuttings of the Labour party, I should like to return to the comments of international experts, such as those at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which I was invited to address last week. Its report highlighted a series of positive results stemming from the reforms. They include the improved performance of hospitals, especially trusts, the success of GP fundholders and the doubling in the number of day cases, greatly contributing to increased efficiency.

Health care systems around the world face similar challenges. Changes are driven by medical advance, rising expectation and demographic pressures. Our response is widely regarded as well judged. Other countries that have long respected the national health service are looking to us as pioneers of health service reform. The World Health Organisation, for example, described our "Health of the Nation" strategy as a model for other countries to follow.

It is still this Government who are coming up with the ideas. It is still the Labour party that has none of the answers. It does not even know the questions that it should be asking. The right hon. Member for Derby, South tells us that, for the third time of asking, the Labour party is consulting on what its policy should be. It is difficult for Conservative Members to hear that with a straight face. I have faced three Opposition health spokesman. All of them were looking for a policy and searching for the questions and the answers, without delivering anything which could have given any assurance to the people of this country.

Five years ago, the Gracious Speech unveiled the historic Bill to reform the NHS. Responding for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) offered his usual rash of predictions—or should I say, his rash predictions? He said that the Bill would spell the end of the Conservative Government, and that not a Tory Member of Parliament would be left between here and Aberdeen if we dared implement the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), who so ably seconded the Gracious Speech and who won his seat from Labour in 1992, might beg to differ.

The Conservative Government are still here, returned for the fourth time, with more votes than any other party in history. Our reforms are still here, and they are here to stay. Even the local hospital in the constituency of the hon. Member for Livingston went off to become a trust, and the hon. Member went off to another job.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, as I know that many other hon. Members wish to intervene.

She is talking about reform of the national health service, but will she consider for a moment the change for change's sake that has been forced on the National Blood Authority, whose staff are highly skilled and provide an excellent service to the people who rely on it? Will she recognise that the donors who contribute to the service are deeply worried about the proposal to close five centres? When will we be told about the outcome of the consultation process?

Mrs. Bottomley: If ever we needed proof of the jeopardy in which people would be placed if the Labour party were to form the Government again, that intervention is it. The hon. Lady speaks, understandably, on behalf of the unions involved in the delivery of that service. Our health service, like that of every country, needs to change. Change is necessary, and we are rationalising the 14 processing centres to release resources for mobile units. I look to the courage of the people who are prepared to say that change is necessary because patients will benefit.

I pay the warmest possible tribute to the millions of people who regularly give blood to the national health service. The gift relationship established in our blood transfusion service, which is one of the best in the world, is remarkable, valuable and precious, but that does not mean that we should not rationalise the centres where the

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processing is undertaken if we can streamline the service, thus releasing more resources for mobile units and for parts of the health service where there is pressing demand.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the chairman of the National Blood Authority came to Lancaster last Monday and spent the whole day there from 8 am? He spoke to all the staff and the anti-D donors and made it clear that there was no way on earth that he would imperil the donation of blood from the anti-D donors or others. His object was to make it easier to give blood, not more difficult. He also said that blood was a valuable commodity, and that, as it was given freely, it was up to us to look after it as best we can. I am sure that he will do that.

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend for putting the case fully and fairly.

I was talking about history and the hon. Member for Livingston. His great hot tip was that the general election would be a referendum on the NHS. A number of hon. Members have raised the question of public opinion and perceptions. The hon. Gentleman later kept pretty quiet about the fact that he had said that the general election would be a referendum on the NHS. It was a good thing for the health service that he lost.

Dismantling the reforms, as the hon. Gentleman promised then and as the right hon. Member for Derby, South is promising again today, would mean chaos, upheaval and disillusion in the service. Incredibly, the right hon. Lady seems to have learnt nothing, as she is still pledging to reverse the reforms. She said that she would abolish trusts, that fundholders would go and that she would bring back the old command and control bureaucracy that encased the health service in cement.

She would be foolish to try it, and she must know it. In fact, I do not think that she believes for a moment that it would happen. It is a posture, an empty gesture that impresses no one—except, of course, her old friends the unions which sponsor the Labour party's health Front-Bench spokesmen.

I was wondering whether the right hon. Lady would have learnt from her predecessor's awkward predicament. He spent two years dithering about how to respond to the reforms and their growing success in dealing with patients. Like the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), he would not say yes and he would not say no. Finally, however, he got off the fence and decided that he was against them. Two weeks later, he was sacked. He is not making the same mistake twice. As the House will know, he made a spectacular and humiliating U-turn in Labour education policy. My advice to the right hon. Lady is to follow his example, to hoist the white flag now on health and decide to support the reforms, before she too gets shunted off.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am sorry to intervene in this private Punch and Judy show, but the Secretary of State mentioned the comprehensive health service available to all. Is she aware that, not only in my constituency but in many other areas, it is no longer possible for someone to get dental service on the NHS if he or she is seeking it for the first time? More and more dental practitioners are telling even the patients on their lists that, unless they pay a monthly subscription, the service will no longer be available. When will the right hon. Lady make the NHS dental service available again to everyone in need?

Mrs. Bottomley: I beg to differ. Our weekly figures make it clear that dental services are available. But if the hon. Gentleman wants me to investigate the situation in his constituency, I shall be more than happy to do so. Although the number of dentists and the amount of dental care have increased, more children are registered and there is an unprecedented level of dental cover, we accept, as the House will know, that it is time to re-examine the system under which dentists are employed and remunerated, and the structure of the service. That is why we commissioned the Bloomfield report, to which we are now considering the responses. We want a service that is fairer to patients, to dentists and to the taxpayer.

My task is certainly to set out the achievements of the health service, but where issues need reconsidering with the profession, with patients and with the public, we should openly say so, and take forward that process of debate.

I notice that the right hon. Member for Derby, South has been singularly quiet on the subject of health care since her appointment. That is no surprise, because she was silent on the subject before that, too. The debates ahead on the Health Authorities Bill will afford her an opportunity to make her position and that of her party clear, and to admit before it is too late that the Labour party is wrong about the health reforms, as it has admitted that it was wrong about almost everything else.

We welcome the opportunity that the Queen's Speech provides to take three Bills through Parliament this Session, because we wish to speak at great length about the achievements and the further developments in the health service. My hon. Friends look forward to being in Committee, where they will miss no opportunity further to explain and to set out the achievements of the health service, and the way in which our reforms have made it possible to do even better for patients.

The Bill will complete the unfinished business of the reforms. It will abolish regional health authorities, and build on the decentralised system of decision making now largely in place. In place of the existing arrangements, it will create single health authorities, better able to champion patients' needs. It will ensure that we have a streamlined system of management, able to balance local flexibility with greater strategic direction on core issues. Regional health authorities have served us well, but now that, rightly, decisions are taken closer to patients, they are no longer needed. A redundant layer of management can be removed, and the Bill will secure that.

The right hon. Lady identified several areas, and I agree that it will be important to make it clear how medical education, training, research, communicable diseases and the other factors that she mentioned will be dealt with. Only yesterday, I saw the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss some of the issues involved concerning education and research.

In sweeping away the regions, we shall be able to save substantial sums on administration, and we shall invest that money in even more and better patient care. I challenge the Opposition to support the Bill, and I hope they will. If they resisted it, that would confirm what we have long suspected, so I welcome the right hon. Lady's comments. However, we believe that the Opposition are

still the disciples of old-style central planning, the friends of the command and control bureaucracy that we have consigned to history, and the true champions of bureaucracy and bureaucrats.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I understand from the health authority in West Cumbria that it is £1.5 million short. An argument has broken out among the general public about how that shortfall should be funded. Many of the people who come to me say that they are prepared to pay higher taxes to ensure that they have a proper health service in West Cumbria. What does the right hon. Lady say to them?

Mrs. Bottomley: I say to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that his constituents should appreciate the fact that they have a Government who are able to invest progressive extra resources in the national health service—£1.6 billion this year—and a Government who can afford to make a commitment of real-terms increases in resources. As I set out at the beginning of my speech, the Labour party, which the hon. Gentleman supports, was lamentably unable to deliver. Whatever its promises, it cannot deliver and it ultimately betrays the public, the patients and NHS staff.

Mr. Thurnham: A moment ago, my right hon. Friend talked about blood donors. I do not know whether, like me, she has been over to the Treasury to one of its blood-letting sessions. Is not that as good a place as any to reflect on how much greater value for money she is achieving in the national health service? Is not the latest national health service report as good an example as any of all the points where we are getting much better value for money and much greater efficiency in the national health service, under my right hon. Friend's direction?

Mrs. Bottomley: The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) is certainly right. I find the association between blood-letting and the Treasury too close for comfort. When I give blood, I go elsewhere because I do not feel totally relaxed in that environment.

I noticed that in responding to the Gracious Speech, the Leader of the Opposition, as the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) did today, made a number of mean-spirited and frankly disgraceful attacks on NHS managers. Labour claims to be in favour of efficient management, yet it always attacks the very people in the system who have brought it about. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) then quoted the usual inflated figures about increases in the number of managers. He failed to mention the 18,000 extra qualified nurses, the 8,000 extra hospital doctors and dentists and the 3,000 extra general practitioners. The right hon. Member for Derby, South may look at the figures for nurses. I commend her to look at the project 2000 nurses and at the dramatic increase in practice nurses. She will then want to look again at her figures.

What the Leader of the Opposition did not, of course, mention was that NHS management accounts for less than 3 per cent. of staff while front-line doctors and nurses account for almost two thirds. I know of no health service in the world that can better those figures and all the members of the team deserve congratulations for their work for the health service. The Labour party seeks to set doctor against manager, nurse against executive and clinician against clerk. A well-run health service needs them all and if the Labour party knew anything about running a modern health service, it would admit that.

Frankly, I resent the Labour party's insinuating comments that the information provided by the Department of Health and by the NHS is made up of factoids, and is dubious and somehow not to be trusted. Last week, the national health service, the biggest organisation in the country and one of the most significant health services anywhere in the world, published the NHS annual report. It documents the achievements of our staff and it is a tribute to them and their work.

I remind the House of some of the highlights. The number of patients treated rose to more than 8 million for the first time ever. That is thanks to the work of NHS staff. It is a rate of increase in one year twice the annual average increase in the 1980s and, as my hon. Friends will want to know, five times the miserable figure achieved under Labour. The annual report showed that there were significant reductions in junior hospital doctors' hours and that there was improved training for nurses. There were more and better immunisation services for children, breast and cervical cancer screening programmes, community nursing, services for mentally ill people and much, much more. Those are the achievements of health service staff and they do not wish their achievements constantly to be belittled by the Labour party.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's catalogue. Does not she also agree that the Labour party would choke rather than admit that this Conservative Government have launched one £1 million national health service project every eight days?

Mrs. Bottomley: Once again, my hon. Friend is right. Is it not interesting that all the Labour party can do is jeer and sneer? Most people think that a million-pound project every eight days is something from which the patients would benefit and about which patients would be glad to hear.

On waiting times, which have traditionally been the great problem of our national health service, I am pleased to inform the House of further excellent figures published today. There has been a small, welcome reduction in the overall list size, but, more significantly for patients, because this is what really matters to them, we have made even further dramatic progress on cutting waiting times.

In the past year alone, there has been a fall of nearly 10,000 in the number of patients waiting more than a year for treatment. That is a dramatic achievement—10,000 fewer patients waiting more than a year now compared with a year ago. The figure now stands at 62,000—still too many, but less than one third of what it was before the reforms. Half of all patients do not wait at all, but for those who do, our policies have virtually halved the average waiting time. By extending and improving the patients charter guarantees, we will drive that figure down further still and provide an even greater dividend for patients.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Bottomley: We are building a national health service fit for the 21st century. Increasingly, we want to focus on the quality of care. We need to home in on, and wherever possible improve, clinical outcomes. As

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technology advances and medicine evolves, we must ensure that patients reap the full benefits of a state of the art health service.

I am pleased to be able to announce today that the Government will set aside an extra £40 million next year especially to support research and teaching in the NHS, which will bring to £530 million the earmarked funds dedicated for this purpose. The decision underlines the Government's commitment to research and teaching in the national health service. It will support the health service in training tomorrow's doctors, and allow work to be accelerated in the NHS research and development programme on innovative and evidence-based health care.

The NHS R and D strategy has made impressive and often unsung progress. Its continued evolution is essential for the NHS to take full advantage of the advances in science and technology. Research is crucial for identifying those methods in health care which will lead to better ways in which to promote health, prevent illness and treat patients more quickly and effectively. I look forward to the opportunity of working with the profession to enhance further the NHS's national and international reputation for teaching and research—again, an area about which we hear very little from the Labour party.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): If we are to have the confidence that the right hon. Lady wants us to have in her and the health service, will the right hon. Lady tell the House what she thinks about a report on the front page of *The Guardian*, which states that a letter leaked from the Ian Greer Associates office names the principal Member of Parliament involved in lobbying Ministers and individuals of the House against the tightening of the voluntary code for tobacco advertising as her own Parliamentary Private Secretary?

Mrs. Bottomley: Certainly my Parliamentary Private Secretary has no recollection of such a matter at all. Much more to the point is the fact that any holder of my office who is not used to energetic lobbying by people from all persuasions and interests would be unable to do the job. If anybody wanted to take lessons in lobbying, for all the respect, indeed, affection that I have for them, there would few better advisors on the arts of lobbying than the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing themselves.

Talking of the BMA and its colleagues, the recent meeting of the medical profession on core values in medicine was, I believe, a landmark. It showed that the Government and the profession share a commitment to the same objective—to a modern, dynamic health service based on knowledge, informed by research and focused on outcomes for patients, to a health service of the future and for the future.

In the same way, I am pleased to be working with the medical profession in taking forward our proposed Medical Act (Amendment) Bill. The public rightly have confidence in the vast majority of our doctors, but there is regrettably also a very small number of doctors whose performance is deficient. The General Medical Council, the doctors' regulatory body, wants to improve the procedures which they have for dealing with that minority. There may be some, for example, who need further training before they can be allowed to continue to practice. This Bill will provide those necessary powers, and the Government are glad to be able to support the GMC in that matter.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and Opposition Members have long made that point, and I am pleased that we are able to take it forward at this stage. I also welcome the support of the right hon. Member for Derby, South and of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on behalf of his party. I hope that that support will translate into practical action which will facilitate the passage of the Bill through the House.

I want to speak now about the important Mental Health Bill also announced in the Gracious Speech. The principle of caring for mentally ill people, where proper and possible in the community, is long-standing and supported on both sides of the House. The national health service now spends more than £2 billion on services for mentally ill people. More and more of that money is being spent in the community. There are now better services for the vast majority of mentally ill people than ever before—four times as many psychiatric nurses, four times as much residential provision, twice the number of day centre places. However, the right hon. Lady and many of my hon. Friends know of areas in which we have not yet delivered the comprehensive standard of care that we want for all patients, and we are determined to take that work forward.

We have, for example, a £45 million capital programme to increase the number of medium-secure psychiatric beds. It has long been a concern of mine, as members of the Select Committee and others will be aware, that, while care in the community generally works well for the majority, a small group of the most vulnerable patients do not always get the support they need. There have been a number of well-publicised cases which have brought the issue into sharp perspective. The national health service needs to do more to make services for that group a greater priority. It is beginning to happen.

For years, in the cities in particular, the large acute hospitals commanded most of the money available. Our Bill introduces stronger powers for looking after the most severely mentally ill people in the community. The new power of supervised discharge will build on our programme of action to strengthen care in the community. We have already introduced tougher and clearer guidance on the discharge of patients from hospitals. Four out of five health authorities now have in place supervision registers.

Supervised discharge will apply to those patients who have been detained in hospital and who, on discharge, need special support in the community. A patient subject to supervised discharge will be required to abide by the terms of the care plan drawn up by the clinical team when he or she leaves hospital. Failure to comply would lead to an immediate review and the possibility of compulsory readmission to hospital under the Mental Health Act.

That, too, is a measure which I hope should command support on both sides of the House. It will significantly tighten care in the community. It will provide added

protection for the public and for patients themselves, and it will reinforce confidence in the policy of care in the community itself.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am sure that the House will welcome what the Secretary of State has said about mental health. I know that she has a personal commitment—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is asking a question, but I would be most grateful if other hon. Ladies and hon. Gentlemen would keep their peace so that we may hear that question.

Mr. Kirkwood: We all welcome what the Secretary of State has told the House. We all accept the need for filling some of the gaps to which she has referred. Does she not accept, too, that, in community care more generally, some of the transitional arrangements are producing some difficulties, which I do not believe are caused by lack of good management in local authorities? If those local authorities which are suffering some shortfalls in transitional arrangements demonstrate to her that it is not bad management which is causing that shortfall, would she consider addressing some of the financial gaps which are emerging?

Mrs. Bottomley: When I became Secretary of State, a number of hospitals and health authorities came to see me in the ninth month of the year and said that they were greatly surprised to discover that the year had 12 months, not nine, that it came as a great shock and that they were running out of money. I said then, and I say now, to local authorities that, when people take on a position of responsibility, it is their job to act as good stewards for the extra resources that they have available. It is essential that they realise that they must plan that resource through the year.

Some of my hon. Friends may want to know the sums of money going to some of the local authorities which have been making the most noise. The Isle of Wight, for example, has received a 2 per cent. increase this year in its personal social services—almost £2 million more.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Liberals.

Mrs. Bottomley: Liberals, as the hon. Gentlemen says.

Gloucestershire, for example, has a 10 per cent. increase—an extra £5 million. Devon has a 13 per cent. increase in personal social services moneys—an extra £14.6 million. Local authorities have an extra £1.2 billion for community care. It is a policy which local authorities fought hard to secure, as it were, from the Government. They were determined that they would act as good stewards. They worked closely with us in the implementation of the policy.

They must now demonstrate that the trust that was placed in them was well founded. It is irresponsible to indulge in scaremongering tactics in respect of some of the most frail and vulnerable in the land when this year there are resource increases to which no other Department in local government is looking, even remotely.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): On the issue of good stewardship, and on another aspect of care in the community, did my right hon. Friend note the report yesterday, published jointly by the Policy Studies Institute and the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, which showed that, in terms of cost-effectiveness—indeed, by a factor of about one third—and of quality of life and dignity in independent living, there is a clear advantage in allowing disabled people to manage their own budgets for domestic and personal care rather than having services provided for them?

My right hon. Friend has expressed her relish for reform, and she made some encouraging remarks recently to the conference of the Association of Directors of Social Services. Will she confirm that it is the Government's intention to amend the National Assistance Act 1948 during the Session to allow individuals to make their own arrangements?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has been a long-standing champion of that cause, as the House knows well. I began being somewhat sceptical and cautious, feeling that local authorities might not be able to be trusted to take on the responsibility. I have been assured that, on the contrary, they are able stewards. I must confess my concern about the signs that we have been seeing this year that the authorities might be playing at the sort of games that we have seen in other areas. They will need to demonstrate that they can be trusted to manage a budget through the year without holding to ransom the most frail and vulnerable.

I am not able to say more on the issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) has raised, but I shall continue to reflect on his persuasive comments before I am able to make final announcements.

Before completing my speech, I wish to comment on the police investigations at Bassetlaw hospital and at other hospitals. It is clear that they involve serious matters. The police have our full support in the inquiries that they are pursuing. The House will understand that I am constrained in what I can say in advance of the investigations coming to a conclusion. I have made it clear, however, that I expect the NHS to co-operate fully, and I am sure that it is.

All seven hospitals involved have given a helpline number for any past patients, or their relatives, who are worried. Inevitably our minds all go back to the appalling crimes committed by Beverley Allitt. As I recently stated in a written answer, all recommendations contained in Sir Cecil Clothier's important report have been or are being acted upon. If there are further lessons to be learnt from the Bassetlaw case, I give the House an assurance that action will be taken as soon as they become apparent.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): If I can catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall say a few words about the investigations that are taking place. There is, however, something that I would rather say in private to the Secretary of State. Would it be in order for me to have a private meeting with the right hon. Lady later this week, when we could discuss the matter?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am more than happy to arrange such a meeting. I well understand the hon. Gentleman's profound concern about the issue.

The Gracious Speech carries forward the Government's programme of enlightened social reform. In the NHS, our programme has led to a service that is more responsive to the needs of patients. It is more flexible and it is

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responding better to the challenges that it faces. By being more efficient, it is a far better servant of both patients and the taxpayer.

Through four successive Parliaments, the Government have supported the NHS, as we have supported the welfare state. There has been extra funding, extra staff and better results. Over 3,000 more patients are treated every day, there are shorter waits and there are great improvements in the quality and range of care.

In the 1980s, despite significant extra spending, public satisfaction with the health service fell. That trend has now been reversed. Even the right hon. Member for Derby, South acknowledged that the British social attitudes survey, published last week, shows that, since 1990, satisfaction with how the health service is being run has risen. Dissatisfaction has fallen. Those patients who use the NHS, as hon. Members know only too well, as opposed to those who wish to write it down, are overwhelmingly satisfied with the service that they receive. As the benefits of the health reforms become ever more clear, that trend will be sustained and increased.

The speech of the right hon. Member for Derby, South was a sign of a bankrupt Opposition. Wherever the Opposition look—the economy, health, education and social security—they know that the Government have acted courageously and responsibly to safeguard the best interests of the country and its people. They know also that only by appearing to adopt our policies or adapt our principles would they ever have even the faintest hope of success with the voters.

There is one unanswerable question that faces the Opposition: if they were wrong for so long, as they now admit, why on earth should anybody trust them now? They have nothing to offer the health service, and they have nothing to offer the country. After the next general election, once again, they will have nothing to show for ditching their principles. It is not enough to swear allegiance to the NHS and then to bury one's head in the sand.

A great public service such as the NHS must evolve. It must adapt to meeting changing needs, changing expectations and changing capabilities. Governments must face and not fudge the difficult decisions that have to be made. Our policies address the challenges that lie ahead. The new health service is better able than ever before to maintain and enhance the comprehensive, high-quality service that the public deserve and patients expect. The measures in the Gracious Speech will help us to make a great service even greater.

4.56 pm

Mr. Ashton (Bassetlaw): I hope that the House will forgive me if I concentrate on an aspect of the national health service that has become of great importance—security in our hospitals, especially the Bassetlaw hospital and the seven other hospitals that have been mentioned. At the end of January, it was reported that there had been 16 incidents in the new Bassetlaw hospital—it was built only a few years ago. It appeared that someone had tampered with the high-tech equipment in the intensive care unit. After a check was made of the work rotas, a nurse who had been on duty on all the relevant occasions was suspended.

In the ensuing nine months, the police interviewed 500 members of staff and patients. They have now widened the inquiry, and 1,870 interviews have taken place, spreading over eight other hospitals, involving a further 57 incidents. No one has yet been charged and no one has been interviewed as a suspect. That is despite 20 detectives spending well over nine months on investigations. The investigations have spread to Nottingham city hospital; Sheffield Northern general; the Gloucestershire royal; Bristol Southmead; St. George's, Tooting; the Radcliffe infirmary, Oxford; and the Middlesex Central hospital.

Bassetlaw hospital is run by a trust. I suppose that it is no different from, or any worse or better than, any other modern hospital. In the intensive care unit there has been a 12 per cent. death rate, which is the national average in such units; there is no sign that deaths at the intensive care unit at Bassetlaw have been any different from anywhere else. Two patients died during the period when the hospital authorities say that tampering took place. Following investigations, the 16 incidents that were reported have grown to 30.

It is alleged that tampering has taken place mainly with the settings on life-saving ventilators and intravenous pumps—in other words, the settings have been altered. Sometimes relatives were left alone with patients. It is obviously extremely worrying if they think that they might be accused of tampering with equipment. Admission to the unit was by digital code security, the details of which were not generally known. I understand that that is the practice in all the other hospitals.

On Monday, I met the hospital trust chairman, Mrs. Valerie Dickenson, and the chief executive, Mr. Munro Donald, following allegations and revelations in *The Independent on Sunday* by Mr. Jonathan Foster, who has a long history of specialising in health service issues and, in particular, Beverley Allitt issues. He revealed that further widespread investigations were taking place.

When I met the hospital trust chairman, I was told that the nurse who had been suspended had been recruited in the normal way from the Northern general hospital in Sheffield, which is 12 or 13 miles away. She had answered an advertisement. Her boy friend had come to work in Bassetlaw and she wanted to move to Worksop. She was obviously cross-examined. Her qualifications were bound to be in order and there was no reason to think that there was anything untoward about the appointment.

The nurse in question applied for promotion and passed her examinations. There had been no problems before and I understand that there is nothing to show that anything was untoward at the seven other hospitals or places at which she worked. I am not accusing her or anyone else at the hospital of being involved in the incidents. However, 30 incidents took place at the Bassetlaw hospital and 57 incidents took place at another eight hospitals. That is very worrying for my constituents, for patients and for the town in general.

I have not revealed the names of any of the constituents who have complained. However, Mr. Steven Shaw of Workshop, whose mother Muriel died after many months in intensive care, spoke to *The Daily Mirror*. If the House will forgive me, I want to quote what he said in that paper:

"Detectives have interviewed everyone connected with my mum. They wanted to know if any of us had seen anything suspicious going on around her—if we had seen anyone tampering with

equipment. The inquiry has been going on so long now that we all want to know when the agony will end. It has been very upsetting waiting all these months without knowing what was going on. In many ways, it would be easier to bear if we were given the worst news. But the police say it could be next year before they can tell us anything definite. With all these other incidents, there are obviously going to be a lot more devastated families like us."

The situation is extraordinary. After all these months, and after 1,800 interviews and hundreds of statements, no one has been charged. The police have told me that no one has been questioned along the lines that that person was a suspect.

A cloud has been hanging over the hospital for nine months and the inquiry does not seem to be getting any further. There have also been a series of worrying incidents in the Trent region. Again, I do not allocate blame or say that those incidents are connected. However, we must remember the Beverley Allitt affair. She is now in Rampton in my constituency. Indeed, she was treated at the Bassetlaw hospital after mutilating herself during the trial.

Beverley Allitt was accused of killing four children and of attacking nine others over a period of 58 days. She was given 13 life sentences and is now in Rampton. The usual checks were carried out on her stability before she was employed at Grantham hospital.

Earlier this year, the new-born baby Abbie Humphries was kidnapped from a Nottingham hospital. That baby was missing for 15 days before she was found. Those are worrying aspects of security in our hospitals. The Secretary of State referred to the report of Sir Cecil Clothier, who led the inquiry into the Beverley Allitt affair. Sir Cecil Clothier, a former ombudsman, said:

"It takes only two minutes alone with a helpless patient to kill or injure."

He made 11 recommendations. The Secretary of State says that she has sent them to the health authorities and to the trusts and asked—I do not know whether she ordered—that they be implemented. I am not trying to be political, but the trusts virtually run themselves as they choose. They may be satisfied that such things could not happen in those trusts, but they might happen.

This is all rather like the problem with our football stadiums. People thought that the Hillsborough disaster could not happen and people could not be killed in that way, but ultimately it did. Action then had to be taken to improve football stadiums. A similar thing happened to the ferry when its doors were open and in respect of the King's Cross fire.

The security aspect of our hospitals is unbelievable. What has been done about Sir Cecil Clothier's recommendations on the screening of staff, camera surveillance inside hospitals, controlled admission for visitors and curfews on visiting times? Some of our hospitals are like King's Cross station: anyone can walk in or out of them whenever he or she likes. That is very worrying.

Staff in any inner-city accident and emergency department will be aware of the drunks who roll in at 10 pm on a Saturday night. Some of them just come in to get warm and have a cup of tea. However, nurses and doctors sometimes have to endure horrendous situations. Those drunks do not walk into nightclubs, because there are bouncers on the doors to keep them out. There are no bouncers at a hospital on a Saturday night.

This sort of thing is happening regularly. We have security in our town halls and in the Houses of Parliament. People cannot simply walk into the BBC or into a police station. I was in a London hospital in August. It seemed to me that half the neighbourhood took a short cut through that hospital. I do not want to mention the hospital by name, because the medical treatment was absolutely superb. The doctors and nurses worked wonders under impossible conditions. However, there were four lines of beds, 18 of which were occupied out of 24. There was a mixture of men and women in the ward. There was one bathroom, three toilets and horrendous traffic noise. Any weirdo could take a short cut through the hospital from one street to the next instead of walking around. There were no controls. People had to be wheeled into the street on trolleys to get to the operating theatres.

All hospitals are different. Some were built when Strangeways prison was built and, in many ways, their architecture is no better than that of the prison. However, others are very good. Many have no locks on internal doors and there is no one on the main door to stop people coming in. Visitors at the hospital to which I have referred rolled in at 11 pm looking as though they had come straight from the pub. The trusts are doing exactly what they like.

The problem with Bassetlaw is not the first case of trouble in health service hospitals. In 1990, two surgeons were knifed to death in Pindarfields general hospital in Wakefield. The man who did it is also in Rampton in my constituency. In 1991, a man was stabbed at Rake Lane general hospital in North Shields while he was in intensive care. In 1992, a patient was shot dead while talking on the phone at the Royal Free hospital. In 1994, three babies were abducted from hospitals in Bath, London and Nottingham.

Some trusts have said that they will electronically tag babies. Why only some and not all? When that question is asked, the first answer is, "But we will want more money." The Secretary of State said that more money is being made available and it is up to the trusts to manage their own resources. However, with regard to this problem, we no longer have a national health service. We have local health services which are spending their money and operating their hospitals as they think fit.

When a Beverley Allitt comes along or a baby is abducted, there is tremendous uproar in the media and there is tremendous news interest. Twenty detectives have been working on the case at Bassetlaw hospital for nine months. I do not know what that is doing to the crime figures in the rest of the county, but it cannot be doing them any good.

Morale in Bassetlaw hospital is very low, patients and patients' relatives are afraid, and the situation is getting worse after nine months. There seems to be no end to the inquiry. The police say that medical inquiries take a very long time. People have to be cross-examined and their memories become confused as time passes. The police must also consult experts. The problem is very difficult.

There must be a public inquiry into what has happened in Bassetlaw and what is happening to security in general. We have specific rules about dangerous drugs in hospitals. However, there do not seem to be any rules about dangerous people. They can come and go as they like. To stop allegations being made, we have rules whereby a male GP is not supposed to examine a female patient without another woman being present. However, in the

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case of the problem at Bassetlaw, allegations ran throughout a hospital. False allegations were made about people at the beginning of the inquiry which have not helped the police and have not improved the situation. I hope that, sooner or later, there will be an arrest or that eventually there will be a public inquiry. Such incidents are happening far too often in far too many hospitals to far too many people.

Patients have the right to believe that, when they go into hospital, they will be not only treated but protected. Highly technical equipment can be fiddled with as soon as a nurse turns her back. Nurses cannot watch everything all the time. Anyone can wander in and say, "We'll have a bit of fun and alter this machine." Suspicion then falls on other patients, on relatives and on nurses. None of this is doing the health of the nation any good.

I shall have more to say to the Secretary of State when we meet later. I hope that she will now set up not just the sort of inquiry held under Sir Cecil Clothier into the Beverley Allitt case, but a general inquiry into hospital security and whether we need national rules and regulations on visiting and the conduct of patients.

5.10 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, because health is of such importance to all of us. My wife had a major accident on the motorway on Thursday. The car was completely wrecked and she had to be freed from it. An ambulance came from the Royal South Hants hospital within 10 minutes. After being kept in hospital for three hours, she was released, so it was a happy ending. I hope that that shows the Opposition that the national health service has tremendous back-up facilities, for which we will all be grateful at some time in our lives.

The hospitals in Southampton all have trust status and they are doing very nicely. There are no major grumbles. Figures that I obtained today show that in Hampshire the total money for social services and community care has risen from £148 million in 1993-94 to £173 million in 1994-95—an increase of 16.9 per cent. That is a very good increase, but the Opposition never mention such things. I am disappointed with Labour Members. Sometimes, they can be outspoken in the Chamber and give credit where credit is due, but not as often as in Committee where they back many of the initiatives taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

What is the point politically of deriding the national health service? That does nothing other than depress those working in the service, and the patients waiting to go into hospital get a bad impression. I have been in the House a long time, but I have had few letters from patients in Southampton hospitals criticising them.

The security of babies has been mentioned. There was a problem with the maternity unit of the Princess of Wales hospital when babies were given to the wrong parents. It was a rather nasty little episode, but I think that the problem has been solved completely by using armlets for identification.

Surely the emphasis of today's debate should be one of congratulation to my right hon. Friend. I have read nothing that proves that it is not sensible for us to increase the number of patients treated—to 8 million for the first time ever, according to the NHS annual report. That is 8 million in a population of 55 million— *[Interruption.]* Already, the barrackers are jumping in and denigrating the system. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is a shadow Minister dealing with the NHS nationally, yet he sits there denigrating it. That must stop. We have the best health service in the world and no one should forget that, whether he lives in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or England.

The facts must be stated once in a while. We must look on the good side and not carp, especially on the late-night television shows where politicians get around the table and tear things to pieces. The numbers on the waiting list have fallen quickly—by more than 3,000 in one year. That is admirable. Had the Opposition been able to achieve that, they would be wearing funny hats and carrying balloons; because we have achieved it, they treat it with disdain. General practitioners, consultants and those at the sharp end of the NHS do not like being constantly denigrated. They do not like the fact that they work an incredible number of hours, sometimes in cramped accommodation, while some politicians do nothing but sit here criticising them.

Any grumble that I might have is not about the health service, but about the social and welfare service. I am especially anxious that the Child Support Agency should be investigated intensely. I have some cases from my constituency advice service of unfortunate individuals who have become tied up in the system. One case involves a police officer who has served for 23 years— *[Interruption.]* Do Labour Members want to denigrate that chap's suffering as well? *[Interruption.]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you protect me from these denigrators? That is all they are; they are not here for the debate.

As I said, the case involves someone with 23 years' police service. He was married for 17 years and has three children. He left home with the clothes he stood up in and the family's second car. He gave his ex-wife the house, the contents and the main car, and she had custody of the children. He continued to pay the mortgage for a further year. He paid for the divorce and ran up an overdraft. He paid for clothes and holidays for the children, in addition to paying maintenance. He remarried and has a second family. He was just starting to get back on his feet financially when in December 1993 the CSA stepped in and then in June 1994 assessed that he should pay three times the amount of maintenance that he was paying.

As a police officer, if that man goes into debt, he will be in danger of losing his job and pension. The chief constable has told him that he is not eligible for financial help, as it is a domestic matter. His second wife—this may be greeted with a certain amount of glib humour by Labour Members—has now walked out on him. That is the result of a less than flexible approach by the CSA.

The second case involves a lady with two teenage children who was divorced in 1987. She was awarded £16 a week for the son and £12 for the daughter. In January 1993, the court awarded an increase to £20 a week for each child. Now we get to the nitty-gritty. In May 1993, she received forms from the CSA. She explained that she had just had a maintenance increase, but was told that if she did not fill out the forms family credit would be stopped.

In July 1994, the CSA awarded my constituent £17.62 a week, to be split between both children. The lady said:

"One final point, if the CSA had not reduced my weekly maintenance so drastically I would not have needed family credit next year, now I shall need the support for the next three years until my daughter completes her 'A' level exams."

As a compassionate, deep-thinking Parliament, we must admit that the matter requires further investigation.

We know that we cannot have a perfect society. We cannot give everything to everyone who wants it. Nevertheless, once in a while one has to come to an abrupt halt and say that the matter has to be dealt with. It must be investigated in the light of one of the political aspects that we invariably fail to consider: the public relations side of a severe policy. We must make sure that the public know exactly what Parliament is trying to do.

The difficulty in the House is that we have opposing political views. I sympathise with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State because the Opposition are not always co-operative. They do not always work with her. They look ahead to two or three years hence when they think that they will get the wheel and drive us right over the cliff. We need more co-operation, certainly on social services and welfare matters, and on hospital trusts. So many trusts are doing well and they will do even better if they see that we are one team here in the House. I wish my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State every success in the future.

5.21 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am sure that everyone in the House will join me in giving our best wishes to the wife of the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) in her recovery from her unfortunate accident. The hon. Gentleman gave a good illustration of the quality of the people who work for the national health service, particularly those who have to deal with accidents and emergencies.

I start on a positive note by welcoming the commitment in the Gracious Speech to a Bill to introduce new procedures to enable the General Medical Council to deal with those doctors whose professional performance is found to be deficient. I must declare my interest. It has been referred to already. I have been a lay member of the GMC for five years. With me on that council has been the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), and we have been joined recently by the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) from the Labour party.

The hon. Member for Chislehurst and I have come to admire the GMC, although neither of us joined with admiration particularly in mind. The GMC is sometimes criticised, although usually, I fear, from a position of ignorance. The GMC can do only what statute permits it to do. That is something which the newspapers and, as a result, the public rarely understand. It is fortunate, therefore, that the GMC appears to be a beneficiary of the Post Office debacle. It has earned a small but important slot in this year's legislative programme.

The council has pressed for change for two to three years. At present it can deal only with what is called serious professional misconduct—a term the meaning of which has been restricted over time by judicial interpretations in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. It can also deal with doctors who are so sick that the health committee of the GMC is enabled to interfere with their registration.

Under the presidency of Sir Robert Kilpatrick, the GMC has sought to modernise the way in which it is run, not only by increasing the lay membership of the council and examining its procedures but by introducing what has been called, as a working definition, "performance review". This is not, as was suggested in one Health Department press release, a lesser offence than serious professional misconduct. It is much broader than that.

The GMC wishes, and is now to be allowed, to deal with doctors whose performance falls below acceptable standards. The aim of the council is universal good doctoring. With that extra shot in our locker, the council of which I am proud to be a member will be able to deal with bad doctoring. There is more to it than merely widening the remit of the GMC. The causes of bad doctoring are complex. It can be based on overwork, cultural misunderstandings, poor mutual support systems in the profession or sometimes poor support systems from family health services authorities. I suggest to the Secretary of State that some more research is needed into the reasons why doctors run into difficulties.

Another interest that I should declare is the unpaid position of parliamentary adviser to the Overseas Doctors Association of Great Britain. One of the matters that troubles me greatly is the disproportionately high number of overseas qualified doctors who find themselves facing the professional conduct committee of the GMC. It is perhaps time for the Secretary of State to consider funding some research into why that occurs. I know that it worries the Overseas Doctors Association of Great Britain as much as anyone else.

The Secretary of State mentioned medical schools in her speech. They, too, are a direct responsibility of the GMC. It has responsibility for the accreditation and quality control of medical education. There is some anxiety about the future of the medical schools and medical education under the new management structures. I hope that the management structures that replace the regional health authorities and those at other levels of the health service will properly reflect the important role of the universities. It is vital that they are involved in appropriate ways at various levels of the restructured NHS management to achieve joint planning in the disposition of staff and the provision of patient services. We have excellent medical schools in Britain. They must not be disadvantaged by management changes.

The Secretary of State made a passing reference to whether patients were cheering. In that context, I should like to make some remarks about fundholding general practices. I do not think that patients care very much—I do not think that they cheer or otherwise—about whether their general practitioners are fundholders, save when they find that they are disadvantaged by fund holding. I ask the Government to respect the views of GPs who conscientiously do not wish to become fundholders.

It is recognised that in certain circumstances fundholding practices may gain advantages, but there is a perception, which is justified occasionally by evidence, that those advantages may be unfair. There is also some evidence that in a few fundholding practices—I do not wish to blacken them all with a sweeping statement—

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

those whom one might describe as expensive patients are not welcome. It is logical that to try to drive all GPs into fundholding is a kamikaze policy for the Government.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: If I may just finish the sentence. If all GPs become fundholders, the advantages which are available to the few fundholders will no longer be available to any of them. They will all face the chaos which, in some areas, they all faced before.

Mr. Malone: It is not the benefits being available to fundholders that matter: it is the fact that benefits should be available for patients. There is no question either of departing from the voluntary principle of fundholding. Of course the Government would like as many GPs as possible to take advantage of the system, but I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that there will be no compulsion.

Mr. Carlile: That assurance is welcome as far as it goes, but I urge the Minister to look at the success of some non-fundholding commissioning groups. He should look at what is happening in Nottingham, where 200 doctors have become involved in a non-fundholding commissioning group which has had at least as much success as fundholders—and probably more—in securing better services for their patients. I accept that the discipline may have arisen from the introduction of fundholding—I do not deny it for a moment—but I would ask the Minister to take an objective look at the idea, and possibly to accept that in some places it is not wise to urge fundholding when a better alternative may be available.

Another aspect of general practice that patients are not cheering is on-call services performed by locums. Much better quality control is needed to ensure that locum doctors working at night, especially for GPs, are fit to do the job they do—and have the equipment to do it. There is evidence—I heard it repeatedly in my five years on the professional conduct committee of the GMC—to suggest that some locum services are extremely slipshod in their management and in the way doctors are engaged to carry out the work.

I urge the Secretary of State and the Minister to the view that we are approaching the time when we must recognise that extra skills are required for a doctor doing locum work. He does not have the advantage of knowing the patient, or of knowing the aetiology of the patient's illness; he does not have the advantage of the patient's records. He needs a better history and quicker and more perceptive skills. He needs special training, in short, to be a locum doctor.

I suggest that the best night-call services are carried out not by the commercially-run services, but by GP co-operatives. I ask the Government to look closely at ways in which co-operatives can be encouraged to take more of these services—

Mr. Malone *rose—*

Mr. Carlile: It looks as though I am on a winner tonight.

Mr. Malone: I am always glad to point out to the hon. and learned Gentleman the fact that he is supporting a Government policy. He will be well aware that measures are in hand to try to encourage co-operative practices for night cover. I hope that he will join us in persuading the medical profession of their acceptability. We need to make progress quickly, and his support would be extremely valuable.

Mr. Carlile: I seem to be on a lucky streak, so I will give that support wholeheartedly.

I should like next to discuss hospital locums. I was a member of the GMC's professional conduct committee when Dr. Gaud, the doctor who operated on patients knowing that he had hepatitis B, was erased from the medical register. It would not be right to comment on that hearing, but I would like to comment on the issue. In that case, a surgeon was able to obtain employment in hospital after hospital because his references were not pursued. It is common practice, when locum consultants and assistant consultants are taken on, for their references to be taken as read. It should not be so. I invite the Government to take urgent steps to ensure that there is a foolproof and fraud-proof system to guarantee that references are always pursued.

Furthermore, there is evidence that some senior consultants are sometimes all too ready to give a favourable reference without possessing the material to justify one—perhaps even occasionally to get rid of a colleague whom they no longer want around. Those are hard words to say, but I believe them to be true. I ask the Health Department to treat this as an issue requiring serious attention. We cannot afford another Dr. Gaud.

I turn next briefly to pay for medical and paramedical staff at all levels. The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) commented on performance-related pay, its definition and its nature, and on whether it is to be individually performance-related or local pay. At the moment that is causing a real worry for all staff. They have no confidence—and I feel none—that a fair system of performance-related or local pay can be devised.

In my constituency, the Powys NHS health care trust has declared its intention to switch to local pay. That has engendered the worst possible morale among staff. It is not right to impose on the NHS a system of pay led by business needs instead of deciding priorities according to patients' needs. There is a danger that rural areas will start to lose medical and nursing staff because of the threat of local pay. It undermines the whole principle of the doctors and dentists review body, which considers pay objectively and nationally.

While on the subject of dentists, I should add that the Secretary of State was plain wrong. She should go and find out what is happening around the country. NHS dentistry for adults is not available in vast areas of rural Wales. In the county of Gwynedd, the situation has become so bad in the past week that no NHS dentist is now available for new adult patients. In my constituency, for distances of 30 miles or more, it can be impossible to find an NHS dentist. The situation has become critical; even if someone finds an NHS dentist—save for a genuine emergency—he has to wait months for treatment.

In other areas of the country, things are different. I understand that in parts of London it is easy to obtain a consultation with a good NHS dentist, but it is not sufficient to use London or urban statistics to distort what is happening in other parts of the country.

I shall end with a few comments on community care. It will never be the jewel in the crown of this or any other Government unless it is properly resourced. Local authorities' standard spending assessments bring huge variations in the money available to the authorities, and in many areas that is leading to increased rationing of care. The elderly, the disabled and their carers can be the losers. Local authorities have worked hard to make a reality of community care, and the idea that some local authorities are trying to wreck the system is a calumny which cannot be demonstrated to be true anywhere.

The increased help given to local authorities was warmly welcomed by members of the public, but it has led to increased demand. The Government unfortunately failed to estimate correctly the element of unmet need. They consistently state how much money has been directed to social services departments, omitting to say where it has come from. By making that omission they perpetuate the myth that it is new money. It is not. It is a reallocation of social security payments to people who previously could have opted for residential care with no assessment of their needs. The Government had no accurate figure for the extra costs required before introducing the policy. The suspicion is that they know no better now. By transferring a fixed sum to local government, however, the Government are successfully capping the spending that is going into community care.

The Government further added to the problems of local authorities by restricting the use of the money transferred from the DSS, so that 85 per cent. of it must be spent on the private sector. The argument for that, apparently, was that it was private sector finance. It was not. It was public money paid in from public taxes. Indeed, that whole area has been so mismanaged by the Government for so many years that £2.5 billion of public money was poured into the private sector without any regard to proper assessment of the individuals, or any attempt at strategic planning.

The Government must recognise two things about community care. First, they must recognise that there are acute funding problems, which have been mentioned already and which largely arose because the Government changed the rules; and secondly, that community care, certainly in rural areas, often means anything but care in one's own community. For many people, it means being shunted off into a community far away from one's life and times, from one's friends and relatives. That is not acceptable.

There are a multitude of other issues that one could raise in this part of the debate on the Gracious Speech, and we shall certainly have a lively debate during the Session on issues relating to health and social services. I hope that the Clydesdale hospital will not remain as the memorial of the Session—an incident led by dogma rather than by considerations of quality and value. Knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing is no basis for improving the nation's health. I hope that, by the end of the Session, we will, by some co-operation—I hope that there will be a large measure of that—have succeeded in improving the nation's health and the way in which the nation is cared for. But I believe that a change of attitude by the Government is needed if that is to be achieved.

5.41 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I begin by expressing my appreciation and that of my constituents to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health for taking time out during her very busy Conservative party conference week in Bournemouth last month to visit the Royal Bournemouth general hospital in my constituency. I know that she was suitably impressed by its undoubted success and performance in treating my patients and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), but I wonder whether she was informed that it was originally scheduled to be built in 1977, but, like so many hospitals, was a casualty of the Labour Government cuts at that time. There was also a reduction in nurses' pay, to which my right hon. Friend referred. It took the restoration of Conservative Government prosperity for that hospital to be built, for the benefit of our constituents.

I shall make four points, two of which relate to the theme of today's debate. I want to reflect the concerns expressed to me at a public meeting on law and order which I held in my constituency last Saturday afternoon. Apart from when party conferences are in town, there are simply not enough police patrolling our streets during the day—some 20 or 30, I am told—and their resources are fully stretched during the night. Those are the police's words, not mine. They do not want to see more clubs opening in Bournemouth, because they could not cope. That situation threatens to hold Bournemouth back as a successful resort.

Of course, I welcome the new freedom that is now given to chief constables to increase manpower without Home Office approval, but there can be no more police without more money. So I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce a substantial increase in resources for police manpower in his Budget statement next week and that some of that will come Dorset's way.

I particularly welcome the proposed legislation in the Gracious Speech to make it easier to return those who are mentally ill to hospital, for which I have called for some time in my capacity as the honorary parliamentary consultant to the National Schizophrenia Fellowship, with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones). I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on the initiatives that she has already taken in mental health during the past three years—more than the previous 300 years put together. I hope that she will consult widely on what she is proposing.

I strongly urge that the new legislation be subject to the same Special Standing Committee procedure that the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1983 underwent. It is a process that is sadly underused, inviting as it does interested parties to come before a Standing Committee, just as they are invited to come before a Select Committee. I may be one of the few Members left to have served on the Special Standing Committee that considered that Bill. I hope very much to be able to do so again.

I welcome the reforms that I expect will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, to soften the impact of the Child Support Agency on absent fathers who have handed their houses over to their ex-wives in clean break settlements. I also hope that the travel-to-work costs of absent fathers and those incurred by children visiting the father, or by the father visiting the children, will be taken into account when assessing his payments. That is only fair and just. I look forward to learning from my right hon. Friend just how he will reconcile those changes while maintaining the whole point of the CSA, which is to ensure that parents accept the

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financial responsibility for their children, and not the taxpayer, many of whom might be much worse off than the parents.

I shall conclude on a foreign affairs issue, which I could not refer to in the debate last Thursday, because I was in Azerbaijan.

The House will be aware of the six-year conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenian people have been seeking independence from Azerbaijan, which has resulted in some 40,000 dead, more than 100,000 wounded and maimed and well over 1 million people displaced. I have now seen—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman will refer to the health service or the pension policy in Azerbaijan and relate it to the Gracious Speech, but I hope that if he is minded to do so he will link it in.

Mr. Atkinson: I will, of course, be referring to the humanitarian support, including the health services that the refugees desperately need at the present time. I understood, however, that in the debate on the Gracious Speech, one is allowed to stray a little from the theme of the day—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must know that we have an amendment before us. Had he spoken yesterday, he would have been entirely in order, but today he would not be in order to stray wide.

Mr. Atkinson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will, of course, refer to health issues in what I propose to say.

I have seen the refugee camps in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and it is clear that, without further substantial and immediate help, many of those refugees will die during the coming winter, particularly those living in very insubstantial tents. They need the benefit of medical aid and other supporting health services through the United Nations, to whom I pay tribute for the considerable amount—

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have always understood that, following the Gracious Speech, we would debate what was in it. The fact that an amendment has been tabled surely cannot restrict Members in what they wish to debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a senior Member. He will recognise that the question is on the amendment before us, which the Labour party, of which he is a member, tabled. That is the question before the House. Therefore, today's debate, until 10 o'clock, is about the national health service and pensions policy, as related to the amendment tabled.

Mr. Robert Hughes *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but those have been the rules of the House for the 20 years that I have been here.

Mr. Atkinson *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal to the hon. Gentleman to return to the specific issue that the House is debating.

Mr. Atkinson: It is clear that I have strayed beyond the parameters that you have allowed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me end my speech, however, by referring to the Queen's Speech as it relates to the situation that I mentioned. I welcome the statement that the Government will seek to enhance the role of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in conflict prevention and the resolution at the Budapest summit in December, and look forward to its contribution to a successful outcome of the dispute over Karabakh.

5.50 pm

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I shall confine my speech to health issues.

The very purpose of Government is to have duties and responsibilities, and the election of a Government carries the burden of trust from the electorate. I believe that the present Government have lost that trust as a result of their actions on the national health service. One would expect the ideological vision of any party that has been in power for 15 years to be near completion, but the Tory philosophy that everything should be left to the market or the business ethic has proved to be fundamentally flawed. It is not what the people want and at the next general election—in two years' time, or even next Monday—we shall see what they do want; the Government will then pay the price.

Meanwhile, for the past 15 years, the price has been paid by those who are not equipped to defend themselves. No area of government demonstrates that more clearly than the NHS. On behalf of my constituents, I take this opportunity to thank all its workers for their skill and dedication, and for always putting patients first: that has always been, always will be and always should be the culture of health care, and to suggest otherwise is to insult the integrity of all who work in that field. I hope that Mr. Lilley of the Homewood health trust will resign; if he does not do so voluntarily, the Secretary of State should ask him to. After what he has said, he has no place in the national health service.

With a population of more than 475,000, due to rise to half a million by the year 2000, Bradford is the only metropolitan district in England whose population is growing. It is growing mainly among the very young and the elderly, especially those above the age of 85. Both groups depend heavily on the NHS. A recent report by Bradford Health Strategy drew attention to the relationship between health and wealth, stating:

> "The health of Bradford's citizens varies in direct proportion to their wealth."

Given that one third of Bradford's population survive on some form of benefit, it is vital for health provision to meet the community's needs.

In 1991, Bradford's hospital trust was launched as a flagship; but it has been a complete disaster. It is already on its second chief executive, and in June was heading for a £6 million deficit. Morale is at its lowest as staff see more resources being poured into bureaucracy: there are more accountants than ever before, spending money on letterheads and administration. Remedies considered to reduce the deficit included the closure of a day ward at St Luke's hospital.

My constituents are still on long waiting lists, but under the Bradford system patients must decide whether they still require operations. Having waited 12 months, they receive a card asking whether they want to go on waiting;

if they do not return the card, they are removed from the list. That is quite convenient when it comes to waiting list figures.

A consultant in my area recently wrote to me complaining that he could not respond to one of my constituents because he was overworked and there was a shortage of neurosurgeons in the United Kingdom. In fact, he said that there were more neurosurgeons in downtown Tokyo than in the whole of the United Kingdom. The spin doctors of the Tory party tell us that there are no problems in the NHS and accuse Opposition Members of talking it down; but that is not true. Conservative Members do no good by saying how wonderful the service is while destroying it and gagging NHS workers who complain about what is going on.

The Tory record speaks for itself: we have seen increased prescription charges—

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Does the hon. Gentleman admit that expenditure on the NHS in real terms is now 60 per cent. higher than it was in 1979? Does he also admit that a record number of patients are now being treated and that nowhere is the number being treated greater than in areas where trust hospitals and fundholding practices work together? Is that not an argument for extending reform, rather than sticking to a system that was designed to meet the needs of the 1940s and cannot possibly meet those of the 1990s?

Mr. Sutcliffe: Surely, if the system is to be changed, those changing it should listen to what the health care professionals have to say. That has not been the Government's record. I can only go on the record of the trust in Bradford, which was formed in 1991 as part of the Government's "flagship": the resources being provided there do not meet the needs of Bradford people.

Mr. Malone: Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to concede that the great advantages secured by that trust include the removal of dialysis services from Leeds to Bradford, and far better physiotherapy in the hospital, where it can be provided in a community context? I know, because I have visited the trust and seen those improvements. Why does the hon. Gentleman persistently describe the picture as black when it clearly is not?

Mr. Sutcliffe: That is not true. If the Minister has indeed visited the hospital, I hope that he commented on the £6 million deficit. I do not know at which time of the year he visited, but if he wishes to return to find out what methods of reducing the deficit are being used, I will gladly accompany him and try to find the answers myself. When asked what it is doing, the trust plays its cards close to its chest; that is due to lack of accountability.

Moreover, not all the developments referred to by the Minister match local needs for certain types of health provision—for instance, provision for the elderly. As the Minister knows, I used to lead Bradford council; I was happy to discuss and negotiate Bradford's health care strategy with many local agencies, but when we tried to talk to the trust we found that it adopted a very distant attitude to the people of Bradford.

Let me return to the Tory record of increased prescription charges and charges for eye tests. Today we have heard about the privatisation of dental care; we have also heard about the two-tier family practitioner service and the discrimination against patients according to whether their GPs are fundholders. In the place of the old service, we see more costly, more bureaucratic and less accountable health trusts.

The following question could be asked: if people do not use the service, does all that matter? I wonder how many Conservative Members use the NHS. What is so tragic is that the position could have been very different. I have been told that the recently privatised utilities, and other privatised companies, have secured millions, if not billions, of pounds in shareholder dividends and profits; if only a proportion of that had been used for the NHS and similar services, people could have received service at the point of need.

The Queen's Speech gives the health service nothing new; in fact, it provides less of the same. It does not provide the accountability that we require, or give doctors, nurses and health care workers what they want. It is necessary only to talk to those employees to see how low health service morale now is. They want the resources to use their dedication to provide services for people in need; what we need is a speedy change of Government. I hope that that will happen on Monday, but I doubt it: not many Tory Members have the backbone to do what they say they are going to do.

6 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I support the Government in their opposition to the amendment that has been moved this afternoon. Like many hon. Members, I have sat patiently listening with great interest to the debate. We heard a great deal about "factoids" and "killer facts" from the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who led for the Opposition. I hope that the good Lord will save us from the hon. Lady if she ever comes back to the House with killer policies for the NHS. She singularly lacked any policy proposals today.

At the start of my speech, I have to declare a vested interest: many years ago I was employed by the NHS as a porter—my first paid employment. I do not know whether that has to go on the Register of Members' Interests, but I thought that I should bare my chest at the outset.

I support what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health said earlier. When one goes to any group of people to ask them about the NHS, 95 per cent. say, "When I used it, it was marvellous. The doctors and nurses were splendid." The users of the NHS think that it is good news. As for my local experience, I have to thank the Government for promising to rebuild Barnet hospital.

But I make no apology for moving the debate sideways within the terms of the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Derby, South. I believe that if the former Member of the House who, at various times, represented Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and a pocket borough called Mitchel, and who is otherwise known as Sir Walter Raleigh, brought back his noxious weed from America today, he would not be welcomed. I wish to talk about that subject in the health context.

On 8 October this year, the *British Medical Journal* published a 40-year study on health and death. It was the longest and most in-depth study of its sort ever undertaken. It contained the prediction that about half of all regular cigarette users will eventually die as a result of their habit. It forecasts that by 2025 no fewer than 10 million people will die from smoking each year. By that

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time, more than 200 million will have died from the habit. Currently, 3 million people die from smoking each year and in Britain the figure is 110,000. Even with the so-called 17, per cent. yearly reduction in smoking in developed countries such as ours, that figure is far too high, and this House must address it.

It is well known that smoking causes 90 per cent. of all lung cancer deaths. It is less well known that 25 per cent. of cases of ischaemic heart disease are caused by smoking, as are 75 per cent. of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema. We must weed out this killer from our nation. We owe it to the world to spell it out now that the *British Medical Journal* has published these new facts. We must take action to prevent the spread of tobacco use and to prevent the vulnerable and the ignorant from choosing to smoke.

The horror catalogue of tobacco use contains one fiend of dreadful aspect with gory hands and bloodstained jaws, if I may put it that way. I speak of our complicity, both in this country and in Europe, in the tobacco business. Belatedly, the most recent research findings have convinced me that tobacco advertising is indefensible—even with its health warning. No hair splitting or sophistry can disguise the fact that we are responsible for allowing what is wrong merely because duty from tobacco use is so large.

In the House we have a history of eventually doing the right thing—of course, this Government do it more regularly than most. Slavery was wrong, but, thanks to Wilberforce, in 1832 we rose above the vested interests. The denial of votes and political representation to women was wrong, but we got over that earlier this century. We now have to abolish tobacco advertising.

I welcome the Government's good sense in raising the tobacco issue in Europe. I thank the Government for raising the level of tobacco duty—one can point to no other single more important factor in explaining why more people are choosing not to smoke. I look forward to more good sense in the Budget next week, when I hope that the Government will announce that they will increase tobacco duty again. That alone will save lives.

My right hon. Friend is right to act on this subject in Europe. It is fair to say that, so far, only Britain has resisted the ban on tobacco advertising and I hope that it will shift its position now that it has new facts to grapple with.

For some time, British Health Ministers have taken the right decision to put pressure on spending Ministers to stop tobacco subsidies. As early as 19 July 1991, Baroness Trumpington said in another place:

"The Government have consistently criticised the tobacco regime on health grounds and will continue to do so."—[*Official Report*, 19 July 1991; Vol. 531, c. 364.]

That decision is right and it is to be welcomed, but there is new evidence not only of the evil effects of the product, but of the crazy nature of the European tobacco subsidy regime.

The European tobacco subsidy scandal is not understood fully. Each year the European Union gives £1 billion to tobacco growers in southern Europe. The money goes mostly to Italy, but also to Greece and, surprisingly, countries such as Belgium, France and Germany. So not surprisingly, votes for its abolition are in short supply. Britain receives not a puff of subsidy in this area.

Of all the current frauds in Europe—it seems that frauds are a big growth industry there—this is the worst, and the House should address it. Conservative Members sometimes find it difficult to explain the details of the excellent efficiency savings that we are making in the NHS, yet at the same time we are spending money on a scandal in Europe.

Our money is spent on the poisonous weed in this way. In another place, the Government have admitted that British taxpayers spent at least £50 million on the European tobacco crop in 1990. Bearing in mind the fact that this country is responsible for 16 per cent. of the total European spending of £1 billion on tobacco, our tobacco subsidy is £160 million. As we are net contributors, our proportion is probably closer to £250 million. But taking the lesser figure of £160 million, each year we are spending the equivalent of one to three hospitals on supporting the growth of this poisonous crop in southern Europe.

That is not all. Another issue is how the tobacco is produced and where it goes. Half the black tobacco cannot be smoked by the people in Europe because it is so awful. It is dumped on the third world, where there is no health warning on the advertising. It is not surprising that the demand for that noxious product is rising all the time.

That is not all. The quality of European tobacco for which we pay is dreadful. With its high tar content it is likely to cause cancer and the other problems that I have mentioned. This must stop. We must gain for ourselves line item veto in our budget proposals. This Parliament has never flinched from curbing squandering and spendthrift rulers. Kings, lords and Ministers have fallen to the demands of the House. The House must give notice that it will block any spending that is onerous, oppressive and damages human health.

I support the Government's fine record on preventive medicine and on far-reaching and far-sighted funding of community medicine. However, they should polish their crown. They should abolish tobacco advertising in Britain and move to stop tobacco dumping in the third world. They should put pressure on the finance and farming Ministers to veto any budget that contains another pound, ecu or lira to be spent on black tobacco growing in Europe.

6.11 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I do not suppose that the people in my constituency or any other really mind who runs the health service, so long as it is run well and is free when people need treatment. I do not want to knock the trusts. They are there and they will stay until we have the power to put them right in the way that we see fit. Unfortunately, we have had some trouble with the trust in south-east Northumberland, where my constituency is located.

The Ashington hospital is about to close, although part of it is still open. There is the new Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital run by the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust, which became a trust in April last year. Three months after that it announced that it was £1 million in debt and the cuts began. Little did we know that some cuts had already taken place because there were already debts. My argument is this: why did it apply for trust status? If it had stayed with the health authority when it knew that there was a £1 million debt, help might have been available. Now that it is a trust, there is no help. We

understand that that £1 million debt may grow to at least £2.5 million by the end of the year, so there are more cuts on the way.

One of the day care wards will be closed and the pathology laboratory is to be shared with another hospital. We all know what might happen there. The worst event was the sacking of midwives and nurses at the hospital to save money. The maternity wing of the hospital took a fairly big cut. Over a few months, 12 well qualified midwives were made redundant. Of course, the trust brought other people in—new health care workers at £2.80 or £3 an hour when fully qualified midwives could easily command £6 or £7 an hour. It was getting rid of experienced midwives and nurses and replacing them with inexperienced health care workers—that is the new term.

One of the gynaecologists at the maternity hospital had seen what was happening. He wrote a letter to the chief executive of the trust and sent a copy to the chairman of the regional health authority. He said that he was amazed to see the work of the midwives and health care workers in the maternity wing. He was amazed at their exhaustion and their worry. He saw their frame of mind and knew that they were overworked. He said that lives would be lost if something was not done, but nothing was done. As we know, those involved in the trust ignored any warning that they were given from the people who matter—the doctors.

There was a disaster. A mother in my constituency lost her first baby after experiencing a perfectly normal pregnancy. I saw the local doctor and he said that there should have been nothing to fear and that there should have been a normal delivery. She went into the maternity wing at Ashington hospital and was in labour for 12 hours. For three of those hours the baby was in the birth canal, but no one was attending to the mother. The nurses and midwives were overworked and were dealing with somebody else at the same time. It was not the nurses' fault: they simply could not cope—that is why the gynaecologist had written the letter.

When the baby was born, it was exhausted and the hospital had to send for an emergency baby unit from the Royal Victoria infirmary, 20 miles away in Newcastle. The unit was rushed to the Ashington hospital in an attempt to save the baby's life. The experts had to insert a needle into the baby, but it missed the child's heart, hit an artery and the baby died.

When I heard about the case I took it immediately to the ombudsman. Unfortunately, the mother is, quite rightly, suing the hospital. That event was a warning.

Lo and behold, about a month and a half later there was another incident. This time the mother came from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and I had no dealings with it. The family were very upset and were not saying much. All we knew was that the child had died in strange circumstances in the same maternity unit. Very little was said. I could not get in touch with the parents because they did not come from my constituency, but we understand that they are now taking legal action against the hospital.

All that arose because the trust was in debt by £1 million and decided to save some money by cutting a few hospital workers, particularly midwives. The deaths of those two children should never have occurred, especially when there had already been a letter of warning from a gynaecologist, which the regional health authority and the chief executive of the trust had chosen to ignore. I think that the Minister has received that letter. If he has not, I shall give him a copy. It is a disgrace when something like that happens and two mothers lose their children.

The trust asked some of the midwives whom it had made redundant to come back. It knew that it had made a mistake. The union man's advice to the midwives was to stay out for another month because they could lose redundancy money if they came back too quickly.

Other things have been happening in relation to the trust. The problems are all down to the lack of money and to a hospital becoming a trust when it was in debt. I should like to ask the Minister how a hospital can become a trust when it is in debt. On two occasions, I asked the chief executive of the trust and the panel of men who sit either side of him why the hospital became a trust when it was in debt. I received a little bit of an answer from one of them. He said, "Captain Harry did not tell me." How in heaven can one believe that? A person could pull the bells on my foot if he wanted me to believe that one.

The position in Wansbeck is not good. If cuts of £2 million or £3 million go ahead at the end of this year, I foresee that that brand new hospital serving south-east Northumberland will close, or that another hospital may take it over, as has been rumoured will happen. I asked some of the people working there whether they had heard any Americans talking because some Americans might be after a nice private hospital in south-east Northumberland. That is a danger.

I asked the Minister for an inquiry, but I did not get one. Naturally, there should be an inquiry and the matter should be examined. The health of people in south-east Northumberland is at stake. I received a letter from the Minister saying that I had made some good, valid points but that, unfortunately, he could not call for an inquiry.

Never mind: things have developed since then. Only a few weeks ago, a sub-committee of the community health council—another sub-committee—passed a resolution of no confidence in the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust. Lo and behold, two Tory councillors put forward that motion of no confidence, which still has to go before the full council for ratification. Two Tory councillors oppose the trust, but the Conservative party says that trusts are wonderful and great and must remain.

I do not know why the Minister's colleagues in Northumberland put forward the motion of no confidence. Perhaps the Minister will be able to find out. All that I ask the board to do is to resign and to let someone in who can do the job. The hospital is in a downward spiral and, unless money is found, it will either close or be taken over by another hospital. Of course, the money will never be found because the Government will never bail the trust out and it knows that.

It is interesting to consider what is happening with GP fundholders. Fundholders and non-fundholders in my constituency have a large number of patients. I visit the practice of a non-fundholder who wishes to remain so. The GP at a nearby practice is a fundholder.The non-fundholder knows that fundholders receive preferential treatment. Patients of fundholders are being admitted to hospital before those of non-fundholders. That is being done deliberately to force non-fundholders to become fundholders. That view was expressed by my doctor; I did not find it out myself.

[Mr. Ronnie Campbell]

I am aware that at least one practice is getting rid of some of its patients, pushing them on to non-fundholders as well as fundholders. One practice in my constituency is removing old people from its books. Another will not treat drug addicts. Whatever one's views on the subject, drug addicts are patients and they need treatment. Nevertheless, that practice refuses to treat them and sends them to another practice.

That practice has lost about 1,000 patients in about 18 months and has made an application to become a fundholder. It is getting rid of patients who will cost a lot of money to treat. It wants to have an elite of patients who will not cost it too much money. That is a dangerous position. Many burdens are being placed on non-fundholders who, on principle, will not become fundholders. They face the burden of looking after old people, drug addicts and anyone else who costs a lot of money to treat.

I hope that the Minister will consider what some of those practices are doing. I am sure that it is happening not only in Blyth Valley but in other regions. The Minister should take time to consider the number of patients that fundholders have lost in a year and how they have pushed them off somewhere else. I hope that he will seriously consider the problem.

6.26 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I should like to deal with the pensions issue and to welcome the Government's proposal to introduce a Pensions Bill. The need for pension legislation is manifest—recent scandals have made that clear to everyone—and it is right that the Government should legislate to protect people who receive pensions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) and I probably represent more occupational pensioners than anyone else. No one is more assiduous in defending their rights than my hon. Friend. There are concerns about some of the Government's proposals in the White Paper. I should like to bring them to the attention of the House and of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. I hope that, before the Bill is introduced, problems will be corrected in the ways that I should like.

I pay tribute to the assistance that hon. Members have received from the Association of Consulting Actuaries and the National Association of Pension Funds, both of which have guided us through some of the more difficult and tortuous parts of this rather esoteric subject.

It is right that a minimum solvency requirement should be built into all pension funds. There is nothing worse than someone working all his life to receive an occupational pension, having paid into it all his life, only to find that the fund contains insufficient money to pay him the pension to which he rightly believes that he is entitled. It is essential, therefore, that we frame our legislation to give adequate protection.

I am concerned that bureaucratic rules may be drawn up which defeat the object that we intend. If the mechanism for defining minimum solvency requirements is too rigid, it could undermine specifically defined benefit schemes and deter employers from providing them. That would be a great shame for employees and would also hurt the Government, who would have to pay out more in means-tested benefits. There would be no winners in those circumstances.

Similarly, we must remember that pensions and pension investment are long-term businesses. They provide for liabilities for pensions and pension trustees many years ahead, whereas markets are essentially short term. Yields, values, equities, values of properties and values of gilts go up and down. The danger is that too strict a mechanism may drive fund managers out of equity investment and, at least predominantly, into gilts. That would not only disrupt the market but deprive British industry of a valuable source of investment funds.

One of the greatest dangers at the moment is that not enough of our institutional money is channelled into investment in productive industry. Too strict a mechanism may defeat that desirable objective. The House will know that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry commented on that fact and suggested ways in which we could guide pension fund moneys into investment in industry. It would be a great shame if the proposed Bill were to defeat that objective.

Secondly, I wish to deal briefly with the contentious issue of trustees and their investment policy. Who should be trustees? It is suggested—rightly—that trustees should not be comprised entirely of employers because, as happened with Mr. Maxwell, they may choose to raid the funds to prop up their businesses, with thoroughly undesirable results. Equally, however, we must be aware that if employees are too heavily involved in the management of a scheme they may have a similar interest in keeping the company going, an interest which may not coincide with that of existing or deferred pensioners. There is therefore a danger both in having too many employers and in having too many employees as trustees. We need independent trustees of proven probity who will be able to protect all those involved in the complex business of investment policy and in where and how pension funds are held.

Thirdly, I am a little worried that the White Paper does not deal with the custody of funds. Who holds the cash or the assets? By whom are they controlled? The example of Mr. Maxwell proves that, unless such issues are clearly defined, there is a danger that cash and assets may fall into the wrong hands. It is therefore extremely important that we provide for proper independent custody of valuable assets.

Finally, I wish to deal with regulation. Most of us agree that it is important that we continue to encourage occupational pension schemes. Valuable as private pensions may be, they satisfy the needs of only a limited number of the population. Those who are young or who may change their jobs often will probably be better off with a private pension. For many other employees in industry and commerce, however, an occupational pension to which a benevolent employer makes a valuable contribution will probably produce a better result. It is therefore vital that nothing in the legislation should prevent the continuing provision of occupational pensions.

I am concerned about regulatory costs and burdens. We are in danger of imposing on pension funds the same costs and burdens that we imposed on the investment industry through the Financial Services Act 1986. Were we to do so, the effect would be simple: employers would vote with their feet, stop providing occupational pension schemes

and say that employees should have private pensions. Everyone would then suffer. I therefore urge that the costs of regulation be kept to a minimum.

Specifically, I believe that the cost of funding the regulator, which the Government propose in the White Paper should be met by employers and pension funds themselves, should fall on the Government. We aim to protect the public, but if we place too heavy a cost on employers they will not provide occupational pension schemes. If that were to happen, we should all lose. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to ensure that the Government pick up the bill in this instance.

6.33 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I greatly welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) because it seemed almost a generation ago that the flickering light was taken to the social security brief which is occupying half of our debate. I shall continue in the same vein as the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that he will forgive me if I do not follow him into his sphere of concern and expertise, namely pensions.

It might be helpful if we move to a recent speech that did not gain the coverage that it perhaps deserved. I refer to a speech made by the Secretary of State for Social Security in Northern Ireland. It is perhaps a sign of the lack of confidence we have in ourselves that it is not what happens in the Chamber that matters so much as the coverage that we get might outside. As I am anxious to promote the Secretary of State's career, I shall spend a short time bolstering it now.

I believe that the Secretary of State's speech is the most important given by a senior politician this year. He outlined the theme of his lecture, which was what he believes to be

"the single most significant social change affecting the UK and most other western countries."

He went on to explain:

"That phenomenon is not the ageing of the population. Nor the breakdown of the family. Nor the increasing proportion of women at work. Rather, it is a phenomenon which is still largely unrecognised—the growing dispersion of earnings power."

I shall consider to what extent the Gracious Speech covers what the Secretary of State regards as the big issue of our time.

There are some wonderful give-away points even in the brief quotation that I read out. Indeed, one can build from it the modern Tory laws of politics. The beginning refers to a worldwide trend. Whenever the Government discuss a trend that is unfavourable to them, they describe it as "worldwide". Thus, the dispersion of earnings, which is very bad, is a "worldwide" trend. However, when trends begin to be favourable—for example, when unemployment goes down—it is all thanks to the Government, although, of course, when it goes up, it is part of a terrible worldwide trend.

In his speech, the Secretary of State did not concern himself—unusually, given the rigour of his analysis—with the fact that we know quite a bit about the dispersion of earnings in this country, and the trend is not as worldwide as he alleged in his lecture.

The record growth in inequality of earnings in this country can be accounted by three forces: half of that growing inequality is due to the Government's tax changes since 1979; a quarter is due to the rise in unemployment, and a quarter to the changes in the job market to which the Secretary of State devoted so much of his interesting discourse. I provide that information because it is something that we need to consider.

We shall be examining our tax policy between now and the election, and considering how we are going to fashion our fair tax policy. If half the inequality that we deplore has been brought about by the Government's tax changes, we clearly have to think carefully about the changes that we shall reverse in order to lessen that inequality. Instead of doing that, the Secretary of State, understandably, considers the unemployment rate. Again, I thought that that was rather unfair, because figures can be used to favour one side or the other.

When examining any modern economy, it is no longer appropriate to concern oneself merely with the unemployment rate. We must combine it with the number of people who would usually be in work but are not—or, to use the technical jargon, the inactivity rate. If one adds the inactivity rate to the unemployment rate, it is clear that our performance—sadly—is no better than that of other countries. Nor is our performance in job creation.

Again, the Secretary of State chose two key dates for his analysis. He took the period after the first Thatcher recession and just before we went into the recession caused by Lord Lawson's Budget. And, looking at that very limited time span, he said, "Haven't we done rather well with job creation?" All of us would wish that the Government's claim about job creation were right, but the sad fact is that, if we take the total period of stewardship, from when the Government came into office until now, our economy over the past 16 years has been good at producing jobs, but by their management of the economy the Government have destroyed most of those new jobs. We have created many jobs, but we have not sustained them.

When considering the Gracious Speech, we should take the framework that the Secretary of State has given us and examine some of the more serious trends on which we need to spend more of our time. I shall give one illustration. Sir Brandon Rhys Williams was for long the Member of Parliament for Kensington, and one of his many activities was to safeguard the National Birthday Trust, which was responsible for three cohort studies.

The 1970 cohort study has now examined its subjects at the age of 21, and it found that many of them, having been through 11 years of our state education system, are largely illiterate. Of course there are points to be scored across the Floor of the House about the various stewardships of the different Administrations, but we should all be appalled by the fact that, after 11 years of taxpayers' money being spent on their education, people come to our surgeries hardly able to read or write.

We must consider that trend against what the Secretary of State described as the globalisation of the world economy, which will make it harder rather than easier for people without skills to get work in future. We must address that central problem. What is in the Queen's Speech to tackle it? There are two measures.

First, there is talk about allowing technical courses in schools for pupils aged 14. As someone who has lobbied the Government for eight years to carry out that small reform, it would be ungracious of me to say, "About time too"—although I now believe it to be totally inadequate. What is wrong with our city technology colleges is the

[Mr. Frank Field]

fact that there are not a thousand of them, so that we could produce an education relevant to many of our young constituents.

The other measure in the Gracious Speech is the job seeker's allowance. Opposition Members would have no complaints about that if it were being introduced at a time when most people who wanted to work had work. But our great fear is that, under the guise of their supply-side measures, the Government will try to rough up many of our least able constituents so as to get them out of the dole queues, and that that, rather than getting them back into work, will be the primary objective.

Those two measures are totally inadequate to deal with what we all see in our constituencies now. As we have disfranchised younger people from work, two trends have appeared. One is that some of our younger female constituents, rather than being bound to their own homes, are deciding to start their own new homes and to have children and thereby gaining a certain freedom. That is a trend about which I am deeply unhappy, but it is happening.

For our very young male constituents, the opposite is happening. Ironically, they are even more firmly bound than ever before to their original families. In our constituencies are being created groups of unskilled young males condemned to a state of permanent adolescence. They are not in school; they are not in training schemes; they cannot get work.

While we are considering the extent to which the Gracious Speech meets the challenge that we see in our constituencies all the time, and which the Secretary of State boldly and clearly outlined in his recent speech, I ask the House how we are to judge the worth of the two measures. Sadly, I come to the conclusion that we now have a Government who—collectively, as opposed to some of the individuals within it—seem to have no will power to match measures to the situation that many of our constituents face.

The hopeful note in the Secretary of State's speech was about the Reich theory of the labour market and about taking our constituents up market for their skills. But even if that were possible in the short run, I do not believe that there would be the levels of employment that we require.

Similarly, I do not think that we shall see another American election won by a free trade candidate. Nor will we be able to maintain the line on free trade when we see how devastating is the impact of that policy on our poorer constituents. I believe that we shall need to move towards much clearer trading blocs, with competition being maintained within them rather than between them. Before some hon. Members look too shocked at that idea, I remind them that, although we all refer to GATT and free trade, if we really had free trade we should not need GATT, which is in itself a way of managing trade.

I suggest that, if we are serious about securing a breathing space in which to take the people now confined to a state of permanent adolescence back into the labour market, we shall have to dream things that we in this Chamber have yet to begin to dream about.

6.46 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made what was an interesting speech to start with, although I am sorry that he ended on what seemed a pessimistic note. I do not share his pessimism. The hon. Gentleman must have been selective in his reading at the weekend. Although I commend him on following the Secretary of State's speech in Northern Ireland, he seems to have missed the weekend's bigger headlines, which were all about lottery fever, and the concerted effort by many people to increase inequality.

The thrust of the hon. Gentleman's speech was that inequality was a bad thing, but presumably everybody going in for the lottery did so on the basis that inequality was a good thing. We must accept that people believe that we live in a world not only in which there is inequality but in which there should be inequality. Otherwise, such an enormous number of people would not have supported the lottery and put in money that, although some of it went to good causes, also went into the pockets of the people fortunate enough to win large sums, and who now sit there having achieved great inequality through the wishes of the large number of people who bought tickets.

The hon. Gentleman may rather have lost sight of the human motives that underlie our feelings about inequality. That made me think more about the subsequent news about large salaries for the directors of utilities. The hon. Gentleman may feel that something should be done about those; perhaps we should empower the shareholders of privatised utilities to decide what directors' salaries should be in advance, rather than having to read about them in the newspapers some time later, after a small group of non-executive directors have made the decisions. To the extent that many people are happy that there should be inequalities, perhaps we can all be winners on the privatisation front in one way or another.

I was a little perplexed by some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) about the Government not being good at sustaining jobs. I look at the record for Bolton as a whole. When the Labour party was in power, unemployment trebled from 2,100 to 6,500. Admittedly, the unemployment figure is higher today at 9,300, which is a 50 per cent. increase on the figure under Labour, but there was a threefold increase while Labour was in power. The hon. Gentleman's memory must be a little short if he criticises this Government for not sustaining jobs. He should remember what happened before.

I very much commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security for the measures in the Gracious Speech on the social security front. There are three major measures covering pensions, the job seeker's allowance and disability, to which I shall come later. Those measures prove that the Government are a strong reforming Government; there is plenty in the Gracious Speech on that front.

What we might see in the Gracious Speech if we ever had the misfortune of being given a Labour programme crossed my mind. If that happened, there would be a Clinton-like con trick on the British public, as they would soon realise. The Labour party has performed U-turns on school league tables, on its position on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and on its position on Europe, which suddenly changed after the former Prime Minister obtained a £600 million rebate. There are U-turns on clause IV, and there have been great disappointments with the social justice commission. Labour is now wriggling on the minimum wage.

The minimum wage is a classic example of how a Labour party programme would lead to unemployment. Almost 20 years ago, the former Secretary of State for Social Services, Barbara Castle, produced a paper showing how minimum wage legislation would lead to increased unemployment, especially in the regions. She showed that there would be an especially severe effect in Northern Ireland, as well as in other regions, if there was any attempt to introduce a minimum wage.

I noticed at the weekend that Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union, one of the paymasters of the Labour party, was wriggling when asked what would happen to differentials if there was a minimum wage. He was more or less forced to concede that wages would leapfrog as differentials came in, which would lead us back to inflation, back to high interest rates and back to higher unemployment—perhaps the International Monetary Fund would come in again.

Looking at the picture in the United States, it is interesting to note that, according to *The Economist* this week, 16 per cent. of workers in the United States have wages that are below the minimum wage in France. If the minimum wage in the United States was at the level that it is in France, the jobs of 16 per cent. of workers in the United States would presumably be at risk. That shows why unemployment in France is double the level it is in the United States, where the latest figures show that it is at 5.8 per cent. and falling. In France, unemployment is, at 12.7 per cent. and rising. There seems to be a clear correlation.

The minimum wage is a classic example of how Labour policies would lead to unemployment and to weakening the economy. By contrast, this Government's policies are leading to a strong economy. I am confident that the Budget which will be before us in a few days' time will be good for business in the country as a whole and for business in Bolton, where there is a strong emphasis on manufacturing. I am confident that the Budget will help to reduce unemployment even further. Unemployment in Bolton has fallen by 2,000 in the past 12 months, and I am confident that it will continue to fall.

We have the strength of an economic recovery based on an export-led boom. Exports are up by 11 per cent. overall and by 17 per cent. to the European Community, much of which is still in recession. That has given us 4 per cent. growth in gross domestic product, the fastest in Europe. Inflation is at the lowest level for almost 30 years. Productivity is up by 6 per cent., and unemployment nationally is down by the best part of half a million. That is the way in which we can fund the sort of welfare state that we need.

I do not know what else we shall see in the Budget, but I am sure that we shall see further evidence of the control of public spending as the basis for it. I hope that items such as housing benefit will be brought under control. I am sure that it should be possible to cap housing benefit if it is done on a local basis and at the same to give a boost to the private rented sector. We may see housing investment trusts coming forward, and I hope that there will be a boost to the sale of council houses. We may need more legislation on that front to make it easier for councils to dispose of their council houses, even if the tenants are unable to buy the whole freehold under the right to buy.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My hon. Friend has just advocated a regional, or even a local, cap on housing benefit. Would not that flatten out differentials and effectively set a going rate, which would encourage landlords to move their rents up to that level if they happened to be below it? That would do nothing otherwise to encourage the development of the private rented sector which, my hon. Friend said in the same sentence, he advocated. Will he explain a little more why he supports such a possible change?

Mr. Thurnham: As my hon. Friend knows, the rents that landlords set are limited by the rent officers. I am sure that he appreciates that there are no incentives for tenants to move to cheaper accommodation. There are no incentives for either tenants or landlords to seek any savings in the cost of the accommodation they have at the moment. We have seen housing benefit increase substantially.

I am sure that it should be possible to arrange matters so that there were incentives for people to make use of the least expensive accommodation that they can sensibly afford. At the moment, as my hon. Friend will be aware, there are massive abuses of housing benefit throughout the country, especially in areas such as London, where some high rents have been charged. I am confident that it should be possible to control that, although I take my hon. Friend's point that we need measures to boost the private rented sector at the same time.

We have the "rent a room to a lodger" arrangement, which gives £3,000 free of tax. That should be extended to a lodger who is not under the same roof. In other words, people should be able to rent out a property they own at up to £3,000 a year without having to pay tax on it. That would be an incentive for them to provide accommodation up to that cost.

I very much welcome the fact that the Government are introducing their own Bill on disability. I am sure that that is to the credit of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), the new Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. I also give praise to his predecessor. I am sure that there have been some strong discussions behind the scenes. We look forward to hearing the full details, and I hope that we shall have a full statement of the details this evening or before too long, so that we know exactly what the Government have in mind. When the Bill is published, we shall see the full details.

My message to the Government is that they should be as bold as possible. They have an excellent record on disability overall, and spending on disability has trebled to £17 billion a year. The Government's general approach has been a step-by-step, balanced approach, in contrast to that in the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

I see that the hon. Gentleman is here at the moment. He knows that I had reservations about how one could proceed with a big-bang approach. I shared his aims, but I believed that, when it came to implementation, it would be more sensible to proceed in stages rather than to try to achieve everything at once. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be as bold as possible, and that he may

[Mr. Thurnham]

be able to go beyond what was in the consultation paper, by introducing measures that will provide as much additional opportunity as possible for disabled people.

The Government's own example is important. The public sector is a huge employer in its own right, yet organisations such as the BBC employ only one tenth of the so-called "quota". There are health authorities and local authorities that do not employ any registered disabled people. That goes to show that the quota itself is nonsense. There is no doubt that we can dispense with the quota and go towards legislation that will outlaw unfair discrimination in the whole area of employment. We have excellent examples of some organisations, such as the Shaw Trust, which work to provide opportunities for disabled people at a cost substantially lower than that of the Government's own arrangements through Remploy.

I hope that the Government will go as far as possible to provide access to buildings. This is the expensive area, and we have already had long debates about what the costs would be. The Government need to assess what sort of time scale is appropriate.

We must outlaw some of the blatant discrimination one comes across. Recently, I saw a case of a lady suffering from cerebral palsy, who had worked all her life. When she came to retire, she put her name down for a retirement home and was given an indication that she would be able to proceed with her application. However, when the owners of the retirement home found that she suffered from cerebral palsy, they suddenly said that they did not think that they could proceed with the deal.

It is that sort of nonsense which needs to be totally banned, because it is blatant discrimination of the worst sort. We look forward to seeing the details of the Bill, and I hope that it will be strong in all the areas that I have outlined.

I hope that the Bill is especially strong in the area of transport. A recent opinion survey of the members of the Conservative disability group showed that their number one priority was transport. I hope that we can bring in measures such as ensuring that all new buses are of the low-floor type, and that taxis and so on are made to enable disabled people to make as much use as possible of all forms of transport.

In deciding where the right balance should be struck and how far the Government should go with their Bill, we need to keep as wide a perspective as possible, and not only consider exactly what we may want to do in this country. We must bear in mind the fact that, in a global sense, there are enormous difficulties for disabled people. Although we should do everything that is sensible, practical and pragmatic in this country, we should bear in mind the considerable difficulties and chaos abroad.

It is a few years ago that I visited Romania, but I remember going to an adult psychiatric hospital—so-called—at Podriga, where the conditions were simply frightful. There was no doctor in the hospital, patients were dead in their beds, there was no running water or proper heating, and the lavatories were blocked and overflowing from one floor to the floor below. The conditions in that place were absolutely horrific.

My daughter happened to be working in Romania in that hospital at that time. If anyone would like a Christmas present, I certainly recommend the book published this week, entitled "Sophie's Journey", in which she describes the dreadful conditions under which the people in that hospital were placed, as well as the conditions in the Ionashen orphanage where she also worked.

I give great credit to the Government for the measures which are in the Gracious Speech. I wish them well with those measures, especially the measures which will be announced shortly in the disability Bill.

7.1 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Twelve months ago, we would have been surprised to hear that the Government were to introduce a Bill to tackle, in their words, discrimination against disabled people. I welcome the fact that we now have that Bill, although perhaps it is useful to reflect on what has happened over the past 12 months to change the situation. As a matter of fact, a Government report published in 1982 by the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People—the CORAD report—recommended that the Government should make discrimination unlawful. Of course, every year since then, no action has been taken.

Comments have even been made about how inappropriate it is that private Members' Bills deal with the matter. I could not agree more. The fact that the issue had been left for so many years and private Members had to seek to legislate on an important matter of civil rights was wrong. If we are now generally agreed that we should use the law to outlaw discrimination against disabled people, I very much welcome that change of heart.

It is, in fairness, generally recognised that disabled people face discrimination in every aspect of their lives—in employment, in education, in access to leisure facilities, transport, and so on. No doubt some right hon. and hon. Members will have attended the Scope reception at lunchtime, where one of the reports published, the result of an extensive survey of disabled people undertaken by an independent research agency, concluded:

"The problems faced by disabled people in coping with hostile attitudes and inadequate support are much greater than many think."

I hope that it is now recognised that this is a serious area of discrimination and also that there needs to be legal redress. After all, we have laws in this country that seek to banish discrimination on the grounds of gender and race and, indeed, in Northern Ireland, on the grounds of religion. Why, therefore, should we not make it illegal to discriminate on grounds of disability? We should.

If the House has achieved that consensus over the past 12 months, I am very grateful. It has to be said—I say this in as constructive a manner as possible—that, in the past Session, not many issues were as controversial as the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. It resulted, of course, in a couple of apologies for misleading the House, and led to the departure of a Minister. It resulted more positively, perhaps, in raising the political profile of the issue. I have no doubt that the events of last year also resulted in the Government's publishing a consultation document in the summer and I have no doubt that the events of the past 12 months resulted in the commitment in the Queen's Speech to introduce a Bill to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

I believe very strongly that disabled people's organisations deserve every credit for the fact that this issue has been put at the top of the political agenda. We must recognise that every organisation of and for disabled

people was saying last year, as such organisations have said every year recently, that comprehensive, anti-discrimination legislation was required and, therefore, that they wanted the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. The Rights Now campaign deserves credit for the way in which that lobbying was conducted over the past 12 months.

Support for the Bill has been voiced not only outside but inside the House. A clear majority of hon. Members support the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. They did so last year and, if we examine support for early-day motion 1, we see that they also support it this year.

Briefly, I shall refer again to Scope. I am not advertising it, but its reception happens to be the only one to which I have been today, so far. The Scope reception also published another report. Again, it was an independent survey of how Members of Parliament feel about civil rights for disabled people. I am sure that the Secretary of State is aware of the outcome—70 per cent. of Members of Parliament responded by saying that they supported civil rights legislation. A clear majority responded by saying that they supported the specific measures in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I believe that it is the extent of support outside the House and inside the House that has brought about the change in the Government's attitude, and I welcome it.

The Government ought to be aware that some of us may be slightly less charitable than the hon. Member for Bristol—sorry, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham). Goodness me, what a strange slip, given that I am from Bristol myself. The hon. Gentleman has a vision that the Government have been struggling to liberate themselves from various constraints and have finally done so. I suspect that, rather than the Government struggling to get out, people were pushing the Government.

The Government have now realised the extent of support for the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Indeed, that is probably why none of them voted against the Bill on Second Reading in the last Session. Not one vote was cast against it. It is probably also why not a single vote was cast against a single clause in the Bill in the past Session. Indeed, not a vote was cast against the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in the entirety of the debate in this Chamber in the past Session. That was not how the Bill was killed.

This House has repeatedly supported the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. It has been through all its stages in another place. Indeed, in the past Session, it had yet another unopposed Second Reading in another place. In summary, the Bill was not defeated in the past Session because it lacked support. It is a fact that support was so clearly demonstrated that the Government were forced to respond to it.

The Bill envisaged in the Queen's Speech has yet to be published, although I have read some very interesting accounts in the press. There has obviously been some degree of either briefing or lack of security—I do not quite know which. If the Bill is along the lines of the consultation document, clearly, there are problems for many of us. The consultation paper that the Government issued in the summer did two things: first, it made untrue statements about the civil rights Bill; secondly, it set out a number of measures that in my view—this was the view also of disabled people—were far from comprehensive.

I shall refer briefly once again to the Government's arguments on the costs of the civil rights Bill. I hope genuinely that we shall never again have to listen to the contention that we cannot have the civil rights Bill because it would cost £17 billion. It was not argued that it was badly drafted or that the Government could produce a better Bill. The cost argument should not be repeated, because £17 billion is a bogus figure. As I have said before in the House, it is true that the compliance cost assessment arrived at that figure.

The all-party disablement group has said—the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) and I are members of it, and we share the view of the group—that £17 billion is the result of several serious errors, conscious or otherwise. There is double counting in the assessment. For example, the chapter submitted by the Department of the Environment includes certain costs of access to buildings. Those costs crop up again in the chapter produced by the Department for Education and in that produced by the Department of Employment. The double counting accounts for about £6 billion.

It is not good enough for people to reiterate numbers that they know are wrong, and I hope that it will not happen again. The documents which demonstrate clearly that such assertions are wrong have been in the hands of Ministers for several months.

Mr. Thurnham: I wish to intervene because the hon. Gentleman referred to me. Perhaps he will admit that he had not been able to provide a costing of the provisions of his Bill. Is it not naive to imagine that a Bill that, on any reckoning, would have cost many billions of pounds could be slipped through the House on a Friday, when attendance in the Chamber is often very low, and at the same time to claim that there was no opposition to it because most hon. Members were not present?

Mr. Berry: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. The Second Reading debate was hardly about slipping the Bill through the House. On the Friday that debate took place, 231 Members were present to vote for the Bill's Second Reading; taking account of the four Tellers, there were 235. With great respect, we surely cannot say to those right hon. and hon. Members who took the trouble to be in their places in such numbers on that Friday that they were doing something casual in trying to slip the Bill through the House.

The Government were invited to oppose the Bill on that day if they wished to do so, and they did not. It is for the Government to explain why, having not opposed the measure on Second Reading or in Committee, they were then to invent the story that somehow the Bill was fatally flawed or that it would be so expensive that it would wreck the economy.

I have always contended that it would be difficult to put a precise figure on the civil rights Bill. I moved an amendment in Committee to ensure that there could be no reference to a binding time scale. I recognised that it would be for the Secretary of State of the day to determine the level of expenditure implied for his or her Department. If it is said that I cannot produce a figure, it should be remembered that the Committee and all those who supported the Bill were anxious not to tie any Government to a specific timetable. That argument cannot be used as an excuse for blocking the Bill.

[Mr. Berry]

The compliance cost assessment, as I have said, engaged in double counting. That was wrong. The assessment assumed also that all the Bill's provisions would be implemented within five years. There was no reference in the Bill to five years or any other period. The report to which I referred demonstrates that, if we allowed for the phasing in of accessible public transport vehicles—producing such vehicles, not retrofitting—we would be able to save £5 billion to £6 billion. That leaves only £5 billion.

When I mentioned that saving earlier in a packed Chamber—I think that the House was waiting for a debate on sleaze—hon. Members groaned and said, "We are left with only £5 billion." I say with the greatest of caution that £5 billion phased in over a few years is not a great deal of money. The outlay would be about a third of what it cost the Government to introduce the poll tax, to try to prop it up and then to axe it. If the Government are able to find about £14 billion for an exercise of that sort, I shall not apologise for seeking to find £5 billion to ensure that there are equal rights for disabled people.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the cost of compliance with the civil rights Bill would be about £5 billion spread over many years. Does he agree that netted off against that cost should be the economic benefits of introducing the Bill, which consist of having a significant proportion of 6.5 million disabled people contributing to the economy through their employment opportunities, the development of new consumer services and tax and national insurance contributions? When those economic benefits are netted off—they must be real, but they are difficult to assess with precision—it is at least possible that the net cost of the Bill's implementation will be zero.

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman is right. I pay tribute to the fact that over recent months he has stressed the need for a proper cost-benefit analysis of the civil rights Bill. It is absurd that we have a compliance cost assessment of proposed legislation but no proper cost-benefit analysis. It is absurd to examine the costs of operating a Bill without assessing the costs of not doing so. That is an odd approach. To give credit to the private sector, I am sure that it would not make decisions on such a basis, and nor should we.

Several studies have estimated the benefits to the Treasury of removing discrimination in employment. The estimates range from £2 billion to £4 billion. If we cease denying disabled people their right to work, they will pay tax and receive less benefit. Studies have been made of access to public transport, something that would benefit disabled people and enable us all to move more quickly. The experience in Holland shows what can happen. Estimates vary, but it seems that about £1 billion could be saved.

I do not seek to argue that the civil rights Bill is something for nothing. There would, of course, be costs, especially in the short term. In the medium term, however, there would be direct financial benefits. As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) suggested, they would be of the same order as the costs. Surely the most unacceptable costs are those of discrimination.

Last week, the Prime Minister said that the anticipated Bill

"will include a right not to be discriminated against in employment, a right of access to goods and services and the establishment of a national disability council to ensure that the voice of disabled people is heard more clearly within Government."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 31-32.]

I welcome the Government's conversion to the idea of rights for disabled people. Not long ago there were those in the House and elsewhere who thought that the idea of talking about rights for the disabled was extraordinary. I remember being savaged by Bill Deedes in the columns of *The Daily Telegraph* for being obsessed with political correctness and for using the term "rights", a demand so unreasonable as to put one beyond the pale. Against that background, I welcome the Prime Minister's talk about rights instead of talking only about what good government can do for disabled people.

Let me explain why, on present signs—based on the provisions set out in the consultation document—the Government's Bill is likely to be inadequate. If the Government follow the line set out in the consultation document that was published in the summer, we will have a set of piecemeal proposals. We will not have the comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that disabled people want and require. Two very important areas—education and transport—were completely excluded from that document.

In the consultation document, access to goods and services was limited to direct discrimination. For example, if a publican refused to serve a Down's syndrome sufferer, that would be outlawed. I welcome that, but that would not deal with physical access. The consultation document states:

"It is very important that those providing goods and services should not be required to carry out modifications to existing premises."

That may be important to the Government, but it is not important to disabled people who require access to premises. Anything that deals with the broad area of access to goods and services must address physical access.

Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister referred to setting up a new advisory body called the national disability council. I am deeply alarmed that that might simply be a talking shop. Unlike the disability rights commission which would have been set up under the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, the Government's advisory body would have no investigative or enforcement powers. It would not have the same status as the Equal Opportunities Commission or the Commission for Racial Equality. If that is true—the document shows that it is—disabled people would again be offered second-class treatment, and that is simply unacceptable.

My response to the Prime Minister's comment last week about ensuring that the voice of disabled people is heard more clearly within Government is that I believe that that voice has been clear. Disabled people have stated very clearly what they want and require. The obstacle to the voice of disabled people being heard more clearly in Government have hitherto been the Government themselves.

The Government should recognise that every organisation of or for disabled people, whose views have been known over the past 12 months before, during and after the consultation exercise, has said that a

comprehensive civil rights Bill is necessary. Anything less than that will be unacceptable. Anything less than that will not defuse the campaign for civil rights.

As I have said before, in a few years we will look back and wonder why on earth we had to have this debate in 1994 about whether we needed to ensure equal treatment for disabled people in exactly the same way as we seek to ensure equal treatment for women and black people. Let us hope that we have a comprehensive civil rights Bill as soon as possible. I very much hope that that is what the Government have in mind.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. In the two hours before the winding-up speeches, no fewer than 10 hon. Members hope to catch my eye. With a little co-operation, I hope that they will all be successful.

7.23 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I warmly welcome the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I particularly admire her for her vigorous support for the achievements in the national health service that we have made over a considerable period. I was sorry that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) made a rather mean-spirited speech. It is almost as if the Labour party is seeking to make the health service its own health service rather than our health service in respect of which we, the Government, are the custodians of the future of the health service.

The remarks made by the right hon. Member for Derby, South bore no relation to the health service that I know. I am proud to use the health service. I visit a national health service GP and I queue up like everyone else in her surgery. I have never been let down.

It may be worth while to travel overseas and ask people in other countries about their fears and their terror of falling ill and being unable to afford the treatment that they desperately need. By contrast, we should then be able to understand and appreciate how precious and valuable our health service is. It is terrible to learn that one third of the American people have no automatic health cover. We should compare that with what we have in this country. We have a fine record, of which we should be enormously proud. The fear in America does not exist here.

What concerns me is that, where there is fear in this country, it is the result of scaremongering. I often knock on people's doors wanting to know how they are getting on. When I ask about their concerns, people say that they are worried about the health service. When I ask whether they have had any treatment which has gone wrong, I am told, "Oh no. In fact, the treatment has been the best possible. It has been fast and speedy. The doctors were wonderful, the nurses were dedicated and I'm feeling fine."

When I ask, "Well, why do you feel like this?" The answer is, "Oh, it's what they say on television and in the media. It's what the Labour party is saying. Clearly, they are trying to make me feel that there's something wrong." However, their personal experiences have always led them to be appreciative and supportive of their treatment.

Mr. Alex Carlile: What about the doctors and nurses?

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) asks about the nurses. I frequently visit my local hospitals. Morale at the St. Helier national health service trust hospital is excellent. I have yet to come across a nurse, doctor or consultant who has criticised the management. To a large extent, criticism is politically inspired by the Labour party. Perhaps Labour Members should visit hospitals to see for themselves what is happening.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lady Olga Maitland: No, I must move on.

Having made clear my appreciation of the health service, I have a message for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I support comments made by hon. Members on both sides of the House about mixed-sex wards. It is clear to me that many people, particularly women, do not wish to share a mixed-sex ward. A close elderly relative of mine was in that situation and, frankly, it was very embarrassing for her.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I support the hon. Lady's call for single-sex wards. Will she join me in pressing the Secretary of State to instruct and direct purchasers to ensure that women—particularly those being admitted to psychiatric hospitals, 50 per cent. of whom have suffered sexual abuse at some time in their lives—have a choice when they are admitted to hospital and can choose to be cared for on a single-sex ward?

Lady Olga Maitland: I sympathise with the hon. Lady and I support her call. It is something that we should be seriously considering, not something about which we should be doctrinaire. There is a way around the problem while also ensuring that we get the most efficient health care available.

I give a warm welcome to the Government's plans, outlined in the Gracious Speech, to introduce a Bill to tackle discrimination against disabled people. It seems somewhat ironic that the first person even to touch on that topic today happened to be my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) rather than a Labour Member, despite the fact that the Opposition's amendment mentions it. I was surprised that the matter was not raised until rather late in the debate, and then by a Conservative rather than a Labour Member. It makes me wonder whether it really is such a high priority for the Opposition after all.

Disabled people are entitled to new rights which give them greater dignity and respect and more facilities to enable them to lead the life of their choice. I have seen their frustrations—the "does he take sugar" syndrome is grossly insulting. More than that we, the able-bodied, are the losers because we deny ourselves the benefit of the massive contribution that disabled people can make to our society.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

In short, as one disabled man, a former high-flying executive in my constituency—Mr. Ted Gates—said:

"Think of us in terms of what we can do. The white stick, the wheelchair, the hearing aid can mask able and quick-minded people whose talents we should be taking advantage of. In any case, why should we be denied access to services that everybody else takes for granted?"

I totally agree with him.

The truth is that education and persuasion can go only so far. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister rightly said, the point is to focus on what can be done now and to present a Bill that will progress quickly. Sweeping statements calling for "comprehensive civil rights", which in any case is an American term tailored to their constitution, not ours, are not in themselves tangible, practical answers to daily problems. The borrowing of moral and legal fashions from America, ignoring the fundamental differences between our two systems and cultures, is rapidly becoming a curse in British politics. It is far better to concentrate on practical, day-to-day matters on which everybody is fully consulted—both the disabled and the providers of services on whom financial burdens can fall.

It is appropriate to concentrate, as our consultation document does, on employment rights, building regulations, access to goods and services and the establishment of a national disability council. Judging by the response from disabled people whom I know, those moves are very much appreciated. In my constituency, the Sutton Alliance of Disabled People welcomed the opportunity to meet my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People last week. Among the points that were put to him was the need for a fully accessible transport system, and especially for accessible buses. They should be more widely available. I have to agree that, interlinked with the section in the consultation document on goods and services, attention must be paid to transport.

Interestingly enough—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East touched on this—when a survey by the Conservative disability campaign asked responders to list in order of priority the three disability issues that they felt were most important, they put improved access to public transport first. The second was access to public buildings and only third came anti-discrimination legislation. Over and over again, people have said to me that access to buildings is meaningless unless they can physically travel there. Not everyone has an adapted car. Indeed, barely half a million disabled people hold a driving licence—hence the importance of considering bus provision.

Sixty-eight low-level platform buses are already being piloted in north London on five routes, with great success. They are sought after not just by wheelchair users, but by mothers with children in buggies, by people laden with shopping and by the elderly and frail who do not have the strength to haul themselves on board a normal bus. The custom is there, but sadly only a small number of bus companies are bringing such buses on stream. I accept that they cost about 15 per cent. more than a conventional bus, bringing the final cost to more than £120,000, but bearing in mind the fact that demand for them goes much wider than just registered disabled people, why not insist that all new buses coming on stream must be fitted with a low-level platform? That is something that cannot be left to persuasion; it requires legislation.

I also welcome the decision to consider employment rights. Again, it is an area on which persuasion needs to be hardened up, but by the same token we must listen carefully to what the employers tell us about the problems that they have in employing disabled people. I wholly agree that it is iniquitous to have about 2 million fit and able-bodied people with disabilities who are not working. To get them off benefits and into earnings would make them net contributors, which must be to our advantage. In any case, employers would find that disabled people were excellent workers and more reliable because the job would mean so much to them.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People appreciates the need for an advisory body—the national disability council—and that he accepts that it must have teeth. A toothless tiger would be a waste of time and money. There is no point monitoring discrimination without the power to do something about it.

A case that such a body would take up might be that of a young woman in Sutton who came to me for advice. She is in her early twenties, has two university degrees and is a skilled computer operator. Unfortunately, she cannot get a job. Admittedly, she is not very mobile and she does not speak very clearly. However, so desperate was she to prove herself that with one potential employer she even offered to work for one week free of charge just to show what she really could do. As it happened, the job was well below her academic qualifications and she was rejected out of hand. I should like to think that the proposed national disability council would fight such monstrous discrimination tooth and nail. That woman should not be fobbed off without any means of seeking conciliation or redress. The council must not be just a talking shop.

Having said that, the major steps that the Government have taken over the past 15 years to make life easier for disabled people are well documented. In all, 35 pieces of major legislation have been introduced. Last year, we spent £17 billion supporting current disability programmes—that is equivalent to £300 for every person in the country, which is almost as much as we spend on our national defence, whose budget is £23 billion. There will always be more to be done, but we do not have a track record of which we should in any way be ashamed.

I have one plea to make, and it is to the ardent campaigners who work with such great zeal on behalf of disabled people. The uproar in the summer may have had the positive effect of concentrating our minds on the cause, but it also had the dangerous effect of raising disabled people's expectations to unrealistic levels. I visited disabled groups in Sutton and saw for myself just how unsettling that was. Sadly, the whole issue became political and partisan. As a result, disabled people became confused, worried and anxious. I trust that now we shall have a period of calm and thoughtful work to take advantage of the 1,000 responses that have come in from all over the country from national and grass roots level organisations in shaping a Bill that will respond to very real needs.

Of course, some will say that the Bill does not go far enough. One can never satisfy everyone, but the truth is that most people will find that it plays a significant and

helpful role in their life. I am glad to say that, after a hiatus in the summer in which many passionate words were spoken, I now have a good working relationship with the disabled community in Sutton. We understand each other much better and I look forward to continuing my links with it. I should not like to see that relationship destabilised by those who seek political advantage from elsewhere.

In conclusion, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on his determination to chase across the landscape from north to south, listening to groups and grass roots individuals, let alone to go to the United States and examine the strengths and weaknesses of the American disability legislation. No one could argue that the Government are not a listening Government. The consultation document made that clear as it repeatedly said, "Let us have your considered views."

The Bill is the disabled people's Bill. I want it to reflect their practical input. I welcome the report that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security argued strenuously for an extra £100 million to support the Bill. All that is on top of the £17 billion that the Government spend every year on helping the disabled. There is commitment on our side. For the sake of all the disabled people whom I have met over several years, I hope that the Bill will have a smooth passage through Parliament.

7.41 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate being called in the debate on the Loyal Address. Those hon. Members who know me will appreciate that I always welcome conversions. However, I recognise that genuine conversions are preceded by true repentance.

I wholeheartedly support the movement for action to remove the discrimination against disabled people that has existed for far too long. I do not retract my support for them. I have had a good relationship with the people in my community for many a long year. There has been no hiatus.

In the United Kingdom, the reforms of the national health service have been proceeding for some four years. In Northern Ireland, they are just getting under way. They started later, but they are now getting up a head of steam. Elements of the Eastern board have moved to trust status. The Northern and Southern boards are well on the way, but the Western board shows little sign of movement. Has it spotted something that the other boards have not? Could it be that it looks with dismay at the pain and confusion which has resulted from some parts of the transition?

From my knowledge of the slimming down that has taken place in the Eastern board and the Southern board, I wonder whether the supposed reduction in administration that will result from the abolition of the regional authorities is not merely a move to other areas of management. We have discovered that most of the people in the Eastern and Southern boards have moved to the various trusts and continued in management.

There is no denying that some aspects of the NHS reforms have brought improvements. However, too many decisions have been ill thought out. I wish to comment on several of them in Northern Ireland. Many of the factors also have relevance to other parts of the United Kingdom.

For example, I understand that boards and trusts in Northern Ireland have been told that they must implement a cost improvement programme and make efficiency savings of 3 per cent. in the coming year. Although 2 per cent. savings are likely to be made from improved productivity, where will the remaining 1 per cent. come from? In a public service which has been required to find regular savings, there comes a time when such cuts can be made only by imposing redundancies. I am concerned that the time is nigh.

Redundancies are also likely to result from some of the competitive practices that are being employed. I have nothing against competition; it often leads to a better deal for the consumer. However, the practice of multiple service tendering is causing a great deal of angst in the Province. In the past, NHS organisations had in-house services. Many such services were by nature small scale and not, on the new basis of competitive tendering, cost-effective ventures in their own right. For that reason, few private suppliers entering the NHS market wish to bid for individual services. Instead, the companies bid to supply all the services to a trust.

Under the competitive tendering system,the former providers can set up a company and tender an in-house bid. I take a particular case in Belfast, in which the contract winners bid £1 million less than the organisation in second place and £1.5 million less than the in-house bid, which came in third place. How can a company offer a bid £1.5 million lower than the in-house team, which has a detailed knowledge of what is involved?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sponsored by Unison, which pays me no money directly, as the hon. Gentleman will know. As members of Unison, we are repeatedly approached by health service workers in Northern Ireland who express the deepest anxiety about the issue he raises. They say that competitive tendering is simply a charter to cut pay.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the intervention. Under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, contractors are obliged to take on the staff under the existing terms of employment. However, human nature being what it is, even the acceptance of a small financial inducement changes those terms and leaves the staff vulnerable. I suspect that the contracting companies, as in the Belfast case, will be able to come in under budget only by making staff redundant.

It is fascinating to discover how competition has been eroded. In my constituency, the saga of the City and Royal Victoria hospitals continues. A decision has been made to rationalise laboratory services, and one laboratory or part thereof is likely to close. The element of competition, which was one of the prized benefits of the new approach, has gone. The closure rather appears to be an attempt to avoid competition. The inevitable result will be redundancies among some of the finest medical scientific staff one can find anywhere.

I do not wish to spend time on the issue of the Jubilee maternity hospital again, but will the Minister clarify, either in the reply to the debate or in a few days, his response on complementary medicine? The issue is causing great concern throughout the community.

I welcome the letter that he sent to all of us, but the very fact that confusion remains has been emphasised by early-day motion 14 and the subsequent amendment to it.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

It shows that there is still some concern, which is heightened by the fact that we in the United Kingdom are apt immediately to implement European legislation, and that officials go further than they ought to. Other countries either ignore it or take years to implement it. It is time we started to protect our industry and services.

May we have an explanation of the outburst against "The Cook Report", which investigated sudden cot deaths? I raised this subject years ago, but I was never satisfied with the answers we were given. Neither am I satisfied with the attempt to rubbish the work of a scientist who has been pursuing the matter for years. I welcome the fact that the trend towards making children sleep on their backs has minimised the number of deaths—but have the pathologists and scientists at the Department examined the issue? My information is that they have not. Instead, they have accepted other explanations, without doing the necessary pathology work.

I have no intention of playing down the good work of the national health service, but I disagree with those who keep telling us that we are better off than other countries. That is not saying much. We want to maintain the high standards of our health service.

I offer the House a simple illustration of how the tendency towards privatisation can be detrimental. A constituent of mine with a small business to run was prevailed upon, because he needed heart surgery, to go private for the operation. The operation was successful, but then septicaemia set in. Specialists at the hospital advised his wife to take him home, on the grounds that he was going to die in a short time, anyway. She refused. She said that he had contracted the problem in the hospital, so he should be treated in the hospital. He was given antibiotics and, once he had recovered, he was transferred to another hospital for treatment of his arthritis.

Owing to his long stay in hospital, my constituent's firm went bankrupt. He was charged not only for the cardiac surgery but for the time he spent in hospital recovering—a further nine days at £200 a day, simply because he had contracted septicaemia. That is scandalous. As we seek to keep our health service moving forward, we must begin to eliminate some of these anomalies.

7.51 pm

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): I am pleased to be able to contribute to what has been a wide-ranging debate. Although I intend to speak about health, I should like first to compliment the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—not in his seat now—on a speech of substance. It is a great pleasure to watch the faces of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues as he trespasses with such furtive guile into subjects that have remained no-go areas for his party for so many years.

I begin with a remark that runs the risk of sounding trite, but it is a truism all the same to say that the economic and cultural strength of a country, particularly this country, lies in its people: they are its greatest asset. Their health and well-being are at the centre of any discussion on health.

We know this from the stark reality of third world poverty. We know it from the pockets of deprivation in the United Kingdom, which are matched by equally challenging medical difficulties, in densely populated inner cities or in peripheral rural areas. We know it, too, from World Health Organisation statistics, and from the figures of similar agencies.

On no issue more than health does the House have a great responsibility to enter into responsible and dignified debate, and we have had such a debate this evening. It is a prerequisite of such debate that we avoid the anecdotal trail at all costs—the tabloid slogan that panders to scare stories of dubious origin, and even more dubious academic or scientific rigour.

The media have a major responsibility to fulfil. I would have liked to ask the editor of "Panorama", after the programme a few weeks ago that examined health care for the elderly, whether he would have slept as easily after the programme if he had known of the concern expressed to me only some hours later by a constituent about to receive treatment at the Treliske hospital in Truro. The hospital serves many of my constituents very well. He had got in touch with my office in a blind panic. After watching the programme, he feared that he would turn up at the hospital the following day only to be turned away. He thought that everyone over the age of 65 was suddenly going to be refused hospital treatment. His fears were, of course, unfounded.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth)—I am sorry to see that he is not in his place—spoke with erudition and with his long-standing concern about cot deaths. I am very pleased to have been given a son seven weeks ago. During my maiden speech, it was my great pleasure and privilege to thank the staff at Epsom general hospital for the safe birth of my daughter. Tonight, it is a great pleasure to thank them for the safe delivery of my son.

A few days ago in Cornwall, my wife and I switched on with great interest to watch "The Cook Report" on cot deaths and the problems surrounding some of the fire-retarding agents that have supposedly contributed to them. While we should never turn our backs on new information—scientific rigour is all about scrutiny and monitoring—we should also be careful about engendering unnecessary panic. Forty thousand people rang up ITV straight after the programme, and I for one wonder whether the programme makers took great pleasure in the glee with which they were able to announce that fact. Those people were extremely frightened.

I must also question the editorial judgment of any programme that decided to leave in the crass, ludicrous advice to parents of young children that, if they believed their mattresses comprised any of these substances, they should wrap them up in polythene. I am pleased that the Department of Health and the Chief Medical Officer managed to put the lid on that one quite quickly.

Hard evaluation, nationally, locally and at the point of delivery, often tells a story very different from that portrayed by selective editing. The constituent I mentioned, who was so unnecessarily frightened, went on to receive the right treatment. It was successful, and he is recovering. But he is not alone. He is one of the 7.4 per cent. more people who have been treated at Treliske in the past year, and had he needed out-patient treatment, he

would have been one of 8.3 per cent. more people going through the system. He is using a hospital that serves the medical needs of my constituents extremely well.

The hospital has just invested £1.4 million in a new dermatology unit, creating 14 more bed spaces and freeing resources in Falmouth community hospital. The hospital has a new public health laboratory—£3.6 million worth of facilities, opened in April and incorporating some of the most modern clinical microbiology provision to be found anywhere in the country. It has a county-wide coronary angiography service. That means that many of my constituents will not now have to travel to London for treatment—a total saving to London hospitals of some 400 patients a year.

Patients now enjoy the reassurance of being treated locally in familiar surroundings, with staff whom they know and with families close at hand. That enhanced service for my constituents, and the other services that will be created locally, are all part of the reordering of priorities from the centre, which have given new life to many of our regions.

If the London reforms mean that none of my constituents has to make a 520-mile round journey to London for treatment, I welcome them with open arms. For my constituents, the importance of health care delivered through community provision is, of course, all-important. They see new and expanding health centres, more practice nurses and well-funded care in the community, which, in Cornwall, is bedding down remarkably well. They see general practitioners who provide a standard of care and commitment that is unrivalled and who strive for continual improvement and, more often than not, achieve it.

My constituents are now part of practices that have more control over local hospitals. Gone are the days of the conversations that I once had with a local GP who, when confronted by one of his patients who had been booked in for a 2.30 appointment at a local hospital, but who was not seen until 6 o'clock, went to see the hospital administrator, who looked askance at him and said, "Well, of course, we book everybody in at 2.30."

There are new initiatives in health centres. Only last Friday in my constituency, I opened Link Line, a computer service that now operates from the Poole health centre, allowing information to be collated and disseminated among my constituents—all in support of care in the community. Health education and, more importantly, health promotion must be central to any national health strategy. There is more evidence in GPs' surgeries than ever before of real developments.

We still have much to do. As we go about our duties in this place over the next week, some 450 people will die from coronary heart disease. As we go about our duties in this place next year, some 40 million days will be lost to that disease. The sadness behind those statistics, behind the tragedies, is that so many of the deaths are preventable—not all of them, but so many. Recent figures highlighted our concerns about the number of women who smoke and who remain resistant to health campaigns. It is certainly no coincidence that coronary heart disease now claims more women than ever before.

We have much to do to remove the embarrassment factor from health promotion—the kind of embarrassment that seems to be behind the inordinately high incidence of prostate cancer, which goes undiagnosed and treated for so long, and which claims so many men.

Some of the major developments in health promotion have been in female diseases: advances in breast screening, cervical cancer screening, not to mention the major step forward in our immunisation programmes.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) in part grudgingly accepted, then dismissed, the statistical significance of the recent British social attitudes survey. I must say that I find it more than statistically significant.

Let me return to the anecdotal evidence. I can count on the fingers of both hands the number of letters that I have received from constituents complaining about health services, GPs or hospitals over the course of this year. That is not to say that problems do not exist, but when constituents write, it is often not about a direct experience, but in response to a newspaper article or television programme that may have been badly researched. Very rarely are they from people who have suffered bad patient care.

The British social attitudes survey supports that. Nearly three quarters of those with recent experience of in-patient care are satisfied with that service, as compared with 56 per cent. of those without recent experience.

When the Government tackled the reforms, it was to an institution, a management dynamic that had remained inviolate from any reform for nearly 40 years. There are few institutions in this country about which one could say the same. The national health service still remains the biggest single employer in Europe, at one time employing more people than the Red Army. There was a management sclerosis. It is uncomfortable in some quarters to say that, but it was the case. Few things, if any, were costed—from bandages to serious operations.

The answer, of course, is that organisational change and the pattern of the new relationships that emerge within that change cannot be transformed over night or by the single flourish of the legislative pen. It has taken time, and it will take time, but it is gratifying that the British social attitudes survey is now identifying that transition and the very real advances made on behalf of the British people.

8.6 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate and I would particularly like to address the proposals contained in the Queen's Speech that will give effect to changes in the law in relation to the community care that is provided to people suffering from serious mental disorder.

I shall draw on my own experience as for 13 years I was assistant director of MIND and, for five years, I was a member of the Mental Health Act Commission, which was a statutory body charged specifically with supervising the needs of people who are seriously mentally ill. It is important to place on record that the legislative proposal arrived in the Queen's Speech belatedly and only as a result of its successful battle for space after the proposal to privatise the Post Office was dropped. It is not a mark of great Government commitment to solving the problems of community care for people suffering from serious mental illness.

The first issue that we must deal with is the number of people who will be, or potentially be, affected by the proposals. The estimates based on research vary enormously from 300,000 to the more tightly defined estimate: that people who are seriously mentally ill are

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about 1 per cent. of the 1 per cent. of the population who suffer from schizophrenia—between about 2,500 and 4,000. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will be able to shed some light on the size of the group that the proposals are expected to cover.

I am sure that I do not need to remind the House of the background to the new proposals and the public concern about recent tragic cases that has given rise to a crisis in public confidence about the effectiveness of community care. Why do things go wrong? None of the people who committed dreadful acts of violence, which, in some cases, resulted in murder, was unknown to the services. They had all at some time been in touch with the services. Characteristically, that group of people rarely commits an offence without talking to somebody beforehand about their intention.

Those dreadful tragedies occur because the system fails the victim and the patient. Too often, they occur after a culmination of events—after several cards have been posted through the door, saying, "Sorry you weren't in, and I missed you." When the community psychiatric nurse, the social worker or whoever is charged with responsibility fails to make contact, dreadful consequences follow.

In the past two years, there has been more debate about the crisis of confidence in community care for mentally ill people in the leader columns of newspapers, in pubs and on buses taking people to work than on the Floor of the House. We should not forget that, for every murder and every failure in community care, there are a hundred successes which are quickly obliterated. We now need to rebuild public confidence in a tattered policy.

What is causing the crisis in community care? The picture is complex. That there are many causes rather than just one has been the consistent theme of reports during the past 12 months. It has been expertly documented by the Mental Health Foundation and, more recently, by the Audit Commission, whose authoritative report was dismissed by the Government in an appalling and disgraceful way. They accused the report's authors of being unbalanced; I think that when any of us reads an Audit Commission report that is truly unbalanced, we look out of the window to see pigs flying past.

The crisis in care in the community relates not to the intention or the policy, but to the realisation of intention and policy. There is now ample evidence and experience to show what needs to be done to build effective, valued and co-ordinated services and guarantee high levels of professional performance. Living in the community, with a range of support services and practical assistance, is a viable alternative for all but a handful of patients who, for periods of time, need secure hospital treatment: indeed, it is the consistently preferred option for those needing such services.

For the policy to work, however, the needs of those whose lives will be shaped by it must be acknowledged and respected. Both the Mental Health Foundation and the Audit Commission argued that the approach to the development of community care services should be led by the needs of patients. They described the essential framework as including an appropriate place to live, an adequate income, a useful daytime occupation, access to help and support on a 24-hour basis and the opportunity to be consulted about the range of support available.

It should be remembered that—as many survivors of mental illness will say—mental illness is a career. Too often, planning and support are provided in relation to a single episode as though it were a discrete event rather than, as is sadly the case, likely to be one of a series in the individual's adult life.

Although we know so much about what makes community care work—have, indeed, known so much for 30 years, since the long-stay mental hospitals were first run down—we now have a geographical lottery. In only a handful of regions is there anything approaching a comprehensive mental health service capable of providing the support that patients need. What a scandal it would be if a cure for breast cancer were known, but available only to those living in, say, the Wirral or Edinburgh. Precisely that position exists in relation to the long-term care and support of mentally ill people. We know what is needed, but the Government have failed to provide it on a consistent and national basis.

Sixty-six per cent. of resources spent on mental health services are still tied up in the mental hospitals which treat 10 per cent. of those who suffer from mental illness. That means that, in the community, 90 per cent. of mentally ill people benefit from only a third of the mental health budget—an imbalance that desperately needs to be corrected.

The Secretary of State has said that reforms to mental health law have caused the

"pendulum to swing too far".

Interpreting such generalities is always difficult, but the Secretary of State appears to have claimed that patients' freedoms and civil liberties are now respected more than the need for those freedoms and liberties to be restricted or removed in the interests of the patients, or of society.

The changes in the law are primarily designed to adjust the swinging pendulum, and to reassert power and control over the way in which patients choose to live and behave; they are not intended to create any new legal regime whereby patients can be assured of the service that they need and to which they should be entitled. In words that the Secretary of State has been heard to use, "patients must take their medicine".

That is how the Secretary of State's legislative proposals will be regarded by those who fear being subject to the new powers, and by professionals who strive to win more—and more versatile—resources for their clients, only to find themselves being made legally responsible for supervising patients within services that are unable to meet even minimal levels of need.

Last year, I served on the health committee inquiry that examined in detail the case for additional legal powers, and broadly rejected the proposals that the Secretary of State is now presenting. We did so because we felt that a more fundamental review of the Mental Health Act 1983 was needed, and that piecemeal reform was misconceived; in our view, extensive legal powers were already available but insufficiently used, or insufficiently effective.

I still believe that to be the case, but I firmly believe that the time has come for the House to debate proposals of a different nature which would legally oblige health and social services authorities to provide those in need with a minimum level of service. Unless Parliament requires such action, I do not envisage the Government,

or those with local responsibility, ever taking seriously their duties to those who suffer from serious mental illness.

In the report of its 1993 review of mental health law, which recommended the creation of a new supervised discharge power, Department of Health officials stated:

"it must be recognised that the use of the power implies a reciprocal obligation on the statutory services to provide the support the patient needs".

Any approach that does not make obligations explicit, easily enforceable and adequately funded will be both unjust and ineffective. I fear that the Government's measure promises to be both.

8.17 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I warmly welcome various aspects of the Gracious Speech, but I intend to concentrate on social security and health.

The Gracious Speech heralds a constructive legislative programme, containing measures that will be important to many people. It is a pity that the absence of ideas in the Labour party should present such a stark contrast. I could not help noticing that on seven occasions the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) failed to provide answers to what were, after all, very direct questions.

The success of the programme that has been announced will depend on the Government continuing their policies for a sound economy. Only through those policies can the programme be financed. They have resulted in the lowering of inflation, a steady fall in unemployment levels and—in succeeding months—the fastest-growing economy in Europe. Efforts to promote enterprise and improve economic performance must therefore remain at the heart of Government policy.

The Government must build on the work that they have done already to reduce the budget deficit, even at the expense of short-term popularity. I hope that the forthcoming Budget to be delivered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of Exchequer will reflect that.

As the honorary president of Frome Mencap, I welcome the Government's decision to introduce a Bill to tackle discrimination against disabled people. I have always believed that this task should be undertaken by Government, especially in view of the costs involved, and not left to a private Member's Bill. I wish legislation had been introduced earlier, but I am delighted to see it now.

We must not overlook the fact that the Government approach this subject with a considerable record of support for disabled people. Spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled has increased by more than 200 per cent. since 1978-79, rising to the present level of £17 billion. The new legislation must help disabled people in their struggle to achieve independence and secure even greater recognition of the successful contribution that disabled people make to life in the community.

I visit many community activities for disabled people in my constituency, and I never fail to be impressed by the dedication and achievements of the participants and by the carers who help disabled people so much. If I have a plea this evening it is that we do not forget the carers; that we do not forget to care for the carers. After all, respite makes a better carer. By encouraging and helping carers to look after disabled people, we ensure that they are able to do a better job.

Attitudes to disabled people have changed beyond all recognition over the past 30 years. That is reflected by the speeches that are made again and again on both sides of the House. I pay tribute to those members of the all-party group on disablement—the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) and all the others, including Lord Ashley from the other place—who have done so much to raise the level of recognition of, and interest and concern for, disabled people.

That is why I believe that, when it is enacted, the importance of the legislation will be recognised. I am sure that it will work effectively. However, we must remember that we cannot achieve everything at once. It is by working hard, effectively and consistently for disabled people that we have secured vast achievements over past years. Fifteen years ago, people would not have believed that we could have come as far as we have today. That is not to say that we have gone as far as we can; we have not. We have much work to do and there is great enthusiasm in the community to undertake that work.

I visited the Bath and West show in my constituency this summer, where I attended a disabled persons games. This was not a special activity, heralded with special fanfare; it was a normal and natural activity which has gone on for a number of years. That is the way in which I believe that disabled persons want to carry out their activities: they do not want them to be seen as something special, or something to be gawked at, but as natural a part of community life as a hospital open day or whatever.

I now turn to the issue of unemployment or, more importantly, the need to get people back into employment. Many people come to my advice centres to complain about the inflexibility of the benefits system. People often say that they have sons or daughters who want to get back into employment but who are finding it extremely difficult. That is why I welcome the job seeker's allowance initiative.

It is very difficult to enact change in the benefits system, because whenever an attempt is made some pressure group will scream that it will disadvantage X or Y. It does not matter which party enacts the legislation, that is the automatic reaction—particularly as the negative points tend to be highlighted in the media whilst the positive ones are left, rather conveniently, to one side. It is only at a later date when one sees that the legislation is working and that people are benefiting from it that the press realise the success of the measures which the Government have already undertaken. I see the job seeker's allowance as building on such success by introducing the concept of incentive, which is what the back-to-work bonus will be all about.

I endorse wholeheartedly the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) in recounting experiences from his constituency. Not only is the national health service working well currently, but it is improving all the time. The Labour party does not like to acknowledge that fact for obvious political reasons, but it is borne out by monthly published statistics.

The long hospital waiting lists are reducing, and we need to see that. When I was first elected as the Member for Somerton and Frome in 1992, there was a long-running campaign for 24 hour ambulance cover. I was astonished that there was no such cover in Frome when it should have been provided. So I went straight to the Wessex regional health authority and I would not take

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no for an answer. Within nine months, that necessary service was implemented and since that time I have received no further complaints about ambulance cover. That is a good local example of an improvement in the national health service.

Similarly, there were almost outraged demands for a comprehensive breast-screening service in the Frome area. Those involved in the campaign seemed to assume almost automatically that the Government would not make this service available. Equally speedily, the problem was resolved—another local example of improvement in the national health service.

I have seen great improvements in the quality of health care provided. I pay tribute to the local hospital trusts, which operate from Yeovil, Taunton and Bath, for the work that they have done to secure that improvement. Waiting lists in my constituency have come down substantially and the number of complaints in my mail bag is also coming down.

I meet people all the time who have returned from some sort of hospital treatment. They often express surprise at the quality of treatment that they have received. When I ask why they are surprised, they say that it is because of all the negative reporting about the national health service that they have seen in the newspapers. They say also that it is because of the negative comments that they hear from the House of Commons. Those comments come not from Conservative Members but from Labour Members. The Liberal Democrats are not free of blame on that score.

The most vociferous complaints about the NHS often come from people who have not been near a hospital for 10 years, and base their views simply on what they have read in the newspapers. I will not talk for London or Birmingham, but we often hear about the problems facing people in rural communities.

My constituency is wide-ranging and covers many rural communities. The people living in those communities are being extremely well-served and well looked after by the NHS. If they do complain, those complaints are taken up and dealt with extremely swiftly and the problems are sorted out. It is a sad fact that nine tenths of those problems are due to bureaucratic mismanagement, which, once it is looked at by senior managers, can be sorted out quickly and easily.

The improvements that have been brought about by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's insistence on supporting and developing the hospital trust concept and the success of many of the fundholding practices has brought about a need to refine and reduce administrative structures. That is why I am glad that a Bill will be introduced to abolish the eight regional health authorities. I would not say that it is overdue, but the time has now come. The regional offices that will replace them will employ just over 1,000 people, compared with nearly 4,000 managers and their support staff employed in the 14 regions two years ago. Time and again, constituents come to me to complain about excess management in the NHS. We are tackling that problem.

We can never do away with management, particularly in a service that is complex and which has strongly entrenched professional organisations. However, we can improve that management. We can streamline it and ensure that it works effectively. By breaking management down to individual hospitals through the hospital trust system, we have managed to bring about a far better performance and, with it, thank goodness, substantial reductions in waiting times.

John Yeats has done a great deal of research into this subject, and he has said time and again that it is the time that people have to wait that matters, not necessarily the numbers waiting. People are prepared to wait a reasonable time for non-urgent surgery. People should not have to wait at all for urgent surgery. I am sometimes disappointed when I find constituents who are being treated as non-urgent even though their condition has worsened but their general practitioner has not reported that change to the local hospital. Once it is reported, treatment is effected quickly.

There is a great deal to encourage me in the Queen's Speech. I should like to mention briefly the reform of agricultural tenancy law.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman must not mention that even briefly. It does not fall within the terms of the amendment.

Mr. Robinson: I understand that, but it is enormously welcome to farming interests in my constituency.

8.34 pm

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): John Maples's advice to Ministers to batten down the hatches on NHS matters clearly came too late for the Gracious Speech. The Government will live to regret that. The NHS management changes outlined in the Queen's Speech will bring yet further health trouble to a Government who are drowning in a mess of their own making.

In October last year, the Secretary of State for Health first told the House of her plans to reform the management of the NHS in England. Her intentions were radical. She said:

> "These changes will slim down NHS management. They will make it simpler and sharper . . . They will save money on administration to spend on patients, and they will uphold and strengthen accountability. They will continue the process of decentralisation".—[*Official Report*, 21 October 1993; Vol.230, c.400.]

How could anyone disagree with those aims? The claims will be judged when detailed proposals are laid before the House, but they also have to be judged against what has gone before. There, the Government's record betrays their rhetoric.

To date, the Government's assault on NHS red tape has turned out to be a damp squib. Even that inveterate self-declared campaigner against bureaucracy in the Welsh NHS, the Secretary of State for Wales, has failed to come up with the goods. Since he declared war on bureaucracy in the Welsh NHS in autumn last year the number of health service managers there has not fallen but has increased. The same is true in England, where the latest Department of Health figures show that in the year to September 1993 managerial numbers increased once again, this time by 13 per cent. That is despite a blatant attempt by Ministers to massage the figures. So much for the Secretary of State's claim about slimming down NHS management. It is not slimmer or leaner and it certainly is not fitter, but it is fatter.

What about the other side of the equation? What about saving money to spend on patients? The evidence is equally graphic. An extra £1.5 billion has been spent on

managerial salaries since the advent of the market in the NHS. There are bumper salaries for a few but a pay squeeze for the many. This year there are 17,500 fewer nurses on England's hospital wards than there were last year. Increasing the number of managers and cutting back on nurses is hardly the priority for a national health service where 1 million patients are currently waiting for hospital treatment.

The Secretary of State for Health now says that she has learnt all the lessons. She says that the abolition of the regional health authorities will put matters right by launching a new assault on bureaucracy. Her Department's figures give the game away. They show that she has the wrong target in her sights if she wants to make an effective job of tackling NHS red tape. The abolition of the regions will do nothing to tackle the 7,500 extra managers outside the regional health authorities who have been recruited to implement the Government's market changes. The boom in health bureaucracy has taken place not at regional health authority level but at hospital level as a new contract culture has taken over inside the national health service.

The abolition of regional health authorities will achieve at least some of the Government's objectives. It will undermine health service planning and further undermine local accountability in the national health service. The light touch that the Secretary of State commends as a virtue of NHS management executive outposts is irrelevant in a region such as mine, where the incidence of ill health and health inequalities call not for a light touch but for strong Government intervention. Those health inequalities and the health problems that characterise the north also call for in-depth knowledge of the region so that resources can be targeted where they can be most effective.

The merger of Northern regional health authority with Yorkshire regional health authority will make for a more centralised, out-of-touch service and a less accountable NHS. The future of health care will be the preserve of people without any stake in the regions. Policy, however, will mirror the sort of confusion that exists at more local level.

There is no disputing the merits of the proposal to merge family health services authorities with district health authorities, which makes sense, but greater coterminosity is being compromised by other Government policies, most notably by the free market approach to health authority mergers, by the advent of health commissions, which are even further distanced from local communities, and by allowing the local government review to happen without reference to institutional change in the NHS.

In my own area, for example, the Local Government Commission is likely to recommend in a few weeks' time the welcome restoration of self-government to Darlington. Henceforth, the town will run its own social and housing services, but the devolution of local government powers from County Durham to Darlington is being accompanied by the centralisation of health powers from Darlington to County Durham. The forced merger of Darlington health authority has resulted in the purchase of health care being undertaken by a county-wide commission. Inevitably, the already yawning gap between social services and health services, so apparent in community care, will become a chasm as decision-making structures become ever more distant from one another.

It is a classic case of one set of Ministers not knowing what the other set is up to. The dog's breakfast that results can only compromise patient care. Nor is that a problem peculiar to my area. Across the country, a laissez-faire approach to health authority mergers has given rise to a patchwork quilt of purchasers. There is no direction from the centre, no overview and no planning. Instead, the market and the whims of local health managers are deciding the future shape of the NHS.

There is one bonus, of course, for the Conservatives in this hands-off approach: a further distancing of NHS decision making from the local communities that the health service is supposed to serve. That makes it easier for centrally determined free market thinking to be imposed on the NHS in all parts of the country.

That policy is aided and abetted by a secretive and closed health appointments system. Not surprisingly, that system puts the friends, supporters and even the relatives of members of the Conservative party into key positions, both in NHS trusts and in health authorities. To date, the public have footed a £40 million salary bill for turning NHS trusts into a lucrative job centre for redundant Conservatives.

Ministers could have used the Queen's Speech to make the minimum changes necessary to restore credibility to that discredited system. They could have used the speech to ensure that the lists of people nominated to serve on a health authority or an NHS trust are published. They could have insisted that the selection procedure and the criteria be made transparent. Finally, they could have insisted that, as is the case for people wishing to serve on magistrates benches, the party political affiliations of individuals be declared.

Ministers' refusal to accept those changes clearly shows that they believe that jobs for the boys and for the girls are more important than public accountability in the NHS. They are unscrupulously using the current appointments system to further Conservative interests in the NHS.

I remind Ministers that the health service is not their plaything. It is certainly not the plaything of those people appointed by Ministers. It belongs to the people as a whole. It is a public service and it should be properly and publicly accountable. In place of the chaos and inefficiency of the Government's health care market, we need an NHS that is free, fair, open, accountable, well planned and properly managed. I am afraid that that sort of vision for the NHS will have to await a future Queen's Speech from a future Government.

8.45 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): There is much that I should have liked to debate with the Secretary of State for Health. Unfortunately, time does not permit that. I shall say, however, that she constantly says at the Dispatch Box that the previous Labour Government cut nurses' pay. I am afraid that she is misinformed. She should look back at the records. It was the Labour Government who set up the Hallsbury committee on nurses' and midwives' pay, and it was of great benefit to the nursing profession, in terms of both their pay and their status. I hope, therefore, that the Secretary of State will consider the facts.

The Aberdeen Royal Infirmary NHS trust in Aberdeen was the flagship of the Government's trust proposals and campaign in Scotland. It was trumpeted as one of the best

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

trusts that would be available. All sorts of tributes were paid to it. What has happened? Waiting times have lengthened and the number of patients on waiting lists has increased to the extent that something has had to be done about it.

For some reason or other, the new trust, a flagship of the NHS trust system, has run into rough water. It is in choppy seas. Grampian health board, the purchaser, has had to do something about it. Today, it announced a new £500,000 plan to cut waiting lists. The result is that some services that are to be additionally provided will go to NHS trust hospitals. Some people, however, will have to travel from Aberdeen to Elgin, some 50 miles away, to have their operations.

Even worse, some 50 urological operations and 100 plastic surgery operations will be bought from local private hospitals. I fear that that is what the future holds. As the health service runs into difficulty, services will be bought from private hospitals, which is creeping privatisation. Of course, Ministers will say, "Do you want patients to wait longer and to suffer? Is it not better that services are bought from private hospitals?" It is all very well saying that, but a deliberate attempt is being made to run down the health service.

Grampian health board even went to the extent of trying to purchase about 100 operations from Health Care International hospital in Clydebank. Only seven people from Aberdeen wanted to be treated there. They did not want anything to do with that hospital. That sort of thing brings the health service into disrepute.

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I am sorry, but I have sat in the Chamber all day and I shall not give way to hon. Members who have just entered the Chamber—at this point.

Mr. Milburn: Generous to a fault.

Mr. Hughes: I am generous to a fault, but I do not want to be diverted.

Community care has been at the core of the Government's national health service reforms. I think that all hon. Members agree that the right principle is behind the community care policy. No one would wish any long-stay patient to remain in hospital any longer than necessary. We would much prefer that such patients received community care. The problem is that for many people what is supposed to be community care is not community care at all.

In Grampian, there are some very good examples of small units for former patients of mental hospitals. They are well supported and are a tribute to the community care system, but they are not a cheap option as they can be even more expensive than in-patient care. However, what so many elderly people are offered under community care is simply a transfer from institutionalised public care to institutionalised private care. What lies behind that is one of the most damaging things that the Government have done, which is to abandon the duty to care. That is fatal for the health service and for the patients it serves.

We are witnessing a cynical exercise by the Government to transfer people from hospitals into the private sector to save the public purse. They wish people to pay and to enable private nursing homes to make a killing. Some months ago, I had a very interesting conversation—that is a polite term for the exchange—with the owner of a private nursing home. At any rate, he was more open than the Government. He said that the first method of dealing with the elderly who were in need of nursing care was private hospitals, and that the NHS should be the last resort. He complained that too many social workers were interfering with his ability to choose who he wanted to accept in his private nursing home. When I asked him how he chose, he admitted that his test for admission was not whether his nursing home could provide adequate care or whether particular patients were the most needy, but whether they could pay.

I asked the owner what would happen if he accepted someone, but it turned out that his home could not provide the proper care. He replied that that would be someone else's problem and that the patient would simply go back to the NHS. The notion that the NHS is to be a sort of slum where people go only when there is nothing else available is what I find most offensive about the Conservatives' treatment of it. The NHS should be about excellence, and its first priority should be to ensure that people get the care that they need.

I deal now with an issue of particular importance to Aberdeen, which is the future of Woodlands hospital. It is not, in fact, in my constituency but in that of the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), to whom I might give way if he seeks to intervene again. However, many of the patients are, in a sense, my constituents, and certainly their parents are.

The patients at Woodlands are very vulnerable and require specialist medical care and attention. In its business plan, Grampian Healthcare NHS trust proposed that the hospital should be closed and its patients transferred to a unit on the site of the Royal Cornhill hospital. From the beginning, this issue has been handled extremely insensitively, to put it mildly. The manner in which it has been handled exposes a major flaw in the purchaser-provider split. Patients have been almost bandied about between purchaser and provider as though they did not count. I am sure that that was not the intention, but that is what has happened.

The unit that was to be opened at the Royal Cornhill site was to be a refurbished and extended former acute psychiatric unit for severely mentally ill patients. It was feared—indeed, this was mentioned in the trust's own documents—that the distinction between mental handicap and mental illness would be at best blurred or at worst extinguished.

There has been the three-month statutory consultation period about the closure, but Grampian health board—the purchaser—has confirmed the closure of Woodlands hospital and the transfer of patients to the new Royal Cornhill site. However, it is proposing a new-build hospital costing £3.5 million, which is £1.6 million more than the earlier cost.

Many of my colleagues might ask, where is the problem? They might jump at the chance to have in their constituency a new-build hospital costing £3.5 million. I do not reject the proposal out of hand—it must be examined seriously—but the recommendation raises as many questions as it seeks to answer.

Grampian Healthcare trust—the provider—has made it abundantly clear that it does not have the necessary money, so where is the capital to come from? There has been great controversy about the problems of selling the current Woodlands site, but why is it not possible to refurbish and upgrade the current hospital buildings, which were opened only in 1974? Admittedly they were built for children, but they could well be improved and adapted, because far fewer patients now use the service.

I am anxious to put patients first—they are the only ones who matter—but the parents must also be satisfied because they have a close and continuing interest in the future of those whom they still regard as their children although they are, in fact, adults. I hope that the Secretary of State will not rush to make a decision until all the facts have been thoroughly explored.

Would Lord Fraser of Carmyllie be prepared to meet a deputation of parents or friends of Woodlands? I discussed the matter last Friday with some of the parents as I do not believe that Members of Parliament can adequately articulate their fears and concerns. We are dealing with a very vulnerable group of people whose parents are naturally anxious about the future. Would the Secretary of State or Lord Fraser of Carmyllie be willing to meet such a deputation?

I am happy to report that three other hon. Members who share this "common resource"—the hon. Members for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kincardine and Deeside—agree that the proposition is worth pursuing.

Mr. Kynoch: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Hughes: For 30 seconds.

Mr. Kynoch: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy but point out that Woodlands hospital is in my constituency. He has accepted that there are some successful examples of community care in Grampian. Does he also accept that the people whom we are unfortunately having to put into a purpose-built, highly modern building, which may be at the Ross clinic on the Royal Cornhill site, or where the Grampian health board has proposed, require hospital treatment? Does he further accept that, however sad it may seem, the relatives of those poor unfortunate people will more than likely find it very difficult to stand back from the situation and take a purely rational view?

Mr. Hughes: There is no doubt that there is no real alternative to in-patient care for those patients. Certainly the parents are emotionally involved, but I believe that they are capable of standing back and taking a rational view. If they could see the Secretary of State, they would put the case strongly, because, as I have said to them and as they all understand, we cannot allow the situation to last for months. We must arrive at a decision.

The problem about the new £3.5 million proposal that the hon. Gentleman mentioned is that it has been made almost as an afterthought. After three months of discussion in the statutory consultation period and some months of discussion beforehand, we were suddenly presented with that proposal. That is not the way to plan the health service. I agree with the secretary of the Grampian health board at least to the extent that having consultation after a de facto decision, rather than discussing the future planning of the health service, is not the right way to go about things. I shall be pleased if a real rational discussion about the future of the health service comes out of the debate, even if nothing else does.

I should have liked to mention, even if only in passing, a great injustice in my constituency concerning the ex gratia payment by the Department of Employment to redundant trawlermen. However, I can see the light in your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I shall not transgress against your good nature. I simply hope that if I apply for an Adjournment debate on the subject, you will use your good offices with Madam Speaker to ensure that I get it.

I believe strongly in the health service. We must have the first and the best class of treatment. I do not believe that the Queen's Speech provides that; it is deficient in many respects for my constituents, who are short of employment and who badly need housing and decent education. Regrettably, the Queen's Speech fails the nation, as the Conservative Government have failed it over the past 15 years. I look forward to a Queen's Speech that will redress the wrongs that have been done over the preceding decade and a half, or however long it might turn out to be.

8.59 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): In the short time available, I shall concentrate on a health care issue which needs widespread public debate, and on which we need answers from the Government. In recent years, there has been a dramatic reduction in national health service continuing care beds. Parallel with that development there has been massive growth in the number of long-term beds in private residential care homes.

For years, since the early 1980s, that trend has taken place with little if any public debate. Tory-appointed health service managers, acting by stealth and helped by the Government's cash restrictions, are closing down wholesale the beds for people with long-term illnesses. That means not only the elderly but anybody who needs a long-stay bed.

However, the situation was given a good public hearing when the health service ombudsman concluded earlier this year that the Leeds general infirmary had failed

"to provide long term NHS care for a brain-damaged patient".

That patient had been in hospital for 20 months and needed full-time nursing care. That fact was never in dispute; what was in dispute was where the care should be given and who should pay for it.

Similar arguments and discussions have been taking place in every part of the country, and are the subject of intense debate in my constituency of Halifax, where the Tory-appointed managers have decided to close a purpose-built hospital—Northowram hospital, where I worked for nine years. It now has only 261 beds, because the rationalisation programme is already taking place, and it cares for the elderly and mentally ill, offering excellent treatment. We are not talking about an old Victorian geriatric hospital. Northowram hospital offers excellent rehabilitation and reorientation programmes, and respite care for elderly, sick and mentally ill people, which gives carers a much-needed rest. It also has a number of continuing care beds for people who need them.

The Independent recently published a good compassionate article supporting someone whose husband was at that time in Northowram, although sadly he has

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now died. Clifford Smith desperately needed full-time nursing care, 24 hours a day. His 80-year-old wife, now his widow, agreed to the publicity because she did not want the hospital that had cared so well for her husband to close, and she was frightened of what might happen if it did.

In his judgment on the Leeds case, the ombudsman quoted the Department of Health's guidance on discharge, specifically that part of it which says:

"No NHS patient should be placed in a private nursing or residential care home against his/her wishes if that means that he/she or a relative will be personally responsible for the home's charges."

I followed up that decision by asking the Prime Minister directly in the House if that guidance still applied. Would he give a guarantee that people would retain the right to a free national health service bed? The Prime Minister's reply was quite specific. He said:

"I can certainly give the hon. Lady that guarantee: the right to national health service care free at the point of delivery is an integral part of the Government's policy, and will remain so."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 1167.]

We also remember the Prime Minister's speech to his party's national conference when he talked about his own frail, elderly father and said that he would never do anything to harm such a patient. He should be reminded of what is now happening to many people.

We know that in practice, because of the massive bed closure programme over the past few years, many elderly sick and chronically sick people have been bullied out of their free national health service beds. A recent statistic from the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts shows us that the number of beds for the elderly and mentally ill in the national health service fell from 73,000 in 1990 to 59,600 in March 1993. Over the same period, the number of beds in private nursing homes rose from 89,600 to 144,000. That is a massive shift of elderly people and chronically sick people out of the national health service into the private health care sector, where they or their relatives are means-tested. In most cases, they have to find the money.

This privatisation had been happening quickly enough, but seemingly not quickly enough for the Government. When the ombudsman blew the whistle on this inhumane treatment of the elderly and the chronically sick, the Secretary of State for Health decided to do something. On August 12, she issued new draft guidance to health authorities which was aimed, ostensibly, at clarifying the responsibility for long-term care. It was an underhand way to introduce new guidelines as Parliament was in recess and the consultation period ended before Parliament came back. We can only conclude that the Secretary of State wanted to avoid the debate—but she will not be able to avoid it.

The new draft guidance, if implemented, will take away the right of a vulnerable group to have treatment on the national health service. It says that only patients with

"complex or multiple health-care needs"

requiring

"continuing and specialist medical or nursing supervision"

will have the right to long-term nursing care free of charge. The significant majority of people who need continuing care in a nursing home are expected to have their needs met through the social services.

We all know how patchy the social services provision is. We also know that, if the shift takes place, this group of people will no longer be entitled to a free national health service, but will be subject to a means test. Such patients may be discharged to a private nursing home against their will and they or their relatives will have to pick up the bill. That is the truth, because we do not have massive, comprehensive packages of health care in the community and those that we do have are not free. That is a complete betrayal of elderly people.

Many thousands of elderly people will lose their life savings and their homes because the draft guidelines introduce strict demarcation lines between what is medical and what is social. All that we get from the Secretary of State are the usual lengthy diatribes, which we had today, about how many more people are being treated on the NHS. She blathers on like a clockwork parrot and some of us are getting pretty sick of it. She has reneged on the principle of the national health service providing for medical and nursing needs from birth to death, and she has done so quite openly.

When the Select Committee on Health recently questioned the Secretary of State on the subject, she said that it was necessary to reissue the guidance because of the ombudsman's comments about the Leeds case. Later in the same evidence session, she refused to say, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), whether under the new guidance the patient in the Leeds case would have been entitled to national health service care. She said:

"I do not feel sufficiently intimately aware of the individual case."

We have had a major change in policy based on a case of which the Secretary of State admitted in a public meeting she was ignorant. The elderly and the long-term ill have no friends in this Government. The Secretary of State can only regurgitate as many statistics as she can think of at the moment. The elderly and the long-term sick are absolutely right to be frightened of her.

Anyone who saw the "Panorama" programme the other week and who saw people speaking out about their fears knows that it is not a question of the Labour party making them frightened. It is everything to do with what the Secretary of State is doing. She talks about community care which for many people does not exist. She should listen to elderly people, she should listen to the pensioners. I give her a warning: if she does not start listening, their voices will be raised to such a crescendo that even the present Secretary of State, who is blind to any opinion but her own, will be forced to listen.

9.9 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am pleased to be able to follow the hon. Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). I wholeheartedly welcome two measures in the Gracious Speech, which state that the Government

"will bring forward legislation to make further improvements to the management of the National Health Service; and to provide for people with a serious mental disorder discharged from hospital to be cared for under supervision."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 6.]

I am sorry that I have been unable to attend the whole of the debate, but in the little time that I have been present I have heard some monstrously political statements about the national health service which, since the reforms that

we introduced in 1991—the introduction of national health service trusts and fundholding GPs—has gone from strength to strength. I noticed that both main Opposition parties—certainly the Labour party—wanted to abolish NHS trusts and fundholding GPs, which have so much benefited the care of health service patients in this country.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): That is a brief.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I was not even speaking from a brief, actually. The hon. Gentleman, who interrupted from a sedentary position, should look before he speaks. I was not even speaking from a brief. I have some notes prepared, but I do not even need them because the Government's record on the national health service is so good and I happen to have one or two facts in my head about their achievements in that respect.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Wilson: If the hon. Gentleman does not need the Conservative central office brief, perhaps he would lay it down.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am more than happy to lay it down to keep the hon. Gentleman happy and I am perfectly happy to speak without the brief because, as I have already said, I have the facts in my head.

The main party of Her Majesty's Opposition want to abolish NHS trusts and fundholding GPs, which is absolutely disgraceful, considering the benefits that they have brought to the health service patients of this country.

There are now some 419 NHS trusts. My own NHS trust, the East Gloucestershire national health service trust, was introduced in April 1991 and has brought continuous benefits to the patients in my constituency in Gloucestershire ever since it was introduced. It has been able to bring about more refurbishment to the local hospitals and it has been able to treat patients in a more sympathetic way than ever the NHS was able to do before its introduction.

The result is that 92 per cent. of patients in Gloucestershire are now treated within six months. That is a significant performance. Also, as a result of the trust, nobody has to wait more than nine months for treatments for hip replacement, unlike the position in some neighbouring authorities where people have to wait considerably longer.

On the national scene, the performance is even more impressive. Some 98 per cent. of all NHS patients are now treated within one year. Waiting lists beyond two years have all but been abolished—*[Interruption.]* I hear sedentary interventions from Opposition Members. I remember the bad old days when Labour was in control in the 1970s. One was admitted to hospital merely as a number. One was lucky if one's appointment to see the specialist was not cancelled and, even if it was not cancelled, one probably had to wait some considerable length of time to see the specialist. Having seen the specialist, one then had to wait many months, if not years, for treatment.

With the introduction of the patients charter, patients are no longer mere numbers within the NHS; they are customers—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may laugh, but my constituents, whom I meet in their hundreds throughout the year, welcome the care and dedicated treatment that they receive from NHS nurses and doctors. How much better the service is now, compared with its performance in the 1970s when you were in charge of it—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member credits me with too much. I was not in charge.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I would never credit you with being in charge of the NHS, Madam Deputy Speaker. I pay due deference to the Chair. Labour Members were in charge of the service, however, and what a chaotic shambles it was in those days.

To enter into a more serious political debate, it is fair to say that the NHS has never been better than it is nowadays. It has never had more money spent on it. We shall be spending £32 billion on it this year. That spending will be second only to expenditure within the social services budget. It is much to the Government's credit that expenditure on the service has increased from £8.5 billion in 1979, when the Conservatives regained power, to its present level.The money now being directed to the NHS will be better and more wisely spent than ever before.

There have been many critical speeches from Opposition Members about bureaucracy in the service. Yet one of the Bills described in the Gracious Speech is designed to abolish regional health authorities. That will surely reduce bureaucracy in the service, yet Opposition Members criticise what we are trying to do. We are reducing bureaucracy in the health service and providing better and better patient care by increasing the resources available for front-line treatment by doctors and nurses.

There is reference in the Gracious Speech to a Bill which will enable the long-term mentally sick to be cared for properly. I feel that I must mention the sad case of one of my constituents who was working in the East Devon NHS trust in the Edith Morgan mental health unit. A patient who had recently been discharged from the unit came back and killed her by stabbing her with a knife. On behalf of my constituents generally, I express my deep sympathy in regard to that case.

I welcome the Bill that the Government intend to introduce. I believe that it will come forward as a result of some of the representations that I made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The Bill will enable the long-term mentally sick to be safely discharged into the community under long-term care—*[Interruption.]* Instead of making sedentary remarks, Opposition Members should warmly welcome the proposed Bill. I hope that they will support it as it makes its passage through the House—*[Interruption.]* I understand that time is pressing and that the Front-Bench speeches are due to be made—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. They will be made only if the hon. Member resumes his place.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I understand that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also understand that it is a fundamental principle that when a Member has the floor he is entitled to conclude his speech. If you will be very kind, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall rapidly conclude my remarks.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

Contrary to all the scaremongering of Opposition Members, the health service is providing better care. Patients are spending less time in hospital, scientific advances are being made every day within the service, there are better practices and better treatments, and better drugs are being applied. Those advances have all been brought about because the Government have provided the resources and stewardship that the NHS needs.

9.19 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): My only comment on the contribution of the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is that he would pass any loyalty test likely to be put to him by the Government Whips. He does not need to worry about his rating in that respect.

When considering the Queen's Speech, it will not surprise Ministers if I begin by referring to a sin of omission. There is nothing in the Queen's Speech about the Child Support Agency or its reform. May I say very briefly and sparely—there should be. We are seeing a disaster on a scale that none of us anticipated back in 1991. It is a disaster in respect of which our worst fears are being constantly outdistanced by reality as it emerges.

We received the report of the chief child officer the other week and I want to refer to only one bare set of statistics. Of a sample of 1,188 maintenance assessments examined by the chief child officer, he could certify as correct only 157. Some 545 were incorrect and in 486 the file was so incomplete that it was impossible to decide whether the cases were correct or incorrect.

I do not want to be vindictive, but I wonder how the civil servants' concept of performance-related pay would deal with such a situation. That is perhaps now academic as there have been changes at the top of the CSA. However, that point underlines the immense scale of the crisis.

I can think of no social policy initiative under this or any other Government that has produced so much anger and bitterness. Enormous damage has been done to individuals who have been caught in the system's inflexible cage. However, they are not the only casualties. Other casualties have been confidence in the law and, to some extent, the reputation of Parliament itself.

The figures are consistently obscure. It is difficult to discover exactly what is happening. My best guess from what I can discover is that we are now seeing a withdrawal of consent on a scale that is making a mockery of the aspirations and objectives of the system and bringing it into disrepute.

I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill). He said that, once in a while, there is a policy that must come to an abrupt halt. As Ministers know, I want to preserve the principle, but I agree with the hon. Member for Test that we must get away from the present position. That is why the silence in the Queen's Speech in respect of the CSA is so worrying and such a concern to all hon. Members.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Rubbish.

Mr. Dewar: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman is shouting, "Rubbish." For a long time, Ministers have sheltered behind the coming Select Committee report. It is no longer coming; it has arrived. I must say that it has sadly disappointed expectations in the country and, I suspect, in the House. It has done that for a good reason—the determined and disciplined voting by the Conservative members of the Select Committee, who ruthlessly stripped out a series of key proposals in the Chairman's original draft report.

I cannot go through the Select Committee report in detail. However, let me remind the House that there was in the draft report a recommendation for an independent review procedure to allow departures from the normal financial formula if circumstanced justified that. A disregard was suggested that would make the system rather more child centred and do something to make it measure up to the advertisements for it in its early days. Both those suggestions were filleted.

The proposals that 100 per cent. of pension contributions should be taken into account—which would increase the protected income—were binned by Conservative Members voting in a block. The Tories criticise the block vote, but I must say with some sorrow that they use it cynically when the situation demands. I believe that that exercise did no service to the standing and reputation of the Select Committee system, leaving aside the narrow matter of the merits of the issue.

Mr. Thurnham: As a member of that Select Committee, I ask the hon. Gentleman to make it clear whether he is speaking for official Labour party policy. Maintenance disregards would have cost about £300 million, according to the central estimate. The hon. Gentleman is talking about being cynical. Is he being cynical or is it official Labour party policy to support the £300 million cost of maintenance disregards?

Mr. Dewar: We have made it clear that we are in favour of the principle of a disregard. I have put that on the record during many debates in the House, so I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman sounded quite so peeved.

I was saying that we had witnessed an unpleasant exercise and that common justice demands urgent action. It is no good the Under-Secretary—the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt)—honourably going around like a man with a burden of sorrow, because that is little consolation to those who are caught in the turmoil and distress of the system. It is important that the Secretary of State makes it clear that there will be action on this matter and that reforming legislation will be introduced this Session. We are entitled to have that point clarified today and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will do so.

Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman should go further, when the time comes, than the watered-down Select Committee report recommends. It may mean one or two hon. Members—for example, the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw)—being left hanging out to dry, but Labour Members would regard that as a public service. I shall not bang on about that point, but the right hon. Gentleman should deal with it and give the assurances that I have requested.

Another matter that is directly within the right hon. Gentleman's remit and competence is the compensation package for VAT on domestic fuel. Its impact has been considerable and there is no doubt that the increase from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent., from which, apparently, there is to be no escape, will inflict serious fiscal damage.

I was looking at a recent report—hon. Members will be familiar with it—commissioned by the Disablement Income Group, which considered a series of cases where the principal person involved had severe problems, usually physical. It discovered that the added tax burden per week, after taking into account the compensation package, increased the bill from just under £1 to £3.22 in that range of cases.

The Chancellor said last year—I should like the Secretary of State's comments on this—that his intention was to award the same weekly cash increases again in April 1995, taking help overall to £1 per week for all single pensioners and £1.40 per week for all pensioner couples. The trouble is that the majority of people listening to those words will not recognise the small print in the footnotes. They will be looking for 50p and 70p, depending on whether they are single pensioners or pensioner couples, over and above the uprating that is due in April. They will be astonished to find that the additional payment will be 25p and 30p respectively.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I had already informed him that I wished to intervene when he spoke about pensioners. Perhaps I could put before the House the case of a pensioner today—unfortunately, my mother—who is 76 years of age. She went to hospital at 10 o'clock this morning for some pre-tests for a kidney operation that she is having on Thursday. She was not seen by a doctor until 6 o'clock this evening. When my sister saw her at 3.30 pm, she was still sitting in the same waiting room at Monklands general hospital in which she had been left at 10 o'clock this morning. She had received only a bowl of soup as sustenance all day long. Is that not exactly the sort of treatment pensioners are getting, both with VAT and from the health service?

Mr. Dewar: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know from my earlier brief conversation with him how distressed he is about this matter. Any family faced with that position would be upset. Obviously, I cannot comment on what went wrong, although something clearly did. It is perhaps a salutary reminder to everyone in the House that we can talk theoretically and statistically, but often human situations lead to great distress and tragedy. I hope that they will be put right in the period ahead, but I do not think that they will be if the present policies continue. I can only say to my hon. Friend that I hope that he will follow up the matter, as I am sure he will, on behalf of his mother and with the help of her Member of Parliament.

I want to return to the point I made about the single pensioner's £1 and ask for the Secretary of State's confirmation that it is made up of last year's 50p and 25p—this is a lovely euphemism—feeding through in the uprating figure. In other words, the 25p is hidden in the 2.2 per cent. by which we understand that pensions will be uprated this year. The only additional cash in hand above the uprating will be 25p for a single pensioner and 30p for a pensioner couple. Does not the Secretary of State recognise that that will be widely seen as sleight of hand bordering on a confidence trick, and that it will leave many pensioners fearful and angry as they face mounting fuel bills?

We know that some Conservative Members are prepared to vote against the April increase in VAT. Two Scottish Conservative Members have already signalled their intention to vote against it if they are given the opportunity to do so. However, it would be useful if the Secretary of State could deal with the fact that there will be astonishment and some anger among pensioners in every part of the country when the arithmetic which I have just described becomes more widely known, and certainly when they receive the end product in their hands.

I remind the Secretary of State—I must do so in shorthand—of the problems in the private pensions sector that have arisen from the high-pressure techniques used to sell pensions. They have done great harm to confidence in the system and have produced many blameless, innocent and badly hurt casualties. All of us will remember the KPMG survey: the 9 per cent. of 735 files in which there was decisive and substantial evidence of compliance. None of us can quantify the scale of the problem. We recognise that the Securities and Investments Board is attempting to pick up the pieces.

I remind the Secretary of State—it is important to do so—that many of the problems can be fairly traced back to the irresponsibility of the Government. I am thinking of the uninhibited—that is a nice euphemism—advertising campaign that cost £1.2 million in 1986 and the 2 per cent. premium put on to the contracting-out payment. There was a general lack of any critical atmosphere or of any suggestion that some people might benefit from taking out a personal pension but that many would not. That is what created this difficulty for so many people.

I should make it clear that I do not want to undermine the private pensions sector. I recognise that there is a constituency for its product. However, it does not include people at the bottom end of the income scale, many of whom put the contracting-out payment and nothing more into a private pension. The tragedy is that many of them will find themselves, as anyone in the industry will confirm, with no significant cover. I am afraid that they are living under an illusion. They are left in limbo and they will be bitter and disillusioned at the end.

Although there was nothing in the Queen's Speech on private pensions, the Secretary of State owes it to the House to look toughly at what is happening and to try to build confidence, a sense of direction and perhaps social purpose back into the private pension sector. That sense of direction has been lacking because of Government policy in recent years, which led to an inflationary boom in buying when the circumstances did not justify it.

We have had a night of quoting the Secretary of State's speeches. I want to remind him that he spoke in Spain recently. In a snappy piece of copywriting from the Department, the headline of a press release was:

"Private pensions are the way forward, Peter Lilley tells the Spanish."

They must have been fascinated by, and grateful for, the right hon. Gentleman's message. It does not suggest to me that he has learnt all the lessons. I commend that to him for his attention.

I ask the Secretary of State to consider housing benefit for a moment. The matter was raised by the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham). He suggested regional rent capping as one way of cutting the housing benefit bill. The bill has undoubtedly risen a great deal, but to be fair to the Secretary of State, one of his departmental documents, "The Growth of Social Security", specifically recognised that the increase was linked to the Government's rent policy.

[Mr. Dewar]

To clear the air and to help us in the debate, will the Secretary of State end for all time the rather unpleasant implication of the words of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, which seemed to suggest that the Government were contemplating hitting people held to be under-occupying properties simply because they have one or two bedrooms too many? In particular, the Chief Secretary instanced council house tenants. The Secretary of State will know that council house tenants who are "under-occupying", according to Government space standards, represent only 28 per cent.—not 50 per cent., as the Chief Secretary suggested—of public sector tenants on housing benefit. Of that 28 per cent., 79 per cent. are over retirement age.

If we go down this route, therefore, we shall target, typically, a widow left on her own, her family grown up, living on in the family home. The clear threat that has been implied in what the Chief Secretary said, both in radio interviews and subsequently in correspondence with me, is that these people will be left with a choice of moving out of the family home or paying a financial penalty in the form of reduced housing benefit help. That would be wholly unacceptable to the House and I hope that the Minister can end the argument today by making it clear that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is on a trip of his own and does not speak for the Government on this matter.

I welcome the pensions Bill. Of course it is right to move on to the Goode agenda. The House, however, will be familiar with the fact that it contains matters of contention. There is, for instance, the vision of the regulator as a long stop—to use the phrase that the Secretary of State once unfortunately chose. I agree strongly with the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who said that the regulator's fees ought to be met by the Government, not the industry. Unfortunately, he argued the case in terms of saving the industry money. I would argue it in terms of the need for the regulator to command public confidence in his independence. It is important that he is seen to be operating at arm's length from the industry, scrutinising, monitoring and using his powers. He will not be able to establish that position if he is seen as having the industry as his paymaster.

There are other matters of contention, too—the appointment of trustees, surpluses and contribution holidays, to name but three. I am upset by the fact that the Government have rejected important safeguards recommended by Goode. Then there is the future—or lack of it, if the Secretary of State has his way—of the guaranteed minimum pension.

Can the right hon. Gentleman deny or confirm that the pensions Bill will start its journey through Parliament in another place? If that is in the Government's mind, I should be very sorry. I speak for the whole Opposition when I say that.

I also welcome the disability Bill. It is not so much a tribute to Ministers—that has been suggested—as a tribute to the crass insensitivity with which the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was blocked, and to the Government's desperate need to head off another private Member's Bill tackling the same problem. Of course I will welcome such a Bill—if it is strong and comprehensive, and if it deals with education and transport, two subjects that were neglected in the discussion document. I will also welcome it if it sets up not just an advisory body at the heart of the process—that could be swept aside—but a body worth its space. It must be a body that can innovate, which can use the courts in test cases to establish its position and to push out the frontiers. We shall be looking for that kind of strength and that sense of purpose before we turn a qualified welcome for the fact that there is a Bill at all into a warm welcome for its provisions.

I gather that the Minister of State is to be in charge. I read in one of the disability newspapers an interesting interview with him. It was run under the heading "A Just William". That was rather better copywriting than the Department managed in the previous quotation I used. In any case, a lady from the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People was quoted as saying that the Minister of State

"took his jacket off and I felt it was like talking to my younger brother".

I can only assume that the Minister has been on a charm offensive—I enter the caveat that I do not know the worth of the tribute as I have never met the younger brother. All I would say is that the test will be what is in the Bill.

We give no welcome at all to the job seeker's allowance. It is an attack on the contributory principle. At a stroke, the rights and entitlements to benefit of people with a full contributions record will be reduced from 12 to six months. Some 90,000 people will be left after six months with no entitlement to benefit at all. Perhaps even worse, 190,000 people will be driven on to means-tested benefits. There can be no welcome for a Bill with those consequences, in the House or the country as a whole.

I do, however, recognise that there is bumping along behind it a raft of small measures designed to encourage people to re-enter the labour market, of which the back-to-work bonus is the most substantial. I am glad that the Government are now giving some attention to that aspect. We have been urging it on them for a very long time. I have always believed, and made it clear, that the social security system should not just be a grudging safety net but should be a way of building in opportunity and providing hope for those out of work.

We will judge those measures, and what the Budget adds to them, on their merits. I have no ambition to make a grandstand finish to my speech. I am very conscious of the fact that there should be quality, not quantity. That is fashionable at the moment. I hope that it is not sinister that the Secretary of State for Social Security is the leader of a pack, if not the pack. He has a Minister of State, three Under-Secretaries, a clutch of Parliamentary Private Secretaries—almost beyond count. I hope that, at the end of the day, what they do adds up to something rather better than what they have managed in the past.

I am, of course, a well-known optimist in these matters, but on the Government's record it is difficult to be optimistic. I hope, however, that my optimism will be justified tonight and that we will get an assurance on CSA reform, some comments on the way in which the compensation for VAT will be dealt with this year, some assurances on the control and regulation of the private pension sector, a slap on the wrist for the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the removal of all worries on the private pension score. I await with interest what the Secretary of State has to say.

9.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): This has been a good debate. We heard a splendid opening speech from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, which entirely demolished the rather negative and unconstructive contribution from the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett).

There have been some excellent contributions from my hon. Friends, especially from my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who raised some important points about the pensions Bill, and I will respond to him in detail.

I agree that we must balance the security of funds, which is very important, with the need to keep costs for employers to a minimum, as we do not want to discourage employers from continuing to organise pension schemes for their employees. But I would disagree with him, as I would with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), about the funding of the regulator. It is appropriate that the schemes themselves should fund it, because not all taxpayers have the benefit of occupational pension schemes, and therefore I do not see why they should meet that cost. *[Interruption.]* Everybody goes to school at some stage, but not everybody has an occupational pension scheme.

I welcome the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) and for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill). They raised concerns about the position of absent parents and of parents with care under the CSA and emphasised the need to balance those two positions.

The hon. Member for Garscadden, like the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), seems to want me to make some immediate changes to the CSA, without waiting to consider fully and sensibly the important report from the Select Committee, which I will do. I would simply remind him of the warning that was given to me in the report from the Commission on Social Justice, which warned against the Government

"rushing into . . . ill-considered changes in response to immediate public pressure"

on the CSA.

We will, of course, respond as soon as we reasonably can to the Select Committee. I think that it is appropriate to indicate then the sort of changes that we would wish to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) made some characteristically constructive comments about both housing benefit and disability issues, on which he speaks with great authority. Interesting contributions were also made by Opposition Members—especially the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who was characteristically generous in his remarks about my recent speech in Ulster, and made a constructive response to it.

I believe that the job seeker's allowance is an important aspect of our response to the problems that I identified in that speech, as are the changes that we have made in family credit. The point of my speech, however, was to highlight a supremely important issue—I thought it extraordinary that, in 400 pages, the Commission for Social Justice did not address it specifically—to which we should all devote attention if we are to deal with the major issue now faced by the western world.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry) made an important contribution on disability issues. I am grateful to him, and to the hon. Member for Garscadden, for welcoming the Government's proposal for a disability Bill; I shall say more about that in the main part of my speech. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) made a number of important points, which I shall ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to consider.

The hon. Member for Garscadden raised the question of VAT on fuel, complaining that the £1 for single people and £1.40 for couples that will be included in this year's pensions to help people cope with VAT was inadequate. He thought that people would be surprised about that; I think that people will be rather surprised that the hon. Gentleman raised the point. Exactly a year ago, according to *The People*,

"Shadow Social Security Secretary Donald Dewar said: 'The Government has to add something on to take account of that and they could do it with an extra 50p on pensions.'"

Now the hon. Gentleman is complaining when we give two or three times that amount.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I want to make some progress.

Mr. Dewar: I shall take only 10 seconds of the Minister's time to remind him that we have engaged in correspondence and a number of exchanges on that subject. He knows that he is not putting a true construction on the quotation; I am surprised at him, and disappointed.

Mr. Lilley: I simply quoted what the hon. Gentleman said word for word, in its entirety.

I welcome the choice of social security for today's debate. Reform of social security is now rightly top of the national political agenda. That is not just because it is the largest component of public spending, constituting a third of total public expenditure; it is also because social security is one of the most sensitive issues facing us all. It concerns vulnerable people who are sick, disabled, elderly, unemployed or caring for children and families. It is also crucial to our economic success, determining our tax burden, our incentives and the flow of savings to industry.

The total cost of social security is now some £85 billion, which means that just to finance it, on average, every working person must pay £15 every working day. It is therefore vital that any Government, or any party seeking to represent itself as a credible alternative Government, should have a strategy for the reform of social security to ensure that the system is modern, that it is focused where it can do most good and that it does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay.

Conservative Members have a clear strategy for social security reform. I spelled it out in my Mais lecture, and the Gracious Speech takes it further forward. Each of the three Bills will deal with at least one of our key objectives.

Our first objective is to reinforce incentives to work. The job seeker's allowance Bill contains important new incentives which have been widely welcomed, and which I thought would be a litmus test of the Labour party's conversion to modernism. However, it has chosen not to endorse the Bill, which I think makes it backward-looking.

These incentives include increasing the ceiling of partners' hours from 16 to 24, which will help some 20,000 people. National insurance credits will be extended to those

[Mr. Lilley]

working part-time, which will also help a substantial number of people. Most important of all, the back-to-work bonus will enable people who are working part-time on benefit to accumulate a credit of up to £1,000, which is cashable upon taking up full-time work. That measure will assist 165,000 people per year. Finally, the employment on trial rules will be relaxed to enable people to try out a new job and leave if it does not work out, without loss of benefit. This will assist 200,000 extra people.

Our second major objective, contained in the pensions Bill, is to encourage increased self-provision, especially for retirement. Three years ago this month, confidence in occupational schemes was dented by revelations following the death of that socialist millionaire, former Labour Member of Parliament and principal Labour spokesman in the press, Robert Maxwell.

I would not normally have mentioned his allegiance but, in the climate of modern-day McCarthyism— or perhaps it should be called "Prestonism" nowadays— which has been fostered recently in the press, we have been led to believe that corruption and fraud are associated exclusively with one party.

Prestonism assumes that it is more important to rake up a perfectly innocent seven-year-old hotel bill than devote any attention to a £500 million fraud perpetrated by a socialist. *The Guardian* would not devote any space to fraud by a socialist millionaire who extracted hundreds of millions of pounds from pension funds, because it prefers to devote its entire front page to stories about Tory Ministers extracting teeth on a Saturday. But it was an important issue.

Mr. Dewar *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman; that is enough. He conspicuously ignored the problems of his former colleague.

Mr. Dewar *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I will not give way.

In this Bill, we will implement the essence of the recommendations put forward by the Goode committee. We will create a strong regulator, which will be widely welcomed.

Pensions are a success story, despite what the hon. Member for Garscadden said. A total of £500 billion is invested in pension funds in this country. We want to build on our success and increase the £52 billion flow of new investment which those funds make available to British industry each year.

Thirdly, we wish to focus help on those who are in greatest need. That is the aim of the disability Bill. We already focus increased financial help on disabled people, and we spend five times as much on disabled people in real terms as was spent under Labour. We help six times as many people with the cost of care and eight times as many with mobility needs. But disabled people want opportunities even more than cash, and we support them in that endeavour.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Obviously, many hon. Members took part in the debates last Session and considered the Government's consultation document. Given that the document did not refer to transport and education, have they changed their mind, and will those matters be included in the Bill?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will make a statement to the House shortly about the measures included in the disability Bill and legislative package. He has had a very constructive dialogue with disabled people and business men and women involved in this sphere. He will come forward with proposals that will be widely welcomed in the House. They will go further than our original proposals put out for discussion, and I therefore hope that they will meet the genuine needs and desires of disabled people. I recognise that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and many other hon. Members want to see those needs satisfied, as do we all.

Mr. Berry *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would allow me to continue.

We believe that it is possible to make progress, which will be widely supported and accepted, without imposing excessive burdens on industry. I hope that those measures will have the support that many hon. Members on both sides have said they may be willing to give.

The debate has revealed that the Labour party has no strategy for social security. Its motion calls for the abandonment of the job seeker's allowance and abandonment of the incapacity benefit, going straight back to invalidity benefit. That benefit has no objective medical test, which has allowed the number of people claiming it to double over a decade, during which health has improved.

It would impose an extra £1 billion or more of costs on the budget, and it would mean that the benefit was not well targeted. It would put general practitioners back into the invidious position of being split between loyalty to the taxpayer and loyalty to their patients. I cannot believe that a sensible, modern party would want to go back in that direction. I note that even the Commission on Social Justice does not recommend that the Labour party should do so.

The amendment is remarkable as much for what it omits as for what it includes. Financially, the most momentous decision in the Bills mentioned in the Gracious Speech, albeit the most long-term, is the equalisation of the state pension age. If we had chosen to equalise at the age of 60 instead of 65, it would have cost an extra £12 billion a year. Yet that was not even mentioned by the hon. Member for Garscadden.

That is all the more remarkable, because he gave it pride of place in his speech at the Labour Party conference, when he warned his party against joining the Government in the "Gadarene rush" to equalise retirement at 65. Who are the mad swine who are joining in the Gadarene rush? My right hon. and hon. Friends will recall that those who performed the Gadarene rush were swine possessed of a devil that had been cast out by our Lord.

We are being joined in the Gadarene rush by none other than the Commission on Social Justice. It does not think that it is a mad idea. It says:

"it is quite reasonable to start phasing in a common pension age of sixty-five in the next century".

Sir Gordon Borrie, who might think it a touch uncomradely to be likened to a mad pig possessed of a devil rushing headlong into a lake, wrote:

"as people live longer and as health improves . . . reducing the working lifetime and increasing the retirement period does not make sense".

What makes it all the more remarkable is that the hon. Member for Garscadden had in his hand a copy of the report when he made his speech to the Labour party conference. On the cover it says:

"Essential reading for everyone who wants a new way forward for our country".

It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman did not read as far as page 284. I got there, but only by dint of starting at page 283.

Does the Commission on Social Justice fill the huge vacuum that up to now has constituted Labour's social security policy? Alas, no. There is a welcome change in rhetoric, but no change in substance. Recently *The Independent* published a costing of what it considered to be the key proposals in the report of the Commission on Social Justice, and those which could be readily costed. It found that it came to £7 billion. However, it had a reassuring headline which said:

"'Social Justice' plans almost pay for themselves".

Alas, it turned out that the so-called £7 billion of savings all involved increases in the income tax burden on ordinary people.

After today's debate, the House will reject the Opposition's amendment. It will realise that only the Conservative party has a coherent programme for social security reform, that that is essential for any modern Government and that the Labour party has fallen at the first hurdle in its attempts to prove itself a modern Government. I urge the House to reject the amendment tabled by the Opposition.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 309.

Division No. 1] **[22.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(N'c'tle u Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(A'deen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll and Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Neill, Martin
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley

Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Eric Clarke

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton and Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Egger, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A. *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archi
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow, W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm

Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'td'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Salisbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shephard, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Michael Bates

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 24th November, the Speaker shall—

(i) put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Deregulation (Procedure) not later than two hours after their commencement, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendments to the said Motion which she may have selected and which may then be moved;

(ii) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to two and three-wheeled vehicles not later than one and a half hours after their commencement; and

(iii) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1994 not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon;

and the aforesaid Motions may be entered upon and proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

PETITIONS

Child Sex Offenders

10.15 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am pleased to present tonight this petition, organised by the Action for Children campaign, which has been signed by 1,253 attenders at the 21st Greenbelt festival on 29 August. In the petition, they call for tough new legislation against those involved in the heinous crime of the exploitation of children for the sexual gratification of adults. I fully endorse the views expressed in the petition, which concludes:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do introduce legislation to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom who commit serious sexual offences against children abroad can be prosecuted in this country.

To lie upon the Table.

VAT on Fuel

10.16 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): In addition to the more than a quarter of a million signatures that were presented to Downing street on Monday this week by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), a further 2,000 signatures are attached to this petition to the House of Commons. It reads:

The Petition of the Citizens of the United Kingdom

Declares that the Government decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in 1995 will place a heavy financial burden on pensioners and others on low incomes which they will find hard to meet.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons votes down this terrible proposed increase when it is raised in the House.

To lie upon the Table.

10.17 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Further to the petition moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), I have here a petition from 2,000 constituents in Sheffield, Hillsborough. They declare that the Government's decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. breaks election promises and is unfair, hitting those who can least afford it. The petition reads:

The Petitioners therefore request that this House of Commons passes legislation to stop the further VAT increase on domestic fuel and power.

To lie upon the Table.

10.18 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I have pleasure in following the petitions presented by my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) against the increase in VAT. This petition has 1,000 signatures from my constituency of Glasgow, Springburn. It reads:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of the Citizens of Glasgow, Springburn

Declares that the Government decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in 1995

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

breaks election promises and is unfair, hitting those who can least afford it. The petition continues:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons passes legislation to stop the further VAT increase on domestic fuel and power.

To lie upon the Table.

Barnsley Football Club

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10.19 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I would like to declare an interest in the matter that I intend to raise. I own a share in Barnsley football club, although I derive no benefit from that club whatever. On 24 June, the football club was refused a temporary exemption from the licensing requirements of the Taylor report. That report required that Premier League and Endsleigh League first division clubs were to have all-seater accommodation in place by 1 August 1994, or to have closed down that accommodation which was not seated. I hope to persuade the Minister this evening to change that decision in view of the changed circumstances at the club since that decision was taken earlier in the year.

I should say at the outset that Barnsley football club is committed entirely to the Taylor requirements. Its request, which I am echoing tonight, is for a temporary exemption only from those licensing requirements, until the end of the season. Both the club and I accept that the move to all-seater stadiums should continue.

Since the start of the season, the club has required home spectators to use the brand new 7,000-seat east stand. Those seats were planned and built into the ground this year. That large number of seats was planned to maximise the number of seats for the expenditure which the club had to outlay. It needed a large number of seats as quickly as possible and it wanted those seats to be a permanent structure—a permanent stand and a quality building. That is what the club has achieved with the east stand, which is a quite remarkable building. The remaining 2,000 or so seats on the opposite side of the ground have now been reserved for visiting spectators.

Many fans chose not to use the east stand. Some were reluctant to move from their former seats and some fans, in opposition to the requirements of the Taylor report, chose not to be seated at all at football matches, which has resulted in decreased attendances at home games. The club desperately needs to attract those spectators back to the ground to maintain its financial viability. In June, I and representatives of the club predicted that attendances would fall and it appears that that is exactly what has happened.

Those falling attendances have been quite dramatic. The home gate this season has fallen to below 4,000, compared with last seasons's average of around 7,000. At the same time, the team is performing very well and is placed ninth in the Endsleigh league first division. Therefore, the reduction in attendances can only be related to the problems of accommodation at the ground and not to the performance of the team. The current attendance levels, at below 4,000 for a home match, means that the club will face financial problems unless that figure can be improved and improved very quickly.

I am sure that neither the Minister nor the Football Licensing Authority want to see the club's future jeopardised for the sake of a temporary exemption to last, perhaps, until the end of this season. The club is confident that it will have seating installed at the south side of the ground—known locally as the Pontefract road end—by the end of the season. That will provide cheaper seating than the east stand at the favourite end of the ground. I

stress that because many fans, who stood previously at home matches, like to stand at that end. Now that that end of the ground cannot be used, many fans have chosen to stay away.

Until the new south stand is built, the club would like to use the existing terracing, which is in front of the old stand. Even then, the numbers standing would be limited. That is because the club will be undertaking work on the construction of new seating at the south end of the ground. That for which I and the club are asking is limited in any event.

The Government's arguments were advanced in June and encapsulated in a letter sent by the then Secretary of State to the club. The arguments were based on the criteria laid down by the Football Licensing Authority. The criteria provided that any exemption from the requirement of licensing had to be the result of wholly exceptional circumstances or unforeseen delay, and not through any inaction on the part of the club.

A wholly exceptional circumstance for Barnsley football club is a covenant on the playing surface at the ground. The family which gave the club the ground—it originally owned the brewery that adjoined the ground—placed a covenant on the land when it was given to the club. The covenant provided that the land could be used only as a football pitch. That meant that if the club wanted to dispose of the ground it had to face the covenant on the pitch. That meant, in turn, that the club could not relocate to another ground without substantial problems in disposing of the playing area. Relocation was not really an option for the club. I suggest that that is an exceptional circumstance.

The club's other problems are to a great extent exceptional and unique to it. They began about 10 years ago with the miners' strike, which ended in 1985. Since the end of the strike there has been a rundown in the coal mining industry in Barnsley, with the result that the economy has been depressed for some years. The club's gates prior to the strike when compared with even those of last season reveal a substantial difference. They were about 17,000 before the strike, when the club was in a lower division, whereas they were about 7,000 last season. They are now below 4,000.

The ground has limited road access. There are difficulties in accommodating visiting spectators. Those spectators could not really be accommodated in the new east stand, which has 7,000 seats. I know that the Government were critical of the club for concentrating on that stand, but if away supporters were not to use it they would have to mingle with home supporters in the stand leaving the stand as well as passing through the car-parking area. There is no other egress from the stand that could separate home and visiting spectators.

I remind the Minister of the Barnsley against Stoke City Football Association cup replay match some years ago, when 2,000 Stoke City fans arrived at the ground very late, escorted by South Yorkshire police. The officers ordered the club to open the gates to the ground and the Stoke City fans were admitted without payment and in a hurry. The same force was involved at Hillsborough. Indeed, the match to which I have referred took place six weeks before the Hillsborough tragedy. That relates to a policy that was being pursued at the time. We are conscious of the problems that are involved in accommodating away spectators.

The development of the south side stand was delayed. That was referred to in the then Secretary of State's letter. There was a hint that the club could have speeded up that development. I was involved in persuading the brewery company to sell land to enable the club to build the 7,000-seater east stand. Not all the land that was sold to the club was required and so the club, after building the stand, had to sell the residue of the land.

Money was tied up in that residue until such time as a buyer was found for it. The residue was subject to planning restrictions which were completely outside the club's control. As a result, the club could not proceed to enable it to meet the deadline because of the tie-up of money from the land that the club had to sell and because of planning permission difficulties.

I want to quote from two letters that I have with me. The first is from my letter to Courage in July 1991. In it, I wrote:

"The purpose of my letter is therefore, to ask whether the Brewery would be willing to negotiate the sale of the land in question to the Football Club in order that steps can be taken towards the building of a new stand. As you are probably aware, the recent report by Lord Justice Taylor specifies that clubs within the first and second divisions of the Football League"—

as they were then—

"must have a certain proportion of seated accommodation within their grounds. Barnsley, sadly, is well below the proportion stipulated by Lord Justice Taylor and, therefore, the question of new facilities is a pressing one."

I wrote that in letter to the brewery in July 1991 to try to encourage it to sell the land which the club needed to allow development to take place. The reply from Courage in August 1991 stated:

"Following the merger with Grand Metropolitan Brewing we are currently engaged in a major restructuring exercise and we are not in a position to release any part of the brewery for the foreseeable future. I am sorry that we cannot offer a more optimistic response to the Football Club."

It is clear from that that, at the end of 1991, the club could not acquire the land to build the east-side stand let alone build the south-side stand. That caused the club several problems in relation to tying up money that the club needed to build the south-side stand.

I am pleased to say that the planning matters have now been resolved. The club met the Football Trust last week and it has met the various financial institutions to ensure that funding for the new south-side project is now available. That funding is no small amount of money. It is a £2 million development. It is not just a question of installing seats into original terracing; the structure of the stand must be made safe. The project is rather expensive.

I suggest that the delay in respect of the south-side stand was unforseen and not due to inaction on the club's part. As the Minister can see from the correspondence that I have quoted, the brewery was unwilling to relinquish the land until well into 1992. The club has been doing all it can with limited resources.

Once the south-side seating is completed, the club will be able to maintain cheaper seating accommodation at the favourite end of the ground for the home fans. Hopefully, that will resolve many of the problems, but that is obviously a season away.

The Secretary of State said that the all-seater policy was flagged up as long ago as 1990 and that the club should have acted sooner. However, Barnsley simply did not have the money to implement more than the one-seater stand scheme. It could not implement the

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

south-side scheme and the east-side scheme together. The east-side stand, the large 7,000 seater stand, took precedence to obtain the maximum possible number of seats in one development. No one foresaw the fact that the gates would fall as dramatically as they did.

Contrary to what the Secretary of State maintained in his letter, the club has not been too ambitious. It wanted to build a quality development and it wanted the fans to have a proper well-built stand. The facilities that are being removed comprise old wooden stands similar to the stand that so tragically caught fire at Bradford City football club. The club wants to avoid temporary botched accommodation. It wants to build quality accommodation for the Barnsley fans.

In his letter, the Secretary of State also maintained that the club could adequately accommodate away fans and home fans together and avoid possible disorder if the club employed very careful planning. As I have pointed out, the limited access to the ground from several sides made that difficult, although I am pleased to say that the Government have given the go-ahead, under the city challenge scheme, for a new road to be built as part of that scheme. That road will relieve some of the problems facing people leaving the football ground. That road is somewhere in the future, but we look forward to it being built.

Although this point has been made before, it is worth repeating that Barnsley must be an all-seater stadium. No one complains about that. Its current gate is fewer than 4,000. The neighbouring Rotherham team, which is in a division below Barnsley, does not have to have all-seater accommodation, but its average attendance is about 6,000. Preston is also in a lower division, but it is not required to have an all-seater stadium. It recently hosted a match with an attendance of about 14,000.

I have already said that the club is doing all it can to provide all-seater accommodation. The finance, the planning and the developer are all in place and work is due to commence as soon as the final matters are tied up. I think that it is worth comparing its position with that of other clubs that were granted exemptions—Sunderland, Grimsby, Derby, Portsmouth, Middlesbrough and Newcastle.

I understand that, although those clubs were granted exemptions on the ground that they were relocating to new stadiums, some of them have not yet begun the necessary work on building them. Indeed, in some cases the decision to relocate has been changed to refurbishing the existing ground. It is worth noting that Barnsley has tried its level best to accommodate the Taylor report and to get the money to build the seated accommodation, while some of the clubs that had exemptions seem to be, for whatever reason—and I know that some of them have problems—dragging their feet.

The club made the point earlier this year that gates would fall, which might jeopardise its revenue. That has happened and the fall in gates has been quite dramatic, despite the fact that the team are doing well. Fans have not been able to use their favourite area of the ground. In fact, I had to give up the seat that I have had for a number of years to move into the new stand. All that was predicted earlier this year has happened and the club is facing financial difficulties, despite the team doing well. I urge the Minister to look again at the matter and find a way to grant a temporary exemption, perhaps until the end of the season, to ensure the financial viability of the club.

10.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on securing this debate and on his admirable persistence in trying to seek an exemption for Barnsley football club from the all-seating requirement imposed on premier and first division football grounds. The debate closes at 10.49 pm, so I may run out of time. However, I shall come to his last sentence, even if it is in mid-sentence, before I sit down.

I am aware that this is a very strongly felt issue with many football supporters throughout the country and that has been proven by the hon. Gentleman's speech today. I know that many football fans prefer to stand on the terraces rather than sit down. That point has been made forcefully by several hon. Members in the past. Converting stadiums to all-seating can also be very costly and can create problems for some smaller clubs.

In recognition of that, and having listened carefully to all the representations received, the Government reviewed the all-seating policy and, in July 1992, announced that only premier and first division clubs would need to convert their stadiums. Clubs in the second and third divisions of the football league are being allowed to retain their terracing, provided that it is deemed safe by the local authority and the Football Licensing Authority. I hope that that shows that the Government have not acted in an inflexible way, but have responded, to a considerable extent, to the legitimate concerns and wishes of the supporters and the clubs.

Before I deal with Barnsley's particular circumstances it may be useful to remind the House why the all-seating policy was introduced and what its benefits have been. All hon. Members are, of course, aware of the Hillsborough tragedy and the consequent report produced by Lord Justice Taylor, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We should also remember earlier disasters, such as those at Ibrox in 1971 and Bradford in 1985. Decisive action was needed to ensure a sea change, not only in the safety and quality of the grounds, but in the attitudes of the clubs to make them put crowd safety at the top of their list of priorities.

It is all too easy for some supporters to think, "It could never happen at our club." They should remember that Hillsborough was selected by the Football Association because it was one of the best grounds in the country and had hosted safely an identical fixture the previous year. As Lord Justice Taylor commented:

> "I have little doubt that if the disaster scenario had been described to the management at Hillsborough prior to 15 April, they too would have said, 'Of course, it couldn't happen here.'"

We should also remember that other blight in the game of football, particularly in the 1970s and early 1980s—that of thuggery and hooliganism. The combination of poor crowd behaviour and dangerous facilities could not

be tolerated any longer and action had to be taken to ensure the very survival of the game. I quote again Lord Justice Taylor's report. He said:

"There is no panacea which will achieve total safety, and cure all problems of behaviour and crowd control. But I am satisfied that seating does more to achieve those objectives than any other single measure".

That verdict has been generally accepted both in the game and in the House.

The policy of moving towards all-seated stadiums must, of course, be implemented sensibly and pragmatically. As I noted earlier, many football fans like to stand and if that can be safely allowed, it is right for the Government, who believe in freedom of choice, to allow them to do so. The review conducted in 1992, in which all the relevant football organisations and the police were consulted, concluded that the grounds in the premier league and the first division presented the greatest risks in terms of crowd control and safety due to the larger crowds attending and the more highly charged atmosphere at the games.

Clearly, wherever a line is drawn, anomalies will arise. However, in seeking to ensure the reasonable safety of spectators, a majority of those consulted agreed that working on a divisional basis was the best approach.

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): Is the Minister aware of the valiant effort and the financial resources that Barnsley football club have put into complying with the Taylor report? Even given the dramatic unemployment situation in our area, Barnsley football club has received a great deal of support and has made a staunch effort to comply with the Taylor report. So far, I have heard the Minister blandly comment on seating and so on but I have not heard him refer to Barnsley football club.

Mr. Sproat: I am aware of the efforts that Barnsley has made. I shall turn to them in a moment. I wanted to put the matter in the context of the debate on all-seater stadiums.

In the opinion of most people, the all-seating policy has been a success. The measure of that success can best be seen in UEFA's decision that England should host the European championship finals in 1996. That decision was a vindication of all the work that the clubs have put into upgrading their stadiums to provide the facilities and comfort which spectators are entitled to expect as we enter the 21st century. The changes have not been easy or cheap, and have been made possible only as a result of the financial assistance provided by the Football Trust, which is, of course largely funded by a reduction in the pool betting duty.

The Football Trust has so far approved awards of more than £120 million towards Taylor-related work and, as hon. Members will know, the Government have agreed to extend the concession until the end of this century. I should also pay tribute to the advice and assistance provided by the Football Licensing Authority and the Football Stadia Development Committee and its predecessor the Football Stadia Advisory Design Council.

I turn now specifically to Barnsley's Oakwell ground. I should first congratulate the hon. Gentleman on Barnsley's l-0 victory at Millwall on Saturday. I am sorry that you and I cannot share similar pleasure at the Australian game, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I said earlier that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central had been admirably persistent in arguing the case for standing to continue at Barnsley. He wrote to my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), the then Secretary of State for National Heritage, in June this year. Those representations were carefully considered, as were those from the local authority, and of course the club itself. Indeed, the Secretary of State even held a meeting with members of the club to hear their case for an extension to the 1 August deadline.

It is worth pointing out that Barnsley has not questioned the all-seater policy, but has merely asked for an extension of time in which to introduce it. To quote from the original submission from the club:

"It must be stressed quite clearly by the Club that we fully support the move to all-seater stadia—it is our belief that, a generation from now, people will look back to this century and be astonished that spectators actually were even prepared to stand at football matches—let alone wanted to—and we are very proud of our new East stand—the first step on the mammoth task of converting the Oakwell Ground to being an all-seater stadium".

Those are the fair words of the club.

Nevertheless, Barnsley applied for an extension to the 1 August deadline and it was rejected. I will explain why the Secretary of State did not accept Barnsley's request for a temporary dispensation from the all-seater policy. First, it must be borne in mind that for a policy to have any meaning exceptions can be made only in truly exceptional circumstances. Barnsley did face some genuine problems, which the hon. Gentleman highlighted and which I acknowledge, but the question that Ministers had to answer was whether those problems were sufficient to be considered truly exceptional. When this was looked at in June this year, the answer was no.

I accept that Barnsley started from a very small number of seats, that its extraordinary constitution presents complications and that the planning process in relation to the development land that it sought can be very lengthy. However, had the club begun the planning process as soon as the Government's policy was announced, instead of three years later, many of those difficulties could have been overcome.

I also find it difficult to accept that the all-seater policy has restricted the admission of supporters. I note that the average attendance is 5,000, though the hon. Member maintains that it is lower now. That figure is in any case greatly inflated by the 11,000 attendance for the Coca-Cola Cup match against Newcastle. Since the ground has a seating capacity of more than 11,500, it seems that Barnsley's fears that it would have to turn supporters away, thus losing money and creating crowd control problems, have not materialised.

I appreciate that Barnsley has had to re-allocate home and away supporters around the ground, and that away supporters are generally sitting next to the directors' box—which can hardly be considered a great hardship. The Football Licensing Authority pointed out at the time the new east stand was being built that it should be designed with sufficient flexibility to allow it to accommodate both home and away supporters. Had that been done, some of Barnsley's current problems would have been avoided. However, the club chose at the time not to accept the FLA's suggestions.

I am also aware that 2,000 of the seats are of a temporary, uncovered design. But that, too, does not make the club's circumstances exceptional. Chelsea football club, which was also denied an extension to the 1 August deadline, has installed temporary, uncovered seating

[Mr. Sproat]

which is regularly used. Barnsley's gate may have been affected by the seating. If some supporters are deterred from attending, that is a regrettable but unavoidable consequence of a policy with which Barnsley is in full agreement.

I entirely accept, and indeed mentioned earlier, that financing ground improvements can be very difficult, and in recognition of Barnsley's circumstances the Football Trust gave it a grant of £1 million towards its east stand. I understand that Barnsley is now applying for a grant for a new south stand, seating a further 4,500, and including a social club and community facilities. I am sure that, once the Football Trust and the Football Licensing Authority have been able to satisfy themselves that the design is suitable—I gather from the hon. Gentleman that they have now done so—the trust will give this application the proper consideration. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the trust is independent of the Government, and I cannot say what the outcome of the application will be.

Given all those facts, I cannot agree that Barnsley's circumstances are so exceptional that it should receive a dispensation from the all-seater policy, which was introduced with the safety and comfort of spectators in mind. Many small clubs with limited resources have accepted the policy and made great efforts to introduce it. Many clubs have had to close parts of their ground during the season, losing revenue and atmosphere, and creating crowd control problems. Other clubs have also had to introduce temporary arrangements while redevelopment is under way. And other clubs have also had to face legal and planning difficulties. For the Government now to make special allowances for Barnsley might be considered unjustified, and unfair to all the other clubs.

I appreciate that what I have said will not have pleased the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central, but I hope that he will accept that I have looked into this case carefully; while I sympathise with any genuine difficulties that Barnsley may face, I am not convinced that I could, in all good faith, come to any other decision.

I shall be happy to see the hon. Gentleman if he wants to come and have a word with me. I will have a look at the problem again. I do not know what powers to change the situation I have, following the original decision, but in view of the hon. Gentleman's persuasive speech today I will certainly agree to a further meeting to talk the matter over.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 23 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

Ordered,

That Madam Speaker do issue her warrant for the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the borough constituency of Dudley, West in the room of John Graham Blackburn Esq., deceased.—[*Mr. MacKay.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office

1. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for the commercial future of the Post Office.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The Post Office operates several businesses. We are actively engaged in widening the opportunities for Post Office Counters and we are helping to automate their services. We will announce any plans to change the present arrangements governing the remainder of Post Office activities as appropriate.

Mr. Dowd: Despite the Secretary of State's failure to convince all his own Back Benchers, let alone the British people, of the need to privatise Royal Mail, will he confirm that he will not allow his personal pique or vanity to sabotage a prosperous future for the Royal Mail within the public sector? If he cannot give such an assurance, will he make way for those who can?

Mr. Heseltine: I doubt very much whether the Post Office would want me to make way for the Labour party as it will remember that, faced with the dilemmas that I face, it was the Labour party's decision to cut the capital expenditure programmes of the Post Office by 30 per cent.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the decision of the Union of Communication Workers to take industrial action against what they call back-door privatisation?

Mr. Heseltine: I believe that industrial action against back-door or front-door privatisation is extremely unwise. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir. W. Roberts) is concerned about the possible use of industrial action to frustrate the opportunities for the management of the Post Office to transfer individual post offices from the public to the private sector. Where such post offices have been so transferred, that has been extremely successful.

Ms Hoey: Can the Secretary of State tell us very simply why he will not allow the Treasury rules to be changed—the changes could receive all-party agreement and be put through the House very quickly—to give the Post Office the commercial freedom that everyone knows it needs and deserves?

Mr. Heseltine: Because we are following the precedent of the Labour party in power which managed to cut the capital programmes of the Post Office by 30 per cent. If that was not enough, Labour cut the Electricity Generating Board capital programmes by 25 per cent. for exactly the same reason. In power—something Labour has now forgotten all about—Labour faced the same disciplines that we are facing.

Mr. Page: Now that the plans to privatise the Royal Mail have been dropped and, with them, the removal of commercial restrictions on the Post Office, does my right hon. Friend agree that instead of the taxpayer receiving the money and benefit from the sale of the Post Office and the Royal Mail and the annual income from corporation tax, the taxpayer may well have to find money to finance investment and pay to fight increasing commercial competition?

Mr. Heseltine: Those arguments are very powerful and they are the underlying arguments that have enabled the Government to privatise industry after industry, to turn state-run monopolies into world-class companies and to set a pace-setting programme across the entire world which Governments of all political persuasions are now copying.

Dr. John Cunningham: Why does the right hon. Gentleman walk up a blind alley on the future of the Post Office? Does he not recognise that the British National Oil Corporation—until it was dismantled by the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues—operated successfully outside the public sector borrowing requirement and that, until recent weeks, British Nuclear Fuels also operated successfully outside the PSBR until he brought it back within the PSBR?

Presumably, if the right hon. Gentleman believes that the Post Office cannot be successful in the public sector, he is condemning not only the Post Office but British Nuclear Fuels plc, too. Why does he not seek, with his hon. Friends and with the Opposition, an agreed way forward which will guarantee success for the Post Office and for Britain? That course is open to the right hon. Gentleman—why does he spurn it?

Mr. Heseltine: For precisely the reason that the Labour party could find no way of doing that when it was in office. If it is so simple, why did the Labour Government cut investment programmes by 30 per cent.?

Mr. Tredinnick: Will my right hon. Friend indicate what competition the Post Office faces, particularly from abroad, and will he say something about the fate of the letter post and whether it is declining?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises the right questions. Increasingly, private sector American and Australian owned companies are competing with the

Royal Mail. The fax machine and the bike boys are eating into its marketplace. A proliferation of private sector companies which are subject to the disciplines of their balance sheets are competing with the Post Office. As the whole House knows, it is extremely difficult to impose on a public sector organisation the disciplines necessary to ensure that taxpayers' money is not used unfairly to compete with the private sector. Plenty of Opposition Members who have British private companies in their constituencies would be the first to complain if they felt that those companies were being subjected to unfair competition.

Single European Market

2. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he is taking to ensure that businesses are able to compete effectively within the single European market; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): We have established a single market compliance unit which, alongside the trade barriers strategy, helps industry to tackle single market problems and conducts sectoral studies. We are assisting the Commission in its efforts to improve complaints procedures and are pushing successfully for closer co-operation between enforcement officials in the Community.

Mr. Salmond: Can the Minister identify the precise mechanism by which having a part-time chairman at £450,000 and a 75 per cent. salary increase for a chief executive will enable British Gas to compete more effectively in the single market? Is there not a contrast between the President of the Board of Trade's specific support for the company and the Prime Minister's general condemnation of excessive salary increases, or is the common connection that neither of them intends to do anything about it, presumably on the ground that the Tory party helps those who have already helped themselves?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman's bile has obscured his judgment of the success of the policy and the way in which British Gas has helped its customers over the past few years. The salaries of chairmen of such companies on the stock exchange is a matter for the directors involved, as the chief executive himself has said. We are concerned to improve the quality of service to customers. In many privatised utilities, that is exactly what happens. In the sphere for which I am directly responsible, we must look at the tremendous success of British Telecom since privatisation and the at improvement in services to customers. Prices have fallen by 35 per cent. Why does the hon. Gentleman not talk about those successes rather than ranting and raving?

Mr. Quentin Davies: May I congratulate my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on their remarkable success in persuading our European partners finally to open the telecommunications market in the single market by 1998, which is a great success about which, needless to say, the media have said almost nothing? May I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to build on that success by now pushing for a single market in energy and forcing the monopolistic owners of pipelines and electricity grids elsewhere in the single market to open those networks to competition as soon as possible?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend has noticed the Government's tremendous success in the Telecommunications Council on Thursday evening, when we persuaded recalcitrant Community colleagues to agree to liberalising infrastructure as well as services by 1 January 1998. I should point out to Opposition Members that the problem for several of those countries was that they were not sufficiently committed to liberalisation. A party that is not committed to liberalisation cannot envisage the true merits of the information superhighway.

On my hon. Friend's second point, we are very much in favour of a single market in energy, and it is overdue. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy is working hard to obtain agreement on this across the Community.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Minister aware that one of the greatest single hindrances for British companies seeking to operate in Europe is the high cost of electricity for large-scale industrial users in this country? Electricity prices for that group of users have risen by more than 50 per cent. in the past five years, while they have fallen in comparable European countries; in pence per kilowatt the cost is higher in the United Kingdom than in France, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. Will the Minister tell the chairmen of the privatised companies to stop lining their pockets and to produce electricity at prices which will allow British firms—particularly those in the steel and chemical industries—to compete effectively in Europe?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman's comparative figures are not entirely correct, but if he persists in his view perhaps he will write to me about the details.

The point is that larger users in particular are capable of negotiating contracts. British industry is competitive in the European Union, regardless of the price levels that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, specifically because we have the right competitive background for British industry to flourish. That is why it is doing well in the European single market, and why our partners in the European Union regularly view the Government's policies as those that they should follow.

Exports

3. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will next meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss exports.

The Minister for Export Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): With other DTI Ministers, I regularly meet the CBI to discuss a wide range of issues, including exports. Underlying export volumes have risen by 12 per cent. over the last year and now stand at record levels.

Mr. Batiste: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the unprecedented success of British companies in exports is due at least in some measure to the success of small British companies in re-exporting products to rather difficult markets—companies such as those in my Leeds constituency involved in re-exporting musical instruments? Will he consider ways in which his

Department could help such companies to expand their presence at international trade fairs through joint ventures?

Mr. Needham: A recent survey showed tremendous confidence among Leeds business men in the export market, for which they deserve great credit.

As my hon. Friend knows, this is the only recovery since the war—and I mean the Boer war—in which the trade deficit has actually declined. British exports are now at the level that they reached in the mid-1980s, and the decline of the British percentage share worldwide has ceased. That is because of the tremendous success of the Government's policy, and the dynamism of the British manufacturing base.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Do not the improvement in British exports since devaluation and the even greater improvements in exports outside Europe, where the devaluation has been greater, indicate the need for a competitive exchange rate to boost exports? Would not the best way of providing encouragement be to offer Eddie George on a free transfer to the Bundesbank instead of allowing him to yammer on about putting up interest rates—and therefore the pound—every time recovery stirs?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman asks enough questions over a month to know the answer to that himself. The fact is that Britain's share of world trade in manufacturing stopped declining in the mid-1980s, having—as the hon. Gentleman knows—declined consistently for most of the century. That cannot be purely to do with our leaving the exchange rate mechanism. The real factor is that Britain's exports are now more competitive and our productivity is increasing, as is our quality, mainly because the Government have managed to attract vast amounts of foreign investment into this country and to improve the competitiveness of British industry.

Mr. Garnier: My right hon. Friend mentioned the Boer war. Will he encourage the CBI and its members to export vigorously to the Republic of South Africa—a country that needs all the trade that it can get, but trade that will benefit British industry as well?

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Trade have already taken large missions to South Africa and I intend to add to those twice next year. I think that British business understands the importance of South Africa and the opportunities there, and that we shall take every opportunity to exploit those opportunities.

Motor Industry

4. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the contribution of co-operation between employers and employees to the performance of the motor industry.

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): In recent years, both existing vehicle manufacturers and inward investors have transformed working practices. That has led to very significant improvements in productivity and quality. Those changes have also fed down the supply chain to component suppliers.

Mr. Burden: Surely the Minister accepts that the hallmark of the really successful motor manufacturers recently, such as Rover in my constituency, has been the fact that they work closely with the trade unions representing the work force, that they value collective agreements and realise their validity, and that they have conditions of service well above the social chapter minima and low-pay thresholds. Does that not show just how bogus is the Government's approach of advocating low wages and union bashing?

Mr. Eggar: I confirm that the number of working days lost through industrial action has decreased dramatically since 1979—from 29.5 million days then to 649,000 days last year. That is a credit to the industrial relations changes brought about by the Government which the Labour party consistently opposed.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: As the motor industry makes such a major contribution to manufacturing industry in the west midlands, which itself accounts for more than a third of exports from Britain, is it not encouraging that a recent CBI survey of the west midlands shows that no fewer than 80 per cent. of companies expected an increase in sales in the next three years and 60 per cent. expected an increase in exports? Would that not be jeopardised by the huge rise in business taxation which the Opposition expect will increase by no less than 50 per cent. at a stroke?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The worst thing that we could do in terms of inevitably reversing the present trend towards increased competitiveness by British industry would be to take on board the burdens of minimum wages and joining the social chapter, which is exactly what the Opposition advocate.

Small Businesses

5. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small businesses were set up in Devon and Cornwall last year; and how many went out of business.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The figures for VAT registration and deregistration in 1993 are not yet available, and they would be the best guide. Commercial sources show a decrease in company failures in the south-west during the first nine months of 1994 compared with the same period in 1993.

Mr. Jamieson: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in Devon and Cornwall since the mid-1980s 21,000 people have lost their jobs in defence-related industries, many of them small businesses, with a total loss of £500 million to the local economy? When will the hon. Gentleman announce new measures to assist small businesses in Devon and Cornwall, and when will he take the interests of the south-west seriously?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should know that we do take the interests of the south-west seriously, as any visit to the Government office in the south-west will show. In addition, the help that we are giving through Business Links particularly helps smaller companies in periods of adjustment or expansion. We are working with

the defence industries and through the European Union's Konver programme. However, the hon. Gentleman might think closely about the Labour party's policy towards defence as that would be the biggest job destruction programme going.

Sir Peter Emery: Does my hon. Friend agree that unemployment in east Devon, as in most of Devon, is among the lowest in the United Kingdom and that the investment of overseas companies in Devon and Cornwall is high and based on small industries which have grown in order to attract such investment? Will my hon. Friend do everything possible to continue the support that we have had from the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure that such investment continues?

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for being positive, which is in the interests of the region. The Government are giving considerable help in the form of DTI assisted area status, particularly for Plymouth where the inward investment office will be. As I have said, there is the status 2 objective for the European Union, particularly for the urban areas, the Konver 1 and 2 programmes and Business Links seeking to ensure that small companies, to which my right hon. Friend referred, receive the best possible advice. That is a story of considerable assistance; if Opposition Members did more to highlight it, they might provide companies with more incentives to move into the area.

Mr. Bell: That is a story of complacency rather than assistance. When the hon. Gentleman talks about the south-west and the small business man, will he refer to the famous memorandum of the famous John Maples, which states clearly that privatisation has not been popular and that the small business man in particular feels let down? That view was immediately echoed by the hon. Members for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and for Dover (Mr. Shaw). None of those Back-Bench Members supports the Minister, and Mr. Maples does not support the Minister, so who does?

Mr. Taylor: The Minister is not looking for support for something that he is confident that he is doing right. That will be self-evident, and support will flow from the success of the economy, including that of the south-west. There is no question but that the south-west is benefiting from the Government's policies across the board, which have stimulated growth among smaller companies. All the figures now emerging from the banks show a rising number of business start-ups and an increase in the total stock of businesses in each of the first three quarters of this year. Those are the statistics. What I said earlier shows that we are also providing a framework for further support to allow those companies to grow from small into medium-sized businesses. That is actually rather good progress.

Mr. Streeter: Has my hon. Friend been able to assess the adverse impact on all small Devon and Cornwall businesses supplying goods and services to the dockyards if a future Labour Government were to comply with the policy of the Labour party conference and scrap Trident, thus destroying the dockyards?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) has spoken up long and loud in the interests of his constituents, and I know that they are now paying close attention to the support that the Government have given him. There is no doubt that Labour policy on defence, especially on Trident, would be devastating for people in and around the dockyards. Those problems would continue and get worse if ever a Labour Government came to power—which is one reason why people in the south-west would be well advised to read the Labour party's defence document, especially on Trident.

Coal Industry

6. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has for payments to mineworkers on the transfer of the coal industry to the private sector.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Charles Wardle): I have no such proposals.

Mr. Illsley: The Minister may be aware that there is increasing speculation among mineworkers employed in the coal industry that their contracts of employment will be terminated when they are required to apply for jobs in the private sector. Can he tell us whether that will happen, and whether any payment will be made to mineworkers invited to transfer to the new privatised coal industry? Will there be redundancies, with fewer men employed in the industry in future?

Mr. Wardle: Miners transferring to the private sector will not be redundant and they will transfer under the well established Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, which will cover their contractual rights, including those relating to redundancy levels. The hon. Gentleman has always been perfectly open about his past employment with the National Union of Mineworkers, but it is a bit rich for him to suggest that an industry which has received nearly £20 billion from the taxpayer since 1979 should ask the taxpayer to dip further into his pocket and give miners a parting gift when they sensibly join the private sector.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my hon. Friend confirm that one of the requirements of the privatisation process was that companies bidding would provide redundancy finance if and when required?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is right; that is the cover provided by the TUPE regulations. When the Minister of State made his announcement last month about the preferred bidders he made it clear that those companies were well funded and able to meet their liabilities. Thanks to the TUPE regulations, they will do precisely that—when necessary.

Telecommunications

7. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further discussions he has had with the National Consumer Council about the level of service provided by telecommunications companies.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Although my officials met the National Consumer Council following its September 1993 report, "Paying the Price", which covered the work of all the utility regulators, the level of services provided by

telecommunications companies is primarily monitored by Oftel. Oftel deals directly with representations from consumers.

Mr. Jones: I am glad that the Minister has mentioned the NCC report, "Paying the Price", as it says that since privatisation the cost of connecting a telephone has increased by 20 per cent. How does he justify that?

Mr. Taylor: Matters of interconnection are now being assessed by Oftel, which has said that a report will be published early next month. Oftel has kept continuously under review the question of whether the consumer is best protected and the necessity, in a highly complicated sector, of providing a proper balance between access to BT and enabling it to perform properly as a company.

The key point to bear in mind, however, is that since the liberalisation of BT call costs have been reduced by 35 per cent. in real terms. Cheap communications are important not only to customers but because they will enable the information super-highway to grow.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that many pay phones did not work when BT was in the public sector, whereas many more do so today? Does not that show that competition and privatisation give a better service to the consumer?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is quite right: shareholders are not known to vandalise telephone boxes. Since competition began, universal service provision—a matter of considerable debate 10 years ago during the phase of liberalisation, which was not supported by the Labour party—has increased. There are now more telephone boxes—most of which now work—and more people have a telephone. That is a tremendous success for a policy, which the Labour party could well reconsider—with guilt for not supporting it.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: How can the Minister be satisfied with Oftel's record when fewer of our citizens have phones in their homes than those of France and Germany? Why do British customers pay higher connection charges than most of our competitor countries, and should not the regulator be given powers to reduce connection charges to the French and German levels of under £30?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman makes unreasonable comparisons with other countries' telephone systems. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should listen to what I have to say. I attended a European Telecommunications Council meeting last Thursday, at which Minister after Minister complimented us on the way in which liberalisation had given the British public an excellent telephone network based on competition.

Each of the cases that Oftel is investigating contains detailed proposals backed by reports, and another report in December will propose protection for the consumer. As a result of liberalisation, the British public has received a better quality of telephones and lower prices. Where there are problems, BT and the other new companies have offered special bargains such as the low-pay tariff. Those are excellent moves by a competitive market that is responding to customer demand.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that this country now has more digital links than France or Germany, that long distance and international phone calls are cheaper here than in France or Germany and that—to be precise—less than 30 per cent. of call boxes worked before privatisation, whereas now more than 95 per cent. work?

Mr. Taylor: Britain is the best place in the European Union for international businesses to conduct their business. It is interesting that, from Paris, it is cheaper to phone somewhere else in France via New York than it is to use France Telecom. That is a remarkable fact, and it would not occur in this country. We have just found a United States equivalent for telephone purposes, and there is now the possibility of extremely cheap lines across the Atlantic. That again will assist British business.

Steel Industry

8. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts concerning pricing policy in the steel industry.

Mr. Eggar: The Government have had no such discussions with Community member states. Decisions on steel prices are a matter for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned.

Mr. Hughes Does the Minister recognise that the problems of state subsidies and unfair practices have temporarily abated because of the upturn in demand for steel? Nevertheless, when the downturn comes we shall be back to square one. Is not there some justification for the widespread feeling among steel workers that the Government have put up only a sham fight on their behalf?

Mr. Eggar: I simply do not accept that. I pay tribute to the management and work force of British Steel and of the other steel companies for the dramatic change that has been achieved since privatisation. I know that the hon. Gentleman's constituency has been through a period of change. He now has a world-class plant in his constituency that is producing a record amount of extremely high quality steel.

It is well known that the Government strongly opposed a number of European Union proposals. Last December, however, we accepted, a package of six article 95 cases. We are discussing a particular article 95 case, the EcoStahl case, with the Commission and the German and French Governments, and at the same time we are keeping British Steel and the British Independent Steel Producers Association—BISPA—closely informed of progress. It is a difficult issue. We are aiming to achieve equivalence between the present article 95 proposals and the December 1993 proposals.

Gas Bill

9. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the average domestic gas bill is likely to fall as a result of the effects of the Gas Bill.

Mr. Eggar: Janice will be happy to know that she is likely to be able to benefit from about a 10 per cent. cut in her gas bills as a result of competition.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he confirm that since privatisation gas prices have fallen by 23 per cent.? I know that my hon. Friend likes to have instant control of himself, but does he agree that Bambi has already lost control of the lot opposite? Does he also

agree that—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading".]—we have not heard much about the 50 per cent. pay rise that Bambi got when he became leader of that lot on the Labour Benches?

Mr. Eggar: I can answer yes, yes, yes and yes.

Mr. Harvey: When the Government introduce a competitive market into the gas supply industry, what protection do they intend to offer small-volume consumers in areas remote from the sources of supply against the higher economic costs of supplying gas to them? Upon whom will the cost of restructuring the industry fall?

Mr. Eggar: As the hon. Gentleman knows, a number of issues lie behind that question. In the coming months, a regional differential in prices will be introduced that will differentiate region by region as opposed to urban area as against rural area. We therefore do not expect transportation charges to differ to the extent implied by the hon. Gentleman. We will publish full details in the proposed Bill and in the accompanying licence of the various obligations that will be placed on the competitor companies to British Gas. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by that information. I know that his party is in favour of gas competition and I look forward to working with him.

Mr. Wilson: The country is now well aware that the chief executives of British Gas have awarded themselves grotesque pay rises. The chief executive has been awarded an increase of £205,000 a year. Will the Minister confirm that, by remarkable symmetry, in the current year his Department has cut the grant to the Gas Consumers Council by £209,000? Will he further confirm that there could be no more eloquent commentary on the concern felt by his Department and the Government for the consumer as opposed to their worship of private greed?

Mr. Eggar: Why does not the hon. Gentleman pay credit to British Gas for a reduction of 23 per cent. in real gas prices? Why does he not follow the line taken by the shadow energy Minister, who has welcomed the Government's announcement about ending British Gas's monopoly, which will therefore increase the benefits of competition that will be enjoyed by consumers?

VSEL

10. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the proposed takeover of VSEL by GEC.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): It is for the Director General of Fair Trading to consider this proposed merger and to advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade under the Fair Trading Act 1973 whether the merger should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. All representations received by the Department of Trade and Industry are being forwarded to the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Mans: I congratulate my hon. Friend on being appointed to his new post. Bearing in mind the near monopoly that would result if this bid were allowed to go ahead, will my hon. Friend give serious consideration to submitting it to the MMC, should the Office of Fair Trading consider that that is the right way to proceed?

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the warmth of his welcome. At this stage, it is the job of the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate those cases, but he is willing to receive views from all interested parties and I am sure that my hon. Friend will pass his observations to him.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister accept that people are anxious about the possible takeover of VSEL not only by GEC but by British Aerospace, particularly about the impact that it might have on Yarrow's on Clydeside? Would not it be far better for the Government to make it clear now that they will refer neither bid or both bids, but will not discriminate in favour of one bid as opposed to another?

Mr. Evans: As I have already said, at this stage it is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading, but I am sure that the competition authorities will pay close attention to all the views expressed. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will join my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) in making representations to that quarter.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I wish to advise the House that Avro International, the regional jet division of British Aerospace, is located on the periphery of my constituency and is therefore a vital employer in the Macclesfield borough. If GEC succeeds in taking over VSEL, it will create a virtual monopoly in shipbuilding, which cannot be good for the defence pound and its purchasing capacity. Will my hon. Friend take on board the fact that many Conservative Members are strongly opposed to GEC's bid and will do everything possible, in representations to the Government and the Office of Fair Trading, to point out the problems that would result if GEC were successful?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is an experienced Member of the House and will therefore appreciate that, at this stage, I cannot discuss specific issues raised by the merger. He will have heard the observations that I made to other hon. Members and I am sure that the strength of opinion that he has expressed will be made clear to the Director General.

Dr. Moonie: Surely the Minister is aware that the bid has considerable repercussions for other parts of the defence sector and that there must be a question mark over whether a successful company like VSEL should be taken over by either of the potential bidders. My hon. Friends and I find it incredible that his Department is prepared to make no recommendation whatever to the Office of Fair Trading, nor to say that it will refer both bids to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission if the need arises. Is not there a role for the Government, other than holding their jackets?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman's question shows a remarkable lack of understanding of the process of considering these matters. The Director General of Fair Trading makes a recommendation to the President, rather than the other way round. Once that recommendation has been made, the matter will fall for decision within the purview of my right hon. Friend the President, but not until that time.

Manufacturing Industry

11. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated size of the United Kingdom manufacturing industry measured by its contribution to the gross national product in the current year; and what it was in 1991.

Mr. Heseltine: The share of manufacturing in GDP was 21.9 per cent. in 1991 and 21.7 per cent. in 1993. Since 1991, manufacturing output has increased by 5.7 per cent.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that helpful reply. Notwithstanding earlier comments made in the Chamber, will he join me in congratulating GEC-Alstom on its outstanding success in winning overseas orders, often in the face of intense competition? Will he further congratulate GEC on the quality of its management, its well-trained and well-motivated work force and the quality of the products that are made in my constituency of Rugby?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right to draw the House's attention to the excellent products that are made in his constituency. He will understand if I do not go too far down the road that he invites me to take because, in the context of the dialogue in the House this afternoon, I should not want to indicate that I am in any way prejudiced in matters that might come to my attention.

Dr. Cunningham: Instead of comparing 1991 with 1993, why does not the right hon. Gentleman tell the House about the contribution of manufacturing industry and its decline over the past 15 years? Why does not he admit that, in 1979, manufacturing industry contributed 28.5 per cent. to our gross national product whereas, by last year, its contribution had fallen to 21.7 per cent.—a fall of almost 25 per cent.—while at the same time the manufacturing industries of our competitors in Germany, Japan and the United States of America were all growing? That is a measure of the failure of his policies.

Mr. Heseltine: When the right hon. Gentleman has had time to do some more homework, he will find that manufacturing, as a share of the economy in this country, has been falling for the past 40 years. He will also find that it has been falling consistently in our competitor economies. If he really wants to understand what is happening in some of the world's most successful economies, I should tell him that in Hong Kong manufacturing now makes up only 15 per cent. of the economy. The right hon. Gentleman must understand that the arcane ideas that one can fossilise an economy of yesterday's industries are totally out of date.

Sir Michael Grylls: Does my right hon. Friend not find it strange that the Opposition are incapable of paying compliments to people who work in British industry? I understand that the British machine tool industry has announced that it has achieved an 18 per cent. increase in its exports and that we shall have a favourable balance of trade in machine tools. Should not the Opposition be pleased about that, rather than attacking us?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right that Opposition Members do not give the support to British industry and British commerce that they deserve. In order to help them on their way, perhaps they will join my right hon. and hon. Friends and I in welcoming today's excellent news for Humberside—that, as a result of a £10 million grant from my Department, Courtaulds has announced that approximately £100 million will be invested to develop a new textile fabric based on tensel, which is one of the most exiting innovations that has taken place in that industry for many years.

Telecommunications

12. **Ms Church:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the validity of the asymmetry principle in relation to telecommunications policy.

Mr. Ian Taylor: There is no asymmetry, as explained in the Command Paper on creating super-highways in the United Kingdom, which was published yesterday.

Ms Church: Does the Minister agree that the decision that was announced yesterday means that it will be difficult for British Telecom and Mercury to carry out the Government's proposals on competitiveness and investment? How will they be able to compete internationally, how will they be able to invest the £15 billion that they will want to invest and how will they lead Britain into the 21st century in that sector?

Mr. Taylor: BT, Mercury and the other public telephony operators are allowed into the household to supply video on demand, home shopping and home banking. They are allowed to take all services into small business and all services of a fibre-optic nature into institutions of health and education. They are not restrained. I was delighted to welcome yesterday BT's statement that it will continue massive investment in those sectors.

The hon. Lady should understand that the success of the revolution in optic fibres has been achieved partly through competition, and that has been established by giving the cable companies a secure period in which to invest and to lay cables. We are now halfway through the cycle, and I have no intention of uprooting the investors before they have even had a chance of obtaining a proper return.

Exports

13. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support he is giving to north-west industries wishing to export to former Soviet Union countries.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: North-west companies wishing to export to former Soviet Union countries are eligible for the full range of nationally available services provided by my Department and overseas posts. That national support includes the use of export promoters, subsidised attendance for businesses at trade fairs and on sponsored missions and the provision of a wide range of other intelligence gathering and promotional activities.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer.

On a recent visit to Russia, I spoke with our ambassador and was delighted to see the efforts that staff are putting into assisting British companies to export to Russia. Will my hon. Friend congratulate a company in the north-west called Thwaites Brewery, which recently exported some of its excellent product to Russia, and will he say what proactive action the Government are taking

to ensure that more companies in the north-west and other regions know about the potential of countries such as Russia?

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I am happy to accept my hon. Friend's invitation. Being someone who is aware of the products of the Daniel Thwaites Brewery, I am sure that consumers in Russia will have the opportunity of taking advantage of the produce of that company on many occasions in future. I congratulate the brewery on its export success this year.

A number of north-western companies have been engaged in trade missions that have been supported by the DTI this year. I am aware of three north-west companies that are due to participate in another mission undertaken by the British Baltic chamber of commerce early next year. Five export promoters have been seconded from industry and are working with the DTI actively to support overseas trade, particularly within the former Soviet Union.

Mr. McAvoy: When considering what support he can offer companies in the north-west, what weight has the Minister given to the difficulties suffered by small and medium-sized businesses caused by the late payment of debt? In the light of that, why will not the Government introduce a statutory right to interest for late payment of debt?

Mr. Evans: The Department is keen to do all that it can to encourage businesses of all sizes. That is why it has been actively engaged in the activities that I have outlined. If the hon. Gentleman is unaware of the specific action undertaken by the Department, it is important to say that the various schemes run, not just by the DTI but by the Foreign Office and the Export Credits Guarantee Department, are explained in a helpful publication that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has placed in the House of Commons Library. It is entitled "Overseas Trade Services—Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union" and I invite the hon. Gentleman to read it.

Ms Gillan: Will my hon. Friend accept my congratulations—to add to those from businesses in the north-west and throughout the country—on the DTI's excellent initiative in appointing export promoters? Does he agree that those export promoters have contributed in no small way to the golden, export-led recovery? Will he give our businesses a firm assurance that the posts of export promoters will remain firmly within the DTI?

Mr. Evans: I can certainly say that it is our intention that they will remain so. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for paying tribute to the work undertaken by export promoters. I am aware that Mr. Robin Forrest, who is responsible for the north-west area, has visited a number of companies in the region.

Holiday Safety

14. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further discussions his Department has had with representatives of the major package holiday operators about the need to maintain and inspect safety levels at foreign holiday destinations.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have had no such discussions and none have been requested. All major tour operators in the UK observe guidance drawn up by the International Federation of Tour Operators, and endorsed by the Association of British Travel Agents.

Mr. Etherington: The Minister must surely be aware of the growing concern about the lack of adequate safety standards in holiday resorts in Spain and Tenerife. This year alone there have been three deaths in Spain due to faulty heating appliances, which have led to carbon monoxide poisoning. Will he therefore ask the major tour operators why they continue to send people to places with inadequate standards? If he does not receive a satisfactory answer will he do something about it in the same way as Dick Spring did when one of his constituents in Ireland was killed in similar circumstances? Will the Minister ask the Foreign Secretary to display the same zeal as that displayed by Mr. Spring?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Member should be aware that the tragic cases in Spain, which he mentioned, led to a joint Foreign Office and Irish Foreign Office initiative because two of the couples were, I think, of joint nationality. The hon. Gentleman should not try to distinguish between the Irish effort and the British effort. There are problems related to carbon monoxide poisoning and travel firms are well aware of them. As the campaign in the UK shows, the problem does not occur only during holidays—there are between 30 and 40 known deaths from the same problem in the United Kingdom each year and we are talking with travel agency groups about that. They are not irresponsible, but are doing their utmost to check reports of faulty installations, which often involve cheap methods.

Mrs. Lait: Is my hon. Friend aware of the Rytlewski case in my constituency, in which a young girl fell to her death from a low window in Spain? Are there any proposals for the compulsory insurance of all travel companies or compulsory registration with the Association of British Travel Agents? Are any discussions being held in the Council of Ministers to promote standard safety procedures throughout the Community?

Mr. Taylor: I am very sorry to hear of the tragic case of my hon. Friend's constituent. Travel companies take out policies and inspect all the hotels that they list in their brochures. They also have guidance covering fire safety, swimming pools and public hygiene—and buildings too, I think.

The European Union has made several attempts to draw up a common system of regulation, particularly for fire safety in hotels. I am not aware of the point that my hon. Friend has made. The difficulty is always that we must ensure that the regulations move up to the highest, not the lowest, common denominator. I shall have to look again at my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Shipbuilding Industry

15. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about state aid to the shipbuilding industry.

Mr. Heseltine: The European Community's seventh directive on shipbuilding regulates state aids to shipbuilding within the Community in 1994 and is likely to be extended to cover 1995. The Government support

the OECD shipbuilding agreement which provides for the elimination of shipbuilding subsidies, on a multilateral basis, from 1 January 1996.

Mr. Hutton: I thank the President for that answer. What will be the subsidy for 1995 under the shipbuilding intervention fund scheme? Has he given any consideration to extending the period applying to guaranteed loans under the home shipbuilding loan guarantee scheme?

Mr. Heseltine: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the answer that he requests. We expect the European Commission to announce the rate of subsidy; for 1994 it is 9 per cent. The moment I have updated information I shall make it available to the House.

Mr. Gallie: Given the pleas of Opposition Members in respect of the referral of both bids for VSEL to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, can my right hon. Friend advise me on how on earth the British Aerospace bid can be referred to the MMC, as it has no shipbuilding interests at present?

Mr. Heseltine: I know that my hon. Friend will understand if I do not get drawn on that matter.

Mr. Beggs: The president must be aware of just how difficult it is for any United Kingdom shipyard to win orders or successfully tender bits for new business against European yards. The obvious conclusion is that some hidden subsidy or support is given to shipyards in Europe—support that British yards, and Harland and Wolff in Northern Ireland, cannot obtain. That is damaging their chances of gaining new business—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Is everybody sitting comfortably? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Beggs: Now that that cargo has docked, I shall proceed. I call upon the President of the Board of Trade to endeavour to establish whether hidden subsidies are being given to European yards, and to secure a level playing field for our own industry to compete on.

Mr. Heseltine: I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's point. If there is any evidence of the sort of hidden subsidies to which he refers, I shall take it extremely seriously and seek to have them withdrawn.

It is important, however, to realise that the situation is not as bleak as the hon. Gentleman suggests. Vosper Thornycroft's turnover is up 22 per cent., and more than 90 per cent. of its business is in exports—a commendable achievement.

Trade Balance

16. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the most recent figure for the balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Needham: In the latest three months the trade deficit in manufactured goods was £1.5 billion, down from £2.2. billion in the previous three months.

Mr. Grocott: That was a poor answer to a question I did not ask. Can the Minister confirm that our £8 billion deficit in 1993 was the clearest possible illustration of how our industrial base, especially in the west midlands, has been vandalised by the Government? Does the Minister share my nostalgia for those heady days in the 1970s under Labour when the surplus in manufactured goods rose to £5.8 billion? Will he confirm that not in his wildest dreams would he expect either the jobs or the apprenticeships that existed under Labour ever to come back under this Government?

Mr. Needham: Let us just recall those heady days in the 1970s, shall we—the strikes, the appalling productivity and the trade union restrictive practices? The hon. Gentleman obviously does not recall that in 1979 it took 13 man hours to make a tonne of steel, whereas British steel now does it in four hours. Obviously he does not know, or did not bother to find out, that since 1981 the export volume of British manufactured goods has increased faster than those of France, Germany, Italy or Japan. Instead of knocking that the hon. Gentleman should look at the facts.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On 25 October, I put an oral supplementary question to the Prime Minister in which I asked him to provide me with a list of the salaries of the chief executives of the next steps agencies, together with those of the civil servants whom those chief executives have replaced or succeeded. The Prime Minister replied to me on 15 November, providing me with the material about the chief executives of the agencies, but informed me that for the salaries of the civil servants I should table questions to Ministers. The Prime Minister's letter stated:

"This information will only be available from the Minister concerned."

As the Prime Minister suggested, I therefore tabled questions to all the Ministers with responsibility for the next steps agencies, including the Secretary of State for Defence. My question to the Secretary of State is listed on page 133 of the Votes and Proceedings for last Friday and it asks

"if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of or work comparable to that of the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established."

Yesterday afternoon, I received a letter from a person called G. H. Wilson, headmaster and chief executive of the Duke of York's royal military school. It stated:

"The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your parliamentary question."

By the second post this afternoon, since I gave notice of my intention to raise this point of order with you, Madam Speaker, I received a letter from the headmaster of Queen Victoria school, Dunblane, Perthshire, stating:

"I have been asked to reply to your Question".

I ask you to rule on two matters, Madam Speaker. The first is that persons who are not Members of this House have no right or status to answer parliamentary questions, should not purport to do so, and should be directed not to do so.

Secondly, whatever the role of a chief executive of a next steps agency may be, it is not to account for the salaries of civil servants, who are directly employed by Ministers who are responsible to the House; that the only people who are properly equipped and have the duty to answer those questions are Ministers; and that it is therefore unacceptable for Ministers to hive off to these deplorable agencies not only the work that they have done, but responsibility which the agencies do not have and on which they have no right to answer questions by a Member of Parliament.

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman raises not only a point of order but matters of a debating nature which I cannot enter into. For all that, I am grateful to him for giving me notice, to some extent, of his point of order. I have made inquiries into the matter, and have been informed that the letter to which he refers was sent to him in error. The headmaster was asked to provide information so that the Ministry of Defence could put together a comprehensive reply to the right hon. Gentleman. Instead, the headmaster misunderstood the request and wrote directly to the right hon. Gentleman. I understand that a full reply to his question will be given by the relevant Minister tomorrow.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I seek your guidance on whether it is improper for an outside body to influence the appointment of an adviser to a Select Committee? It is clear from a letter I have here that Unison has attempted to force Labour members of the Select Committee on Health to appoint a Unison member as an adviser to that Committee. That is exactly the sort of behaviour by the Chairman of a Select Committee that was condemned in the House yesterday by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Madam Speaker: I have not seen the letter, and I am not aware of the matter. *[Interruption.]* There is no point in waving it at me; I have good eyesight, but I cannot read it from that distance. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me have the letter, and I shall see what I can do about it.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. My question to you yesterday was whether it was normal practice for the Chair of a Select Committee to report on such a sensitive issue when she had a one-to-one meeting with the manager of a advertising agency, and when the Committee had previously conducted a report into tobacco advertising—a very sensitive issue. On the issue raised in Committee, I, along with other Members, suggested that a member of Unison could advise us on a particular inquiry. It was openly done, and agreed unanimously by Conservative Members on that Committee.

Madam Speaker: I think that two points arise from points of order yesterday. The first concerns whether a Chairman or Chairwoman of a Select Committee should report to the Committee any approaches that relate to the work of that Committee. As I told the House yesterday, there are no rules that are relevant to the issue, but let me give the House my own views and a little guidance, if I may. It would be a matter of common sense and courtesy for such approaches to be reported. I am not seeking for rules and regulations to be engraved in tablets of stone. We have to apply common sense to our dealings with each other in the Chamber and in Committee, and I leave it at that.

The second issue is the notification that should be given by hon. Members who intend to refer in the Chamber to other hon. Members. It is a clear convention, again based on courtesy, that notice should be given where such reference is intended to be made, but clearly there will be cases where the reference arises on the spur of the moment—during a point of order or at Question Time, when advance notification is unlikely to be practical. Of course, hon. Members should consider whether reference to a colleague without notice is fair. We all understand when it is on the spur of the moment, but we must consider whether it is fair to behave in that way.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on a serious matter. As you know, yesterday the Select Committee on Members' Interests met to consider the very sensitive and important matter of a complaint against the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). As a member of that

Committee, I was astonished when I realised that a Government Whip was present as a member of the Select Committee. Of course, it would be wrong to me to reveal anything that went on in the Committee hearing, but I think that he made an influential—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should be very careful about what she is reporting to me. If she has something to report about a Committee, she should come and see me and not report it in this way. I would be glad to see her, but at the moment she is reporting something that took place in a Select Committee of which I have no knowledge.

Ms Eagle: With respect, I want to ask you whether there is any precedent for a Whip, who is a member of the Government and takes the Crown payroll, to be a member of a Select Committee. I have been approached since the meeting by journalists who know of this, and they are astonished. This has set a very serious precedent, which threatens to breach the independence of the Select Committee system.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Lady has not considered the matter carefully enough. I do not know the individual the hon. Lady is talking about. That is why I would rather she came to discuss the matter with me. It could well be that the House appointed the individual.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) is of immense constitutional importance. A Government Whip has been appointed to the Select Committee on Members' Interests at a time when a series of sensitive inquiries are under way.

There is a precedent of which you should be aware. The Leader of the House of Commons is a member of the Broadcasting and Privileges Committees, but he has a remit, in that he has to steer changes through the House. The Attorney-General gives legal advice to the Committee on Privileges. That is his remit. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury is a member of the Public Accounts Committee, although he has never attended it. I was a member of that Committee for 11 years, but the Financial Secretary did not attend.

What we have here is a precedent where a Minister, because that is what a Treasury Whip is, is attending a Select Committee meeting—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Campbell-Savours:—with a view to fixing its findings—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat—*[Interruption.]* Order. I have heard sufficient to know that it is what I first suspected. This House has appointed the hon Member concerned. The hon. Member for Workington, (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and anyone else who wished to object to that should have done so at the time.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, with the support of several hon. Members, I sought to table an early-day motion which contained reference to the famous Maples memorandum and the word "yobbos". The Table Office has informed me today that you might object to an early-day motion containing the word "yobbos".

I would like your ruling on three points. First—

Madam Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can give the hon. Gentleman guidance now. There is a procedure by which, if early-day motions are refused by the Table Office, they come to me. I am therefore waiting for the early-day motion to come to me, and I will look at it in that light.

Mr. MacShane *indicated assent.*

BILL PRESENTED

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Secretary Mawhinney, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Gummer and Mr. John Watts, presented a Bill to provide for the construction, maintenance and operation of a railway between St. Pancras, in London, and the Channel Tunnel portal at Castle Hill, Folkestone, in Kent, together with associated works, and of works which can be carried out in conjunction therewith; to provide for the improvement of the A2 at Cobham, in Kent, and of the M2 between junctions 1 and 4, together with associated works; to make provision with respect to compensation in relation to the acquisition of blighted land; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 3.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Industrial Training Levy

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 1995 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1995 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SIXTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Dunn.]*

Question again proposed.

The Economy

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Also, in accordance with Standing Order No. 32, I shall call the amendment standing in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrat party.

3.43 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Address, at the end of the Question to add:

But note that living standards for millions are falling and that election promises are being broken again with seven tax rises to pay for Government economic mismanagement; humbly regret that the Gracious Speech excludes positive measures to remove the fear of unemployment, to tackle the unacceptable and clumsy reforms of the NHS and to cease treating education as a business rather than a service; regret the absence of legislation to tackle executive share options and to deal with the excesses in the privatised utilities; regret the absence of a strategy for employment, skills and industry including measures to assist the Post Office expand in the public sector; and call for a reconsideration of the further cuts in vitally important public services and the abandonment of the increase in VAT on fuel for domestic and charitable purposes to 17.5 per cent.

The amendment identifies what is wrong with this country, and what should have been tackled through the Queen's Speech. What is wrong is that living standards are falling; fear of unemployment is widespread; the health and education reforms of this Government are unacceptable; the gap between rich and poor is too wide; the VAT rise on fuel is simply wrong; and the excessive executive pay packages, especially in the privatised utilities, are causing real offence throughout the country. Those are the terms of our amendment, and, by identify those problems, Conservative Members should find it possible to support it.

All those proposals are contained in the memorandum of advice from the vice-chairman of the Conservative party to the Government, which was published only a few days ago. That memorandum shows that even the Conservatives now admit what is wrong and that the Labour party is right. It shows that, when there is consensus throughout the country on what needs to be done, the Government are seen as out of touch, ineffectual, unable to deliver on their promises, and having no conception of the public interest.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I shall make progress.

Mr. Gallie: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who says that there should be a £4.05 minimum rate per hour, and that that should become the policy of the Labour party?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has said no such thing. The hon. Gentleman should address what I read out from the Maples memorandum. In particular, the hon. Gentleman might take account of his own constituency party in Ayr, which has said that it is afraid for the welfare of the elderly if VAT is increased. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will seek to join us when we try to have the VAT issue reopened.

What does the Maples memorandum say needs to be done? The first thing that it says is that we should stop the implementation of the second stage of the VAT increase. It says that changes must be made in the national health service, because the reforms are not working. It also says that the Government should end tax subsidies for executive pay—something which is Labour policy and which should have been done years ago by the Government.

Even some Conservatives now understand that what the Government are doing is not in the national interest, but purely in the interests of a few factions in the Conservative party. One reason why the Government are unable to do what is right for the country is that the Conservative party is so divided, from faction to faction. It is so divided on Europe that the best summary of its approach is isolationism tempered only by the occasional visit to the Ritz hotel in Paris.

As we see again today, the job of chairman of the 1922 Committee is now at risk. How do we defend the situation in which the real crime of the chairman of the 1922 Committee, in the view of Conservative Members, is that he is too loyal to the Prime Minister of this country? No doubt the next chairman of the 1922 Committee will have to pass a new test—a disloyalty test. The governing party is so paralysed by the tyranny of its factions and the impotence of its leadership that it is unfit to govern.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Gentleman is giving much peripheral information at the moment, but he is avoiding policy. What is his anti-inflation policy? Is he prepared, as well as to lower interest rates, to raise them if that is necessary for the economic good management of this country?

Mr. Brown: The reason that interest rates have had to rise is that the capacity of the British economy is now too small. Whenever the economy expands, there are now inflationary pressures as a result of the mismanagement of policy.

As for policy, does the hon. Gentleman agree that I have asked him to support three specific policies already? They were, first, to abandon the VAT rise in respect of fuel; secondly, to deal with the health service and the reforms that have gone wrong; and, thirdly—I hope that he will agree on this—that tax subsidies should be withdrawn from the executive share options and the perks for the privatised utilities that nobody now can defend?

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall make progress for a minute, and then I should be very happy to allow both sides of the Conservative equation to state their views.

There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to deal with the problems of industry and skills. There is nothing on employment, except penalising the unemployed. There is nothing to build social cohesion or modernise the welfare state. There is nothing to tackle the causes of crime. There is nothing to do what the Maples memorandum admits to undoing. He admits to treating education "as a business" and to market reforms in the health service to which doctors and nurses are, as he said, "universally hostile".

The whole interest of the Maples memorandum and of Conservative Members is not in changing policy to respond to the needs of the country, not to do what is right either for the unemployed or for the rest of the country, but simply to manipulate public opinion to win a further term of government. The Government's election strategy, as revealed in the memorandum, is not a shift in policy but a move to control the press, issue black propaganda and propagate dirty tricks. Every decision to be made by the Conservative party must relate not to what is good for the people of this country and for its long-term future, but to what will help the party in its current predicament.

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Brandreth *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Let me make a little progress, and illustrate my point.

We learn from the memorandum that identity cards are now to be considered. There is to be a Green Paper; a decision was announced on 13 October. We knew yesterday that a Cabinet Committee has just been set up, but we now learn from the memorandum that the decision was made not because the Home Secretary thought it necessary, right or good for the country, but simply because the Government believe that it could embarrass Labour into opposing the introduction of the cards.

As for the economy, yet more anti-trade union legislation is being contemplated, not because it is in the public interest but simply because the Government think that it could divide the Labour party. Nothing is done in the public interest; action is taken only in the narrow interest of the Conservative party's desperate tactics to bring about its re-election.

We must ask how much of the Gracious Speech was written not with a sense of what is needed for the country, but simply with an eye to the fortunes of what is—as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has admitted—an increasingly panic-stricken Conservative party.

What about the presentation of economic policy, according to the memorandum? The Conservatives say that they need help from the few remaining Conservative supporters outside the Conservative party. The memorandum states:

"Third-party endorsements are key, and infinitely more reliable than Ministers."

That is a fine comment on the integrity of colleagues.

Let me quote the full list of potential helpers—the range of people who could offer third-party endorsements of the Conservatives' economic and social policies: "the police"—well, perhaps 10 years ago, but not now; "the CBI"—well, they are not all that keen, as the Chancellor well knows. The memorandum also says:

"We must avoid antagonising them if we can help it."

The memorandum then refers to the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Are we seriously to imagine that spokesmen from the IMF and the OECD could turn out and vote to save the Conservative party in the Dudley by-election? After those organisations, all that is left is the Institute of Directors. When their last remaining supporter is the Institute of Directors—and its support for the Conservatives is ebbing away—the Government have problems indeed.

What else does Mr. Maples say in the memorandum? We should remember that he was hand-picked for the job by the Prime Minister. He is chairman of Saatchi and Saatchi, and the Prime Minister wanted him to stand as parliamentary candidate for the Newbury seat. The proposals in the memorandum are very close to the Prime Minister's thinking. Dealing with the question of the Labour leader, Mr. Maples asks:

"Could we set some Back Benchers on to this? Maybe a few yobbos of our own to try and knock them out a bit, and another team to operate more subtly on the changes of mind and differences of view."

There we have the Conservative party in the House: the yobbos on one hand, and those acting more subtly—the intellectuals—on the other. That is the new Tory parliamentary hierarchy: the Prime Minister, Ministers, junior Ministers, Whips, parliamentary private secretaries, yobbos and, finally, the intellectuals. If someone cannot make it into the House, of course, he can always become vice-chairman of the Conservative party. If a company wants a question to be raised in the House, does it go to the yobbos or the intellectuals—or must the two groups compete on price?

So there we have it: the modern Conservative party, no longer divided only between wets and dries, Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-sceptics, but now divided overall—yobbos versus intellectuals.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: Is the hon. Gentleman a yobbo or an intellectual? Could the country ever tell the difference?

Mr. Marlow: At least I am not a soundbite.

The hon. Gentleman waxed poetic on the subject of factions. We are, of course, the party of power, and it is therefore quite proper for debates to take place within the party of power. Are there no debates in the hon. Gentleman's party? Are there no factions? Can he tell the

[Mr. Marlow]

House how his party will vote on Monday in regard to giving more money to Brussels? Will every member of his party do the same?

Mr. Brown: Compared with the Conservative party, the Labour party's debates reach conclusions. There are not interminable divisions that cannot be resolved in the Labour party. Before the hon. Gentleman casts his vote in the great election for the 1922 Committee, I should also tell him that on Monday, as he would expect, the Labour party will be proposing a reasoned amendment to the Bill, and I hope that he and others will join us in the Lobbies. One thing is clear: that is that the country has no confidence in the Government's approach to the European issue.

What does all that mean for economic policy? Despite all the boasts about what is happening to the economy—we shall hear them again from the Chancellor this afternoon—despite all that he will say about this figure and that figure, figures that he will pluck out of the air from here and there, the central fact stands out in the Maples memorandum—real take-home pay, he says, is falling this year, he says that it will fall next year, and he adds:

"We will have to see this rise in real take-home pay soon or we will have had four or even five years of recovery with no rise in living standards."

He is aware of the impact of the tax rises on ordinary people. He is aware now of the impact of the interest rate rises on people's mortgages. No matter how much bluster there is from the Chancellor this afternoon, he must face up to the fact that millions of British people are seeing their living standards fall.

But what else does the Maples memorandum tell us about economic policy? It says:

"It is no use"—

this is important for the Conservatives' election strategy—

"to pursue fiscal and monetary rectitude if there is no rise in living standards and job opportunities until too late."

What Mr. Maples means by "too late" is after the general election. In other words, he is prepared to admit in private, as the Chancellor seems to be admitting as well, that he will sacrifice all claim to rectitude to achieve a pre-election boom, even when it is not in the long-term interests of the economy.

I challenge the Chancellor to condemn the Maples memorandum, which suggests that a pre-election boom will be manipulated by the Conservative party; because all talk of firmness, of sustainable growth, of commitment to low inflation, irrespective of politics, is hypocrisy if the Government are prepared to manipulate the economy in the way that is being suggested by Mr. Maples.

Mr. Brandreth *rose—*

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Is it a yobbo or an intellectual? I will take the yobbo.

Mr. Streeter: Speaking as an intellectual, may I ask the hon. Gentleman how he feels about his prediction in March 1993, when he said that unemployment would rise month after month after month when in fact unemployment has fallen since that date month after month after month?

Mr. Brown: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, what I said was said the day after the Budget, reading from the Budget statement, after it had been said that it would be some time before unemployment started to fall again. That is what the Chancellor of the day said. That is what the Budget statement said. If the hon. Gentleman wants to condemn me, he had better condemn the Treasury and those on the Conservative Front Bench.

The hon. Gentleman also has a question to answer. Why did he say to his electorate in Plymouth, Sutton at the last election, "We will get taxes down even further"? Should he not be apologising to the British people?

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall give way once more, and then I will have to make some progress.

Mr. Heald: The Labour party is committed to the European recovery fund at a cost of £77 billion. Will the hon. Gentleman give us a bit of rectitude now and tell us whether he confirms that the Labour party will go ahead with that programme and what it will cost the British taxpayer? Yes or no—a clear answer, please.

Mr. Brown: That was not the question of an intellectual. The hon. Gentleman is presumably not talking about the European recovery fund but what is called the European investment fund. One of our complaints is that the European investment fund has not been set up expeditiously enough to deal with this recession, and presumably can only be in being, because of all the delays, to deal with a future recession. As the hon. Gentleman knows, what is costing this country billions of pounds is not acting against unemployment; what is costing £25 billion is the failure to take action to remove our present unemployment. When people realise that every ordinary family pays £20 a week to deal with the Government's failure to combat unemployment, they will join us in calling for action.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): In the light of what he has just said, will the hon. Gentleman explain why every Labour Government have left office with unemployment higher than when they came into office?

Mr. Brown: Unemployment was falling when Labour left office. Under the Conservative Government, in every year since 1980 unemployment has been 1 million higher than it was under Labour. The Government have been prepared to live with unemployment at more than 2 million—it is now 2.5 million—as an instrument of economic policy.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) what could be done about unemployment, and what the Chancellor could do next Tuesday if he were prepared to take the action. First, he could release local authority capital receipts and let local authorities build. Secondly, as we have proposed, he could invest in a small business expansion scheme, as existed previously under the present Government and under a Labour Government. That would allow the economy to expand.

Thirdly, the Chancellor could create an environmental task force for the young people in our community so as to engage their energies in dealing with the problems of

the environment. Fourthly, there could be a tax rebate for employers prepared to take on the long-term unemployed. If Conservative Members ask me whether all that would cost money, I tell them that yes, in the first year it would. But it would enable us to deal with the problem and then reduce public spending on unemployment.

Let me tell Conservative Members how that could be paid for. We have already made our proposals. First, there could be a windfall tax on the excess profits of the privatised utilities.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Would the hon. Gentleman be prepared to live with the consequences of such a windfall tax? Imposed on industries that are already regulated, it would inevitably reduce their cost competitiveness, capacity for innovation and, more than anything else, their ability to invest. Is he prepared to live with a return to the sort of customer service that we had from those industries when the Labour party was in power?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should be clear with the House; he is defending the profit levels of the utilities, profits of £45 billion during the—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is trying to make a claim to be an intellectual, and we should give him a chance. I shall give way to him first and then answer his hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Shaw: Does the hon. Gentleman accept the figures that I have from the Library, which show that the sum of £45 billion that he has mentioned represents the total pre-tax profit for all the privatised utilities since they were privatised, and that part of pre-tax profit is paid to the Government in corporation tax and to pension funds in dividends? How many pension funds does he think should be denied dividends? Does he also accept that pre-tax profits are used to fund investment that will help this country?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is factually wrong, and I hope that he will withdraw his comments.

Mr. Shaw: I got the figures from the Library.

Mr. Brown: The question is not whether the hon. Gentleman got the figures from the Library but whether he can understand them. The £45 billion represents profits earned between 1989, the year before the recession started, and now. If the hon. Gentleman wants to correct me on that, I shall happily give way to him again.

The utilities' profits have risen by 50 per cent. during a recession. I can think of no other company in the country that could justify a 50 per cent. increase in profits during a recession in which others are having to cut back. I believe that the Energy Users Council, whose secretary is a former Conservative Member of Parliament, has now put the case for a windfall tax on the privatised utilities.

Government Members will come to recognise that, as the water companies have been afforded tax allowances of £7.5 billion, the British Rail privatisation contains extra tax allowances of £1.5 billion, and the National Grid is about to be demerged from the electricity companies—giving a windfall profit, over and above those about which we are talking, of nearly £4 billion—the case for action on behalf of the consumers of this country is now overwhelming.

The Government are not prepared to act in relation to the privatised utilities or to take the advice of the vice-chairman of the Conservative party in relation to competitive share options, because too many people in the Conservative party benefit from those profits and from those share options.

Let us remember that, on the board of British Gas—we have been talking about the company this week—is the person who privatised British Gas, Lord Walker; on the board of BT is the person who privatised BT, Lord Tebbit; on the board of National Freight is the person who privatised it, the former chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler); and on the board of Cable and Wireless is the person who used to regulate Cable and Wireless, Lord Young.

I believe that people in this country are increasingly disgusted by the fact that the people who are defending excessive salary rises are also the people who want to deny a decent income to pensioners during these winter months. It is time we had a Government which will do something about that.

When there is a consensus in the country about what needs to be done in relation to unemployment, there is also a consensus about what needs to be done in relation to industry—to end short-termism in relation to dividends, to introduce commercial finance into the Post Office, to further public-private partnership with the task force which we have proposed, and to create a university of industry for skills education.

Why does the Queen's Speech not contain one measure to deal with the problems on which consensus now stretches from the trade union movement through to most people in the business community? It does not, because the Cabinet and the Government—our entire political leadership—are paralysed by bitter entrenched factionalism. That is why they cannot act on Europe in a way which is sensible for party policy. The Maples memorandum makes it clear that the key issue is not what is good for Britain, but party unity. The memorandum states that the Conservative party must remain more Euro-sceptic than Labour.

They cannot act on the Post Office because of the bitter entrenched factionalism in the Conservative party. The left vetoes privatisation, and the right vetoes public-private partnership, so nothing is done. The memorandum from the Lord Privy Seal made it clear that the reason private finance for a publicly owned Post Office was rejected was not because it was against the interests of the country or taxpayers, but because it would seriously undermine the Government's whole approach to privatisation. Factionalism is again rampant. Private funds were rejected for the Post Office not because they were unhelpful, but because they would have revealed the limitations of privatisation as a dogma.

What of industry policy as a whole? We know that dividends have been too high for the levels of investment which we need in the economy. We know also that a new industry policy was favoured by the President of the Board of Trade before he came to the Department of

[Mr. Brown]

Trade and Industry, when he advocated an English development agency, research and development incentives, tough monopoly and merger legislation, and a training level for skills. But why is Britain denied an industry policy such as other countries have? Again, bitter entrenched factionalism in the Conservative party has dictated that there should be no industry policy.

The industry budget, as we know, was the subject of an acrimonious dispute between right and left, and between the President and the Secretary of State for Employment, this summer. The President wanted to continue the regional incentive, and the Chief Secretary—as he was then—wanted to get rid of it.

Bitter entrenched factionalism has also paralysed policy on investment and the City. We know now that there will be no full publication of the review on dividends for the City. It will not be published because of what we know now was opposition, not from the right or left of the Conservative party, but from outside this House, from a sponsor of the Conservative party, Lord Hanson. He told the Prime Minister that the proposals were socialist, the Prime Minister dropped them, and the review will now not be published.

The right wing vetoes a competitiveness review from the President of the Board of Trade, Lord Hanson vetoes a dividend review, and nothing is done to deal with the problems we face in relation to industry.

It is factionalism which explains why there is no agreement in the Conservative party and why there is a yawning gap growing between what needs to be done in the interests of the public and what the public are getting from the Government. It explains what is happening about Europe, industry and the economy. That is why, as the Maples memorandum showed, the people find that they have a Government whom they cannot trust and do not believe to be telling the truth.

Nowhere is the betrayal of the Government greater than on taxation. It is not an accident that we are soon to face a Budget just when the Conservative party is trying to tell us that tax cuts are on the way at some point, but when everyone knows that we face seven tax rises over the next few years.

Let us be absolutely clear about VAT. The same Chancellor who has been asked by some Conservative colleagues to abandon the rise in VAT to 17.5 per cent. is the person who wrote a letter to one of his constituents saying:

"I have always thought we exempt too many goods and services from VAT in this country."

Let us also be clear that he is the same Chancellor who said:

"With hindsight it would have been politically advantageous to go to 17.5 per cent. straight away and bring it in this April."

Far from wanting to leave it at 8 per cent. next year, the Chancellor wanted VAT at 17.5 per cent. this year.

If anything shows how out of touch and insensitive the Chancellor and his colleagues at the Treasury are, it is that they are prepared to impose VAT on fuel at 17.5 per cent. At the same time, the Chancellor has made clear his commitment to impose VAT on food, transport, including rail fares, and on children's clothes, if he could get away with it, because that is the principle in which he believes.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Given that the hon. Gentleman now believes that taxation is too high, does he therefore believe that public expenditure is too high or too low?

Mr. Brown: We are wasting huge amounts of public money on paying the bills of unemployment.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Answer the question.

Mr. Brown: I will tell the hon. Gentleman how he could reduce public expenditure—by tackling the long-term problems of unemployment that the Conservative party has failed to do. He could cut out waste in the public sector by taking up some of our proposals concerning tax reliefs on executive share options and private medical insurance.

Today, the Dudley—

Mr. Duncan Smith: How about an answer?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his intervention. I will not tolerate remarks from a sedentary position.

Mr. Duncan Smith: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I asked a clear question in my intervention. You said, quite rightly, that I had had my opportunity. I asked whether public expenditure was too high or too low, but the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) failed to answer my question.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to put his question, and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) responded in the way he wanted. That is not a matter for me. I will not have barracking. I am sick and tired of barracking from both sides of the Chamber.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) interrupted me during my discussion of VAT, but he might have reminded the House that, despite all his right-wing views, his own constituency association put a motion before the Conservative conference urging the Government to abandon VAT on fuel as a matter of urgency.

Today the Dudley by-election has been called. The promises on VAT have been broken; the promises made on national insurance have been broken; the promises on income taxation and on allowances have been broken. A new tax has been introduced on home insurance, and taxation on mortgages will rise despite the Government's promise at the election to "maintain mortgage tax relief." Ministers even promised:

"We will raise the tax threshold for inheritance tax",

but then failed to do that. They are a Government who not only break their promises to the living, but are even prepared to break their promises to the dead.

Taxes will rise because of bills of more than £25 billion a year to pay for unemployment. Those tax increases are a direct and inescapable consequence of economic mismanagement. What does the Chancellor say now? Does he admit that the Government misled people and betrayed their promises? Does he apologise or confess his

mistakes? In words that will haunt the Chancellor throughout the Dudley by-election, he told us that promises did not really matter. He said:

"I am less impressed by out-of-context quotations from stray remarks in speeches in Dudley on a wet Wednesday night during a general election campaign".

His defence is, "Read my lips, but not in Dudley on a wet night".

May I remind the Chancellor what was said in Dudley during the general election campaign? The manifesto of the Tory candidate for Dudley, East said:

"We will get taxes down"—

[Interruption.] The Chancellor seems to think that the Dudley by-election was last year. It is about to happen, and the Chancellor had better face up to the fact that what he said last year will be repeated this year, because it has significance for the Dudley by-election and what people there think about the country.

The manifesto of the Tory candidate for Dudley, East said:

"We will get taxes down further, building on the new 20 per cent. rate . . . Tax is the dirtiest word in the Conservative philosophy, unlike the socialists who are going down the disastrous pathway of higher taxation and national insurance contributions, taking money out of your earnings".

Which party has put up taxation and national insurance contributions? The Conservative party did so, in the biggest tax rise in history. Although promises were made throughout that election campaign in Dudley, the Chancellor says that we need not pay them too much attention, because there are promises, electoral promises and promises made in Dudley.

We know what the Chancellor thinks of the people of Dudley. We shall soon hear what the people of Dudley think of the Chancellor. Let any Minister go to Dudley and outline his plans for the next few years. I assure him that no-one will believe a word he says.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way again. I had to educate the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) to make him something that he is not—an intellectual—after the last intervention, and I do not propose to do it again.

As the Chancellor admits, there is no feel-good factor in Britain today. There is a feel-angry facto, and a feel-betrayed factor caused by broken promises, which the Gracious Address does nothing to answer.

I have a final warning for the Chancellor before his Budget. A fundamental review into social security expenditure is currently taking place. The Chancellor's policies and those of his Government have already undermined sickness pay, maternity pay, invalidity benefit and unemployment benefit. He now seems to be out for industrial injuries benefit, and even help for the disabled and the unemployed. If the Budget does nothing about abuses at the top, continues to impose VAT on fuel and yet cuts into vital services for the sick and disabled, the country—not just people in Dudley—will never forgive the Chancellor.

Allegations of sleaze are but one manifestation of a breakdown in this Government. They are symptoms of a deeper malaise—a breakdown in ethics at the heart of government: the £1,000 questions; the visit to the Ritz; top salary rises that go uncondemned; public funds, according to the Maples memorandum, to be used for party advantage; public servants to be fingered; the media to be suborned; the news to be controlled; and opponents to be shouted down or, if they are public servants in the health service, to be menaced. The Conservative party's desperate scramble for survival is the only thing that unites it.

The Government have long since abandoned the interests of country as a whole, and have retreated into the interests of the party. They have now abandoned even that, and are continually retreating into factionalism and greater division. They can no longer speak for Britain. They must go, and they must go soon.

4.18 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, took the Chair, Madam Speaker made a ruling on a point of order in which she asked the House to have regard to common sense in its proceedings. It was a bold attempt to overturn the tradition of centuries in our proceedings. If we were to follow common sense, it might be an idea not to hold a debate on the economy about a week before a Budget. However, those are the only debates that we ever have on the economy nowadays, because of the choice of the Labour party. Debates on the economy are few and far between. After this week, we shall not see much of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) before this time next year, when he will come back, as he came back a moment ago, with some of the same passages from the speech that he gave at this stage last year.

I remember times past, when the International Monetary Fund ran this country, when Mr. Healey kept having to change his mind, and when we had frequent Budgets and frequent debates. Those days are behind us, but they are behind us because the economic news is steadily getting better, so the Opposition no longer want to debate the economy. They choose a week before the Budget because they believe—

Mr. Gordon Brown *rose*—

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way in a moment.

The Opposition choose a week before the Budget because they know that Budget secrecy restrains Conservative Members, and they speak on the Budget because they have to speak on the Budget. When we ask any questions in between, all is silence.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East used a great deal of his material from what he called "the Maples memorandum"—a survey that was targeted at a section of the population that is not voting for the Conservative party. Bill Clinton's team probably used many similar surveys. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) probably has many such surveys. The difference between the Conservative party and the Labour party—which used to believe in socialism, and used to have an economic policy—is that Labour uses such surveys to try to find out what its ideas should be. However, when, in reply to an intervention, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East told one of my hon. Friends that when the Labour party has debates, it comes

[Mr. Clarke]

to conclusions, we realised all over again that conclusions on economic policy there are none, and there will not be, from the Labour party.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South) *rose—*

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way in a second, if either of the hon. Members persists.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East will produce a shadow Budget. Today he has the Floor of the House of Commons, and he could have produced that shadow Budget. He is not doing so. He will produce it tomorrow; and he will produce it tomorrow because he knows that its hollowness, its emptiness and its list of meaningless slogans would not bear scrutiny in the House.

Earlier, the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East rattled on for a time about some public expenditure by local authorities on capital projects and new environmental schemes for young people. When insistently questioned about how he would pay for it, he made evasive and all-too-familiar noises from the past about, "You would not have to pay for it because we would get unemployment down," without saying how he would ever get unemployment down.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not mention the loopholes that he mentioned last year. Last year, the loopholes were revealed to be taxes on legitimate business that would have damaged business, as Howard Davies said. This year, he has come up with the so-called "windfall tax", which will, apparently, produce millions of pounds for a Labour shadow Budget.

The purpose of the windfall tax is to revisit successful businesses—which have modernised themselves, invested heavily and reduced costs to their consumers in the case of electricity and gas—to obtain a second price for privatisation, at the expense of shareholders, at the expense of investment, and at the expense of the prices that those industries would charge consumers.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has no understanding of a market economy. He dare no longer say that he would renationalise those industries; he produces a windfall tax to return to them for a second tranche of money to finance the Labour party's spending programmes, at the expense of the consumer and of the people who invested in the companies.

Mr. Brown: Now that the Chancellor has ruled out action in relation to excess profits of the privatised utilities—and presumably he is ruling out action in relation to the demerger of the National Grid, where a £3 billion windfall will be made by the electricity companies—will he also tell us whether he unequivocally condemns the 75 per cent. pay rise for the chairman of British Gas?

Mr. Clarke: The National Grid was taken into account when we sold the company. The hon. Gentleman suggests returning for a second tranche on top of the price that the market has already paid for it. The improved efficiency, including the possible next steps for the National Grid, has already produced reductions in prices for consumers. The hon. Gentleman is going back to deceive the country into believing that taxing those companies will somehow do no damage to the falling prices, the improved efficiency and the greater effectiveness of our electricity industry.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Chancellor of the Exchequer for his courtesy in giving way. Will he admit that the precedent for a windfall tax on any type of industry comes from a Tory Government, who introduced a windfall profit tax on banks in 1981?

Mr. Clarke: In 1981 there was a windfall tax because the banks were making profits, not as a result of their actions, but because of the monetary policies of the then Government, which were producing a windfall for the banks. The monetary policies of the then Government produced a hugely successful decade—the 1980s. The Labour party is proposing new and unexpected taxes on successful private companies that are improving the efficiency of our public services. When the Labour party sees success in the private sector, it instantly thinks of taxation. The hon. Lady's example was not a precedent.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham) *rose—*

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose—*

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West) *rose—*

Mr. Gordon Brown *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: As I see only one intellectual rising, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Brown: If the Chancellor condemns new and unexpected taxes, perhaps he should condemn the tax rises for which the Government have been responsible. Will he now answer the question: does he condemn unequivocally the 75 per cent. pay rise for the chairman of British Gas?

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman wants to talk about taxation policy, he should get rid of the rubbish about loopholes and windfall taxes, and answer the simple question about what he would do about taxation to finance the spending commitments that we hear from him every time that he makes a speech. On the salary increase of the chairman of British Gas, I disapprove of large salary increases for executives, in any company, which go far beyond those deemed reasonable for their performance.

The performance of the chief executive of British Gas has been extremely successful, which is why there has not been one gas price increase since 1991. Nevertheless, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, we should look at what can be done to increase shareholders' ability to take responsibility for the pay and rewards of their company's chief executives. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is thunderstruck—I have just suggested where we might look for policy. All he does is to protest. Presumably, he has in mind higher rates of taxation on high earners at every level.

Mr. Brown: The Prime Minister did not say yesterday that he was proposing increased powers for shareholders to deal with that matter—that is a new suggestion today from the Chancellor. Will the Chancellor take up our suggestion to give the regulator the power to intervene

when excessive pay rises cannot be justified? If companies can afford excessive pay rises, they can afford to cut prices.

Mr. Clarke: Every time that he speaks, the hon. Gentleman reveals that he has no understanding of a market economy—even though he purports to be a member of a party that has suddenly undergone a St. Paul-like conversion to market economics in the past two years. The regulator is there to protect the consumer and control prices. The price record of those public utilities is extremely good. The idea that a regulator should regulate the salaries of the management of a private company is a throwback to the old Labour party—as is the proposal to introduce a windfall tax if a company is profitable. If that is Labour's policy—if we at least have an inkling of it—we see that it is not a new policy, but a throwback to the past errors that brought Labour into such terrible difficulties.

Mr. Brown: Does the Chancellor agree that the proposal to give the regulator power to cut prices when there were excessive salary awards came initially from Sir Bryan Carsberg—who was appointed by the Government to be the regulator in the first instance and who has now been appointed to head the Office of Fair Trading? Will the Chancellor answer my question? Will he unequivocally condemn the 75 per cent. pay rise awarded to the chairman of British Gas?

Mr. Clarke: The regulator is responsible for looking at the management, costs and efficiency of the industry and the profitability of its operations. He then has to set what he believes to be price regulations that protect the interests of the consumer. The regulator is not there—no agency should be set up—to start determining, at the behest of the hon. Gentleman, the salaries to be paid at each level of a company. When the Labour party was last in power, it nationalised many companies and was responsible for great trading companies such as British Leyland. It was precisely the sort of interventionism that the hon. Gentleman espouses, whatever fancy new academic theories he tries—unsuccessfully—to find to support it. He is returning to the old interventionism that ruined this country as a manufacturing economy when the Labour party was last in power.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I will give way more later, but I hope that hon. Members will allow me to continue for a while. The persistence of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has held me up somewhat.

The reason why the hon. Gentleman dismisses the background to his shadow Budget and my Budget next week is that good economic news is extremely bad news for him—it was scarcely touched on in his speech. We can usually see that in his face. Like his leader, who has now departed, the hon. Gentleman often smiles, but he cannot be accused of smiling all the time. When unemployment falls, as it is falling, he positively scowls. When inflation goes down, he glowers. Output and productivity increases always bring a large number of frowns to his face. The hon. Gentleman reminds me of Eeyore in "Winnie the Pooh". When there is good economic news, we can rely on the hon. Gentleman for "a loud roaring noise of Sadness and Despair".

Let me remind the hon. Gentleman of the peroration to the speech that he made on the Budget last year—not this half-quoted stuff about Dudley that he came out with again today. On 1 December 1993, he said:

"As a result of this Budget, we are worse off today without the slightest prospect of being a great deal better off as a nation tomorrow . . . It fails even to appreciate that the problems of trade deficits, unemployment and inflation will return again and again as long as the Government do not tackle these basic and fundamental issues . . . We wanted a Budget for employment, and the Government cut the employment budget. We wanted a Budget for industry, and the Government cut the industry budget. We wanted a Budget for investment, and the Government cut public investment in our economy. We wanted a Budget for fairness, and the Government ended up penalising 95 per cent. of the population. This Budget does nothing for fairness, jobs, industry and investment in the way that the country needs."—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1993; Vol. 233, c. 1071.]

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I take the right hon. and learned Gentleman back to his reference to the role of shareholders? Has he ever been to an annual general meeting to try to overturn a decision of a board of directors? Has he noticed that institutional shareholders—in the case of British Gas, probably large pension funds and other major institutions—can prove very difficult to persuade, the more so if one is an individual shareholder? In the light of the Prime Minister's comments yesterday, and of his today, is the Chancellor prepared to write to the institutional shareholders of British Gas and ask them whether they are able or prepared to exert pressure on the board of British Gas in the matter of the chairman's salary?

Mr. Clarke: Such shareholders are increasingly taking action of that kind in some companies. I should not be surprised to find that they are usually more persuasive than the hon. Gentleman would be if he turned up at a public meeting. The hon. Gentleman seems in any case more convinced than his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East that this is an area we should explore.

To return to the hon. Gentleman's speech on last year's Budget: he attacked cuts in public spending and was against controlling public spending. He attacked tax increases, and he forecast continued downward movement for jobs, industry and investment, and a deterioration in the trade deficit. He said that inflation would come back. He of course knows what has happened since then. He knows what my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade would say about that speech last year. I do not know whether Mr. Balls was responsible for drafting that peroration—but let us look at what has happened since the hon. Gentleman's attack.

Already we are the fastest growing of the major economies in Europe. Production is rising, unemployment falling. Exports are at record levels. Inflation is at a 27-year low. All in all, the country faces the most encouraging set of economic prospects for many years. It is a lasting recovery that will raise the living standards and improve the job security of men and women throughout the country, and lasting recovery is what I am going to deliver—and what the policies propounded by the hon. Gentleman could never deliver in a thousand years.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is painting such a rosy picture

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

of the economy, and if it is as buoyant as he says it is, why are those least able to deal with it about to have more VAT on fuel imposed on them?

Mr. Clarke: The people who are least likely to pay VAT are those who have had help with VAT. For a great proportion of those people, the help has exceeded the change in price because of price reductions over the past 12 months.

I am speaking about the recovery, which gives real hope for the future for prosperity and jobs. Each and every necessary policy measure that the Government have put in place to achieve that hope of lasting recovery—whether it is freeing up the labour market, making British business more competitive, better control and targeting of public spending, raising necessary revenue or lowering public borrowing—has been consistently opposed by the opposition parties. Those measures are the cause of the present recovery. I do not think that the public realise just how obstructive in practice the Labour party has been to all our efforts to get the recovery under way and create the present promising circumstances.

Mr. MacShane: The fact that the Chancellor is wearing hush puppies does not make him an intellectual. On the issue of good news, why is inflation 50 per cent. higher here than it is in France, why are unit labour costs lower in Germany, and why did the Engineering Employers Federation say last week that 22,000 manufacturing jobs will go next year to add to the 400,000 that have been lost since 1990? Capital investment will go down by 1 per cent. next year. That is all good news for the City and the gentlemen at the Ritz, but it is bad news for industry and manufacturing.

Mr. Clarke: I do not know about the hon. Gentleman's judgment on footwear, but his international comparisons are bizarre. Unemployment in France is 12.5 per cent., inflation in Germany is higher than it is here, and unemployment here has fallen by more than 400,000. This is the only country in western Europe where unemployment is falling at all. The hon. Gentleman thinks that his selective quotations can obscure the fact that we have put in place the fastest recovery in western Europe and that we have the best prospects of any economy in western Europe. The hon. Gentleman is deceiving himself, and he also deceives himself if he thinks that that performance would be any better under a Labour Government.

I shall now deal with what a Labour Government would do and refer to the key aspects of economic policy upon which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is always in practice quite silent. The first issue is low inflation. The Opposition have argued at every stage over the period during which I have been Chancellor that interest rates should be lower. We have falling unemployment. The Opposition are committed to a social chapter and a minimum wage, and they would destroy jobs. We have falling Government borrowing. Labour's spending pledges run into billions. There were a few billions in the speech by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East today. We have record exports and rising investment, but the interventionism to which the hon. Gentleman is still totally committed would destroy the competitiveness of British business.

Since the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East last gave us his litany, we have ignored all the twaddle and obstruction from the Opposition. As a result and as the hon. Gentleman knows, in preparing for my Budget next week I do not think that I could have imagined a better economic background than that which we have achieved over the past 12 months. The combination of low inflation and sustainable growth has eluded us for years, but the signs are that it is within our grasp, and I am determined not to let it slip away.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I would not like the Chancellor to pass on without looking at some of the real problems facing the economy. The Engineering Employers Federation has shown that investment in manufacturing is down by 24 per cent. in volume since 1990, and that fixed investment in engineering has fallen every quarter since the end of 1989. We are being dragged along in the tailwind of the European recovery in the trade cycle upswing, but there is no fundamental improvement in our ability to compete with the economies of Europe.

Mr. Clarke: Selective years are being chosen, like selective features of foreign countries. Manufacturing investment is going up and the outlook for it is extremely good. The years chosen by the hon. Gentleman left out the investment boom in the late 1980s. None of that can obscure the fact that in the business world, in manufacturing, which is so vital to this country, prospects are now more attractive than they have been for a long time.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will not the Chancellor admit what his own colleagues have pointed out—that investment this year was lower than it was five years ago and that in the first half of this year, as a percentage of GDP, it was the lowest ever recorded? That does not give the impression that there was a confident boom in investment, which was laying the foundations for sustained recovery.

Mr. Clarke: Choosing particular years is easy.

Mr. Bruce: This year.

Mr. Clarke: This year the prospects are improving and are good for investment. Now, as we are talking, investment is rising. We have a healthy recovery led by exports, investment rapidly improving and modest levels of consumer demand.

The hon. Gentleman must look at what is happening now as a result of all our efforts over the past 18 months, which his party and the Labour party have consistently opposed. Of course, I know—it is the one hope of the Labour party—that the man on the Clapham omnibus or the man in the Nottingham video shop does not think that he is enjoying the benefits of growth.

That is true throughout the western world. A joy-free recovery—so far—is not confined to the United Kingdom. A survey last week in the United States showed that 70 per cent. of the population in that country thought that it was still in recession when it has had four years of growth. In Germany, Helmut Kohl won only a narrow victory despite German economic recovery.

People everywhere in the industrial world are still hurt by the recession and find it hard to give credit for economic progress to their Governments. That is because this recovery is combined with low inflation. People in

Britain are not used to low inflation; they are used to the money illusion that made their houses seem more valuable and wages seem to go higher when inflation was high. They later found that it was a illusion.

Although we have a slightly sustained fall in unemployment, job prospects for many people remain uncertain. I realise—we all do—that that is what gives the Labour party hope that it can sow the seeds of fear in people despite our healthy economic position. I have no doubt—and the Labour party knows—that those fears will diminish as the recovery lasts, as it remains strong, as it delivers prosperity and jobs to men and women up and down the country and as we get used to low inflation and a modern jobs market.

As all those things happen, fear will transfer itself to the Labour party as people realise that the sneers and doubts that it is so recklessly expressing now will not cover up the lack of policy when we have achieved economic success.

Mr. Morgan: Could one of the reasons for the muted public reaction to the land of milk and honey recovery that the Chancellor talks about possibly be the strange phenomenon that for every rise of one in the number of people in employment, there is a fall of two in the total number of registered unemployed? Does the Chancellor accept that that has been the case for the past 12 months, and can he cast some light on that rather strange phenomenon?

Mr. Clarke: The labour force survey shows that the number of people in work is growing. It is true that demography has accelerated the fall in unemployment to some extent, but there are more people in employment. Britain has 70 per cent. of those available in work—the second or third highest in western Europe.

Our falling unemployment is on the back of growth—the rise in industrial investment and the strong export performance that I have just described. That is why we shall persist with the course that we are taking. That is why I shall take no risks with inflation, despite the usual views of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East on interest rates. That is why I raised interest rates by half a per cent. at the first rumblings of possible inflation in September.

I shall certainly not be led by irresponsible views on inflation. That is why I shall take no chances with public finances and that is why I took the measures which reduced public sector borrowing and which were opposed by the Labour party. To take chances would put the recovery that we have already put in place very much at risk.

Of course, we must never forget who was in power when high inflation first became a fact of life. New Labour may claim no longer to believe in any of its own policies and principles, but the British people know in their bones that Labour would still be soft on inflation; it would be soft on strikes in support of inflationary pay claims; and it would be soft on public spending. The Government are determined to avoid boom followed by bust. Labour has only ever delivered bust in the past and it would deliver it again.

What of new Labour? Does it have a policy? Let us turn to inflation. There was no hint or mention of it in the hon. Gentleman's speech. Occasionally, the odd hint of Labour's financial policies slips out. There was a hint in a speech that the hon. Gentleman gave a couple of months ago. I see him blush as he does not like to have the speech referred to, as it was the time when Mr. Balls tried to persuade him to give a serious speech on economic policy.

Tucked away among all the references to new academic theories that were actually justifying old-fashioned interventionism is the following bizarre sentence. I apologise to the House for its grammar; Mr. Balls does not appear to have proof-read the press release. Referring to the inflation target, the hon. Gentleman came out with the following profound remark:

> "A nominal objective has clear operational difficulties and which many academics and practitioners is both inflexible and necessarily out of date".

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is relieved that attention was concentrated on other magic moments in his speech as he delivered his insights into where new Labour is going.

Can we at some stage—perhaps after the Budget—have some serious answers from the hon. Gentleman? Is our inflation target too high or too low? Would he keep an inflation target or would he have one at all? Does he or does he not believe in the use of interest rate policy to head off inflationary pressure, or would he abandon that?

It is one thing to set out Labour party policy in terms that were totally incomprehensible to an audience in the National Film Theatre. One day he has to come here and give in English at least one straight question to some of the answers that we have given—*[Laughter.]*—or one straight answer to some of the questions that we have given. It was the mention of Mr. Balls that caused a momentary slip; I hope that nothing more is contagious.

People have to demand answers and then decide how sensible it would be for Labour to claim that it would have got underlying inflation down at all, let alone to 2 per cent., which is what we now enjoy.

Public finances have never been touched on in any serious way by the hon. Gentleman. Obviously, I shall have plenty to say about that next Tuesday in my Budget.

The Labour party is said to be no longer the party of tax and spend, but again there are elementary basic questions which in every speech the hon. Gentleman fails to answer. Is Government borrowing at the moment too high or too low? Should we be spending more or less? Should we be taxing more in total or should we be taxing less? Those are simple questions. No one who claims to take even a passing interest in economic policy should fail to have an opinion on any of those questions, but the Labour party has no answers to any of them, in either English or gobbledegook.

The Leader of the Opposition was quite unable to answer any of those questions. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is quite unable to answer any of them at Budget time this year. It is rather like someone bidding to be captain of the English cricket team when he does not appear to know which end of the bat the batsman is supposed to hold.

We in Government have answered all those questions; we are delivering steady, substantial economic recovery in which the financial and business world have full confidence. We are faced with a collection of sound bite merchants who do not have a idea in their heads.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful for the courtesy of my right hon. and learned Friend. There is a depressing story going around the Lobby that our contribution to the European

[Mr. Marlow]

Community for this year is being revised upwards by a massive £850 million. Could my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House whether it is just an unpleasant rumour or whether there is any truth in it? If there is any truth in it, can he say what the impact is likely to be on his estimate that next week's Bill, if it is passed, will increase our net contribution by yet a further £250 million?

Mr. Clarke: We have today produced a comprehensive document seeking to explain and improve the level of debate on the subject in the House and outside by a comprehensive explanation of our net contributions to the European Community both now and in the future. The total net contribution is notoriously difficult to forecast, but we have given the best forecast we can. We have also produced the trend of expenditure—which no one has ever denied is a rising trend—because, under the arrangements before Edinburgh, it is tied to 1.2 per cent. of our GDP. The GDP growth that we are enjoying now, and even our present modest inflation, keep taking up the cash total.

The figures that I gave for the Edinburgh settlement—£75 million next year rising to £250 million by the end of the century—are incontrovertible. The complex document to which my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) referred makes it completely clear that those are the only consequences from the Edinburgh agreement. To give an example of the scale of that particular additional contribution, it amounts to seven ten thousandths of the entire GDP of the European Union.

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: With the greatest of respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North, no doubt he and I will return to those matters next Monday when there is other business before the House—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Perhaps the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has an insight into such matters. He may have expertise that he would like to give to the House.

Mr. Skinner: The Government may well be in difficulty in respect of the budget increase and we will have to see how events pan out. However, in view of what has happened on the international money markets over the past few days, what are the prospects for a 1 per cent. increase in interest rates before Christmas?

Mr. Clarke: As we wait to see how things pan out, it will be interesting to see how the hon. Member for Bolsover votes because his party—

Mr. Skinner: I have no problem there. I am against the Common Market.

Mr. Clarke: Could there be divisions in the Labour party on that matter? At the moment, the Labour party is waiting for my hon. Friends to tell it whether to vote and, if so, on what amendments. The Labour party may take no part in the debate next Monday. Labour appears to have no serious role to play. Labour will wait and see whether there is anything to vote against. However, if members of the Labour party Front Bench were to vote against the European Communities (Finance) Bill, they would be voting against a proposition that they have consistently supported. Such matters of principle do not concern the Labour Front Bench.

I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Bolsover is a yobbo or an intellectual. He may be a unique combination of both. He might sort out the divisions with his colleagues. With regard to his point about interest rates, I have made it clear that, as he is aware, no Chancellor of the Exchequer speculates about interest rates. I have set out an extremely clear policy. Interest rates will be set according to a judgment of the prospects for inflationary pressures arising in future because if those inflationary pressures were allowed to run away, they would bring our recovery to a halt.

If I were to take advice from the Labour party, I should ignore all that. Interest rates would always be lower. As a result, inflation would rise and we should have to jack up interest rates much higher to regain control. Recovery would then begin to grind to a halt. That is the truth that lies behind the jokes, hollow rhetoric and fraudulent use of economic theories that passes as Labour party economic policy.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor confirm that he has issued an updated forecast of the United Kingdom's contribution since the debate began? Will he confirm that his forecast shows that the Government have underestimated our contribution to the European budget? Will he confirm that the underestimate is, as the figure suggests, £732 million?

Mr. Clarke: The figures that I have produced are the latest estimate. The outturn compared with estimates for years gone by has never been reliable. However, they are the best estimates that we can make and those are estimates compared with the last estimates that we made. I have produced the figures today because I did not want to debate the Bill next Monday and produce the figures on Tuesday at the time of the Budget.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East will be aware that the trend revealed by the figures is the trend that we have always described. It is the trend that he knows follows from our membership of the European Community. It is a trend that he always supported. The addition from the Edinburgh ceiling is the £75 million next year and the £250 million or thereabouts by the end of the century. The Edinburgh decision has precisely the consequences which he has always supported and which no one opposed at the time of the Edinburgh deal.

However unpredictable may be the vote of the hon. Member for Bolsover, I hope that the vote of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East will not change in respect of something that he has always supported.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: We shall debate all those issues next Monday once hon. Members have had an opportunity to see the forecast. As ever, the debate about European finances is breaking out among a collection of hon. Members who seem merely to have picked up one figure from a 12-page booklet and who are anxious to transform that as if it has something to do with next year's bill, which it has not.

We must approach the economy seriously—

Mr. Morgan: With regard to Europe—

Mr. Clarke: No, we shall debate that next Monday.

If the markets seriously believed that I was about to be replaced by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East or by another Labour Chancellor, the pound and bond markets would fall, long-term interest rates would rise and capital would flee the country. The British people would feel the hard practical consequences of those fears if they delivered the economy into the hands of a reckless party without beliefs or policies.

However, the British people will not be fooled at the next election. The thought of economic improvement towards the next election makes Labour Members' blood run a little colder and the hairs prickle on the back of their necks. Without the markets telling them, the public know that their job prospects would be worse under a Labour Government. The public know that from the evidence of their own ears.

Labour does not have a credible policy on taxation, public spending, unemployment or inflation. Labour's minimum wage would destroy thousands of jobs. The social chapter would drive businesses out of the country. Labour claims to be the party of partnership with business, but its regional development agencies and the windfall taxes are not partnership; they are old-fashioned state intervention.

Post-classical neo-socialism is all Labour has on offer. Labour speeches are either sound bites or meaningless econobabble. Sound bites, econobabble and good jokes do not deserve to win the trust of the British people at the next election when it is prosperity and jobs that are at issue. Labour will not win that trust in the face of substantial economic achievements and the steady confidence that is being restored month by month by this Government.

4.56 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I am glad that the shadow Chancellor did not refer to me in respect of the group of intellectuals, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) is aware of the identity of an ambitious young man in my constituency who, when told in the year I was elected, "You've missed the boat, chappie" said, "No, not at all: Molyneaux, with his very limited ability, will be only a short-term caretaker"—that was 24 years ago.

The Queen's Speech commits the Government to

"continue with firm financial policies designed to support continuing economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation."

We on this Bench welcome that pledge to continue a policy which has, for example, produced a drop in unemployment in Northern Ireland of around 5,500 in the past month, thus continuing a welcome downward trend throughout the year which has resulted in the lowest unemployment figure in Northern Ireland since 1990.

That trend is guaranteed throughout the United Kingdom in the wording of the next paragraph of the Queen's Speech:

"Fiscal policy will continue to be set to bring the budget deficit back towards balance over the medium term."

Last year, in his usual forceful way, my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) expressed his and our dislike of public deficits. He looked forward to the time when we could resume repayment of the public debt. My hon. Friend doubted whether a nil deficit could be achieved before the end of the century, but I know that he would be happy—as would the Chancellor—if that objective could be achieved ahead of time.

It is always popular to advocate a reduction in interest rates, but in my view the Chancellor and the Bank of England may have to take the opposite course—particularly in view of last week's growth rate figures, which were the highest for six years.

I venture to tender further advice to the Treasury team. Schedule 2 to the Finance Act 1994 permitted gains on disposals after 30 November 1993 to have roll-over relief on reinvestment, but that provision does not cater for held-over capital gains to qualify for reinvestment relief, particularly in private limited companies. The effect would be that holders of such funds would be encouraged to invest in qualifying companies, and thus make badly needed seed capital available in regions of the United Kingdom such as Northern Ireland—and one can think of other relevant regions in the kingdom.

I wonder whether consideration could be given to making the whole of Northern Ireland an enterprise zone. The existing experiment has not been entirely happy. In the Ulster business and industrial community there has been a tendency for undertakings to move to what is simply the other side of an imaginary chalk line on a street and thus denude adjacent areas. Companies on the wrong side of the chalk line which are excluded from the enterprise zone then find it difficult to compete with companies within it and take themselves to locations outside Belfast where rates and overheads are much lower, taking with them much-needed city jobs.

A total Northern Ireland enterprise zone would create a dynamic economic driven by the private sector, not by Government, and would have an immediate effect on employment, especially in construction.

The Treasury team, I hope, will be glad to hear a no-cost suggestion. It is directed mainly at international business men who have been invited by the Prime Minister to his international investment forum next month. I understand that a great many of them have already accepted. Of course, we hope that investors will be convinced that the high standards of education, the Ulster work ethic and the infrastructure in Northern Ireland combine to make Northern Ireland an ideal place in which to invest and to put down roots.

Perhaps trade is more important than aid. Those who come to our Province for that forum in December might consider a three-year or five-year package whereby Great Britain, United States and European Community companies might each voluntarily agree to place, say, £250,000 a year of new trade with Northern Ireland companies. In the short term, that would be a terrific boost to the Ulster economy. It would be up to the Ulster community, by the wholehearted co-operation of all of us as individuals, groups and public agencies, to persuade those customers to become permanent clients of Northern Ireland companies.

Small and medium-sized enterprises—SMEs—could be dramatically boosted by what in Eurospeak is called "tax environment", without doing violence to the principle of

[Mr. James Molyneaux]

unitary taxation in the United Kingdom. There could be proposals aimed at reducing job losses during the transfer of prosperous SMEs. There is need for the further simplification of administrative procedures for SMEs. We really must improve SME access to European funding. There is much scope for job-creating programmes in sectors such as local services and the environment.

I now refer to what must be the main theme—trade, not aid. In the years to come, we must move in that direction in Northern Ireland. That is the challenge that we must meet.

The December joint declaration empowered the two signatories—the two Prime Ministers—to establish conferences and forums in their respective jurisdictions. Mr. Reynolds has established, within his jurisdiction, a forum for reconciliation, which has already had quite a few sittings. I gather that there might be plans for another session this week in an effort to reconcile those now at variance within the Dublin Parliament. Reconciliation with God and fellow deputies might be a worthy objective.

Within his jurisdiction, our Prime Minister, with the support of the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, is convening the international forum to which I have referred. The Prime Minister has also convened a Downing street conference in January for all 26 council chairmen and chief executives in Northern Ireland to consider how better use could be made of the economic development units which we find in practically all 26 council areas.

Those two initiatives demonstrate the commitment of the Prime Minister and of Northern Ireland Ministers—I am glad that the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) is present—to advancing the work of restoration, of reconstruction and of rewarding what I persistently describe as the greater number of all religions and none who have proved conclusively that democracy will always win. I say "will" win because there is some way to go. The first step, and only the first step, has been taken by various paramilitary organisations.

When parliamentary colleagues ask me what will happen, I point them with some confidence to an assessment by my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) who on 11 July provided me with a paper before my meeting with the Prime Minister. It contained a prediction which has now been validated by events. It states:

> "To keep them happy the hard men will be allowed to infringe any ceasefire after the end of the 3-month period and once talks have commenced, on the pretext of taking 'only that defensive action necessary to protect the Catholic community'. Sinn Fein will of course, while understanding the provocation, regret such occurrences."

The validating events were the murder of the Newry postman and the nauseating excuses of a Mr. Adams who has not yet washed the blood stains off the hands he now holds out to the world as a man of peace. Although we may have to endure further terrorism, the victory of democracy cannot and will not be cancelled out, nor can the surge of constructive determination ever be extinguished.

In the context of this debate I sincerely convey Ulster's gratitude to all Members of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, of all parties, who have sustained us for 25 long years. In return, we shall discharge the debt that we owe you—I think that I am entitled to include the Chair in that—by taking our responsibility to make Ulster a place of which we all can be proud.

5.7 pm

Sir Thomas Arnold (Hazel Grove): It is always a pleasure to follow the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, with whom I have always had very friendly relations ever since I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Northern Ireland Office many years ago.

In the 12 months since the previous Gracious Speech, we have seen a startling increase in transparency in the making of economic policy in this country. I refer, of course, to the decision of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to publish the minutes of his monthly meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England. Nobody should underestimate the importance of that development. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for a future Government to go back on that decision and the consequences of that decision, which will increase as time goes by.

It is not simply that the minutes themselves are published; it is not simply that, the decision to increase or reduce interest rates having been taken by the Chancellor, the timing is then left to the Governor; it is the knowledge and the pressures which arise from that knowledge, in the markets and elsewhere, of the nature of the debate and the discourse between the Chancellor and the Governor which must have a profound effect on market perceptions of what the Government, in the broadest possible sense, intend.

I welcome that transparency, which I consider wholly consistent with the modern world, the political system in which we live and the many decisions taken in recent years with the aim of opening public life to much greater scrutiny. I hope for further progress in the same direction. I also welcome the greater autonomy conferred on the Bank of England; I hope that the majority of hon. Members support that decision, and will continue to do so.

In the context of transparency, may I draw attention to the continuing controversy—I think that that is the right phrase—surrounding the reports, and indeed the activities, of the panel of independent forecasters? I shall not comment on the panel's membership, which is none of my business, but I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will allow it to continue to exist. So far he has indicated that that is his wish, and that he will not be put off by suggestions in the press and elsewhere that the existence of differences of opinion—to put it mildly—between the forecasters is a reason for winding up the panel.

I believe that, on the contrary, the fact that we can have access to the wide range of advice given to the Chancellor is itself a welcome contribution to economic debate. It can only add to understanding of economic policy-making and the options open to policy makers, and to an increase in general knowledge of contemporary economic policy issues. I personally enjoy the existence of such a divergence of views: I think that it makes the panel's reports both lively and—dare I say it, given the somewhat arcane subject matter—extremely entertaining reading. The fact that forecasters disagree with each other is not something to be deprecated, but something to be pondered and, indeed, debated in the House. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will retain the panel and be

patient with the more obvious disagreements; we can then try to pick our way through the arguments and find a sensible way forward.

Economics, after all, is an imperfect art, or science. No one can pretend to absolute knowledge, least of all the Bank of England itself. In the conclusion to its latest inflation report, dated November 1994—a further welcome exposition of the transparency to which I have referred—the Bank states:

"The greatest uncertainty concerns the continuing difference between retail and producer price inflation. It is not clear how far price pressures will be passed down the production and retail chain."

I think it very sensible of the Bank to admit in that important report that the transmission mechanisms are imperfectly understood, and that there are nagging uncertainties. Its approach is far preferable to that adopted in the days when the Governor—or the Governor's eyebrows—supposedly told us everything that we needed to know about economic policy. The admission that all is not known is worth while in itself.

I thank the Governor for arranging for me to visit the Bank of England's Manchester branch on Friday. I have passed the building many times during the past 25 years, but have never set foot in it; I look forward to doing so. The Bank's agent in Manchester, like agents in other large provincial cities, is responsible for finding out what is going on in the local economy, and reporting his findings to the Governor and his colleagues in London. The connection between retail and producer price inflation mentioned in the report—on the basis of surveys, statistics and anecdotal evidence from, in this instance, the north-west—is clearly important, and I look forward to exploring the issues with the Manchester agent.

My experience of the economic recovery leads me to a view that I believe to be shared, in some respects, by the Chancellor, but I want to probe the Government further. I believe that deflationary pressures are still at work in the economy, and that there are few inflationary pressures. Our labour market has undergone huge changes in recent years, partly as a result of the supply-side changes of the 1980s and early 1990s; I do not think that, when we debate economic policy, we always pay enough attention to what is going on in what I would describe as the engine room of the economy—the labour market. There has been a huge structural increase, for instance, in the amount of part-time earnings, especially those of female workers. We should take account of such changes when registering our view of what is happening.

At any given moment, a snapshot of the economy will be imprecise. Members of Parliament must therefore rely on knowledge and experience of local circumstances, as well as what we can glean from the official statistics. My conclusion from observation of life in the north-west is that there is still excess capacity in the economy. I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) say near the beginning of his speech—at least, I thought I heard him say it—that he thought we were running up against capacity constraints. I find that very odd; how can the hon. Gentleman berate the Government for not lowering unemployment fast enough, pointing out that regrettably 2.5 million are still unemployed, and in the next breath say that we are running up against capacity constraints? It does not add up.

As I have said, I believe that there is still excess capacity in the economy, and the Chancellor admitted as much during his last Question Time. I should like to hear this evening whether that is still the Government's view. If there is still excess capacity, we should not be panicked into altering interest rates by a neurotic obsession with one day's events. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his cautious handling of monetary policy, which I consider admirable; I sincerely hope that he will maintain his stance, taking account of the mixed signals that he is receiving but recognising that we are living in a generally deflationary world. He should resist any knee-jerk temptation to raise interest rates simply because he receives a signal from the markets on a particular day suggesting that such a move is called for.

We should also take account of the huge increase in productivity, and the huge change in the inner workings of the labour market. The deflationary pressures at work in the economy are reinforced by further deflationary pressures from overseas. Our country, together with the other OECD countries, is now under severe new pressures from the emerging markets, particularly—although not exclusively—in Asia. Low-cost producers in those countries can exert on our manufacturers competitive pressures that we have not experienced hitherto. We are moving into a new world, and it is most unlikely that those pressures will go away: that is why the supply side changes of recent years are so important, and why it is also important not only to recognise the existence of greater flexibility in the British economy, but to welcome it.

Our economy has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to changing circumstances in the past few years. We should not be ashamed of that, or defensive about it; we should realise that the pressures from the far east and elsewhere with which we are now having to cope are likely to be with us for a long time.

I would welcome an expression from the Minister today of whether, broadly speaking, the Treasury supports my analysis of what I have referred to as the deflationary pressures which are still at work on our economy, and whether it believes that the inflationary pressures referred to in the financial press and elsewhere may have been exaggerated.

The Bank of England inflation report is optimistic on inflation. The current prospects for inflation are better than we have seen for many years—low inflation, a situation in which we can continue to look forward to a steady recovery of a non-inflationary kind and the firm financial policies to which the Gracious Speech refers are, I believe, the best possible bases for sustaining our recovery up to the next general election.

5.20 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I was interested to hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer's insistence that he was extremely prudent and very cautious, and would do nothing whatever, regardless of the political fate of the Conservative party, that might be considered risky in advance of the election. But no hon. Member believes a word of it. We all recognise what the Government's agenda is.

There is no doubt at all that at the moment we are enjoying a recovery which is welcome, even if it is somewhat shallow. But I find it a little strange to hear Ministers, and the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

Arnold), speaking about the need for low inflation and sustained growth as if they had just come to power and were sorting out the mess of the previous 15 years. It is because they have failed to deliver on their economic policies for the past 15 years that the country is fundamentally fed up with them.

In 1979, we were told that all that wθas needed was to cut public spending, cut taxes and deregulate, and that that would create an engine for growth which would make the British economy the most competitive in Europe. But if one takes the main long-term indicators, all the problems that the Government analysed in 1979 are fundamentally still there. Perhaps the one change, a cultural one, has been within the reforms in the trade union movement, which are now generally welcomed on all sides.

In an exchange with me, the Chancellor said that the level of investment was rising, but it is rising from the lowest level of investment as a percentage of GDP in our entire history. If it is not rising now, for heaven's sake, when will it ever rise? But it does not strike the right chord when the Chancellor says that there is underlying long-term sustained confidence.

Inflation is low, and that is welcome. We do at least have a semi-independent Bank of England, which can pursue policies to try to keep inflation under control. But there is some disagreement even about the inflation target. There is a target range and a target within a target, for which the Bank of England seems to have chosen a figure slightly different from that chosen by the Government. That does not at this moment make for a particularly tidy working arrangement.

In reality, it is too early to say that we have the foundations of long-term low inflation. One of the consequences of that low inflation—it is an incidental one, and I am not sure that there is anything that the Government can do about it—is that many people, particularly business people, are rooted in a finance structure based on the security of property which has fallen sharply in value and which has little prospect of recovering its value in the short term.

That should be used as a cultural opportunity for rethinking how we secure investment and finance in Britain in future, and perhaps, as suggested to me by some German industrialists last week, persuade people in Britain that it is a good idea to invest in business, and that perhaps that should sometimes put priority on investing in bricks and mortar. There is scope for much cultural rethinking in Britain which is long overdue, the impetus for which does not appear to be coming from inside the Government.

There are, as the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and my hon. Friends says, a number of serious omissions from the Government's economic strategy. There is no strategy for promoting sustained long-term investment, and investment is too low. It is our contention, and has been now for a considerable time, that the most important single investment needed in Britain is in our people—in education and training. That is the one thing that can lay the foundations for competitiveness. Our relative performance on education and training is well behind that of all our major competitors.

There is also scope for doing something to narrow the gap between rich and poor, which has become so much wider under the Government. Because they have failed to create the climate for the growth they promised, they have had to raid one section of the community in order to finance their election promises to another section. The division between rich and poor has been increased, without any fundamental increase in the welfare of the community as a whole. We need some radical changes in those areas.

Britain needs political changes that can remove us from the kind of spat we saw tonight, when there is simply a scoring of party political points about what should be Britain's national interests. *[Interruption.]* It is interesting that that should cause ripples of mirth on both sides of the House. But when one speaks to leading players in the economies of other countries, one finds, despite political differences, an underlying commitment to what constitutes the real well-being of the economy. It is a sad admission that such a constructive consensus cannot be found here. Rather, it has been positively attacked during the past 15 years.

There is room for changing the structure of the Bank of England. We propose that it should become a United Kingdom reserve bank, drawing its policy makers from a much wider base than now. It should be given operational independence and a clear, coherent, simple range of inflation targets, set by the Government but pursued independently in an operational sense by the reserve bank.

It is also important to point out that the situation in our balance of payments is not quite as good as it appears. First, it is still in deficit, so that is not too healthy. But if one takes out the £2 billion extra oil surplus we enjoyed in the first half of this year, and the overseas net property income, one sees a deterioration in our non-oil balance of trade.

It may be reasonable to say that we have sold that oil and it has created revenue, but it has always been accepted that that is a special factor, and the reality is that we are pumping oil out of the North sea faster than we ever did before in order to try to maintain an economy which is not making enough of other things of real added value—it is, after all, only a raw material—and that will lay the foundations of long-term competitiveness.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, perhaps unbeknown to the Chancellor, said, in reply to a question on 27 October:

> "Total business investment is up by more than 30 per cent. since 1979, totalling about £60 billion in the past year, of which investment in manufacturing is currently running at £11 billion a year compared to £13.6 billion in 1979."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1994; Vol. 248 , c. 999-1000.]

There has been a clear, continuing decline. I do not want to enter into the argument about whether we need goods or services. We need both, but our manufacturing sector is not performing well enough to deal with our balance of payments problem or our long-term competitiveness. Added value requires goods that can be traded round the world.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) referred—I was unsuccessful in intervening—to windfall taxes. The first interesting point was that, at the end of that exchange, there seemed to be agreement on both sides that there could be something called a windfall profit.

Windfall taxes were originated by the Conservatives, who now find themselves being beaten by a Labour shadow Chancellor—

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: Let me finish my point first.

It was argued in 1981 that the banks had made excessive profits because of the prevailing rate of interest rather than any performance of their own. I do not notice Chancellors intervening when excessive losses are made because of changes in circumstances and offering to reinstate windfall profits.

But the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is saying that, because the privatised utilities have a privileged position in the market, because they have a monopoly, they should be taxed on their excess profits. He is right to identify that something should be done about those profits, but I do not agree with his solution. If there is agreement on both sides that excess profits have been made, the question that then arises is, from whom? The answer is that they have been made from the consumers, and the money should go back to them. They should be returned to those from whom they were made.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman is talking about windfall profits and tax thereon. Has he calculated the excise duty that might be raised on the legalisation and sale of cannabis, which I understand to be Liberal Democrat policy? Is that how the hon. Gentleman would fund his excessive spending plans?

Mr. Bruce: I shall not waste time talking about the costings of a hypothetical situation that does not accord with my party's policy.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: I shall not give way on a point relating to the intervention of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter).

If the Government recognise that there are such things as windfall profits because privatised utilities are not operating in a genuinely competitive market, surely such profits should be returned to the people who enabled them to be made—the consumers—and genuine competition should be introduced into the market, so that the regulator is not left as the last resort to intervene to ensure that that happens.

Ms Armstrong: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is precisely because the Labour party considered to whom the profits should be returned that it proposed a windfall tax? The taxpayer provided and built capital for the industries to which the Government extended excessive capital tax allowances on privatisation. We believe that the taxpayer was done out of a great deal of important money because of the manner in which the Government privatised industries in the first place.

Mr. Bruce: As someone who instituted a debate on the money resolution on the Bill that led to the privatisation of the electricity industry, which the Labour party was willing to allow to go through on the nod, I do not need lectures from the hon. Lady on the circumstances in which privatisation took place.

My argument is that, fundamentally, the profits that are now being generated are at the expense of gas and electricity consumers. They are the people who should benefit from the windfall. I hear nothing from the Government on electricity, or from the Labour party on gas and electricity, about making the markets genuinely competitive. That concerns me.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): The hon. Gentleman makes a fair debating point, but perhaps it is also fair to ask him to explain exactly what he means. Is he supporting the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Mrs. Armstrong) and the Labour party generally? If he says that windfall profits should be taken back and redistributed to the consumers, is he supporting the case for a windfall tax—yes or no? If he is not, is he suggesting a price mechanism or another structure for redistribution?

Mr. Bruce: That is a helpful intervention. Liberal Democrats are not supporting a windfall profits tax, for the reason that I have put before the House. If one believes in a market economy, that sits rather uncomfortably with picking and choosing the industries that are thought to be making excess profits and imposing excess taxes upon them. My party suggests that the moneys should be returned to the consumers. The regulator mechanism was set up by the Government, and it could be amended by the Government to ensure that rebates were given to those who generated excess profits initially.

I move on to the competitiveness, or lack of it, of the United Kingdom internal economy. The issue arises from the Government's privatisation programme. It is interesting that the deputy chairman of the Conservative party, Mr. John Maples, suggested that the programme had been a dismal failure in terms of popularity. It appears that it has not struck a deep chord with the people, and that it is not one of the things they want.

Large corporations that were in the public sector have been transferred to the private sector without the corresponding development of a genuine free market mechanism. That must be recognised and understood if the privatisation process is to be completed in a manner that will give people confidence. That will mean that the chairmen of the industries involved will not secure massive increases in their salaries.

They are doing so at present because their industries are not operating in a genuinely competitive environment. At present, it is too easy for them to make the sort of profits that keep shareholders happy without displaying the same degree of enterprise that would be necessary if they were operating in a freer, open and more competitive market.

The Government seem to have no drive in resisting takeovers or in examining concentrations of economic power within the market place. The past six references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission have emerged from that body without further action being taken. Those involved are beginning to wonder whether the MMC is prepared to operate in a way that will ensure that people who are trying to consolidate their position within the marketplace will be faced with a genuine analysis of whether what they are doing is anti-competitive.

The consequence of the build-up of competition is a greater distortion between large and small businesses within the domestic market. The performance of the small

[Mr. Bruce]

business sector needs to be dramatically improved if the overall performance of the economy is to improve. Small business formation has increased, but the survival rate has deteriorated. There is not much purpose in founding small businesses if they do not live to be successful, profitable and established.

Several actions need to be considered to ensure that we have a much more vigorous and successful small business economy. Small businesses constantly complain of their inability to gain access to competitive finance on the same basis as many of their larger customers, on which they depend for their business.

A small company business man came to see me recently—this is a simple anecdote—who is in the plant hire sector. He told me that he had had his best business year for five years but had laid off three of his five employees because he could not afford to pay their wages. That was because his customers were taking three or four months to pay him. He was aggrieved because his customers, almost without exception, were receiving money from their creditors on cheaper terms and with less security than he was forced to offer to extend his overdraft even to fund his basic working capital. That is something that should not be allowed to continue.

My party would support measures to deal with late payment, along with legislative enforcement. It would like to see the creation of regional investment banks from which business men could gain access to finance on competitive terms, as well as advice on how to manage their businesses and training to enable them to run businesses successfully.

There are many people with skills who do not necessarily have particular skills to run a business in a way that ensures that it does not fall into financial difficulties. They must be made aware of how to meet their commercial and legal obligations. Other countries provide this training rather better than we in the United Kingdom and, as a consequence, have a much more successful business environment.

I ask the House to accept that the Government cannot rely on statistics that relate to the past 12 or 18 months as a justification for the failure of the past 15 years. They do not amount to evidence that we have finally achieved a fundamental turnround in the performance of the British economy. If that were the position, investment would presumably be at a record high, not a record low. We would then see a situation in which the country was beginning to lay down the foundations of economic wealth, which would enable us to achieve what I believe would command support from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House—lower taxes while maintaining funding to the public services.

As long as the Government fail to deliver the economic cake, the stronger is the case that it is time for them to go. The answer is not to raid one part of the cake to provide for their supporters. They, and their supporters, have found that that is not a sustainable strategy. It has not carried the Government through even the first half of a Parliament, and it will not be accepted that it is the foundation for the next general election.

5.38 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): We all listened with great interest and understanding to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneux) when he turned to the section of the Gracious Speech that relates to Northern Ireland. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has acted with great skill in his handling of the matter. He has been absolutely right in his timing when dealing with the various proposals that have been made. He has displayed caution, and that is surely essential in such a situation.

So we watch the process with great interest and hopefulness. At the same time, we all realise—at least I hope we do, and I am sure the Prime Minister does—that a very difficult situation could arise as the talks progress. That would happen when they reach the question of the unification of north and south. We have had to face that problem before, as we did in 1973, and it is inescapable that those at the conference will have to face it again.

When it appears that unification is not possible, what will be the reaction of those who have been the cause of so much strife and distress in Ireland over the past 25 years? That is the crucial question. I do not doubt the capability of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) to handle that and to handle his party, but I hope that the British Government recognise the immense dangers that could beset us when we reach that point.

If the hard core of the IRA decide that they have been holding their fire to see whether their aim can be achieved and they see that it is not being achieved, what will their reaction be? We have to be prepared for that, and I hope that the Government, especially the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Northern Ireland, are taking all possible precautions. That is why I believe that the Government must act with skill as well as with caution.

On the economy, I congratulate the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the course that he is following. He too is displaying great skill as well as steadiness. The Queen's Speech as a whole shows that the Prime Minister and the Government want a period of stability rather than constant change; they have learnt the rather painful lesson of recent events in our country.

The Chancellor has been successfully following that policy, and has stood out against the various proposals put to him. In particular, he has stood out against giving undertakings to reduce taxation. In that he is absolutely right. I have said before that no Chancellor of the Exchequer should ever give undertakings about raising or decreasing taxation, any more than he should give undertakings about increasing or decreasing interest rates.

I found the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir Thomas Arnold) fascinating. I agreed with a great deal of it, but where I disagree, of course, is on the public examination of such matters with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was landed with that; he did not choose it himself. To have the committee discussing its views with him and advising him, and then telling the press exactly what its views are and what it has advised, is most undesirable. Those people have plenty of ways of advancing their views and taking part in discussions, without their being given the official sanction that they now have.

I believe that having those people around weakens the Chancellor's position. The same applies to the publication of the minutes of the meetings between the Governor of

the Bank of England and the Chancellor. That will lead in time to speculation about who will win the battle. If there is a battle of various schools over interest rates, people will ask whether the Chancellor or the Governor will win. That too increases speculation, and that is undesirable.

If, as has been suggested, we had an independent Bank of England as a regional part of a European bank, that would be different. None the less, an independent bank would not call in the press all the time and say, "These are our views," any more than the Federal Reserve Board in Washington or other independent banks do. The Bundesbank does not call in the press in and say, "We have been thinking about this or that"—not for a moment. However interesting such things may be to the specialists, they should be kept inside. The Chancellor should be allowed to reach his own conclusion, and people can criticise him afterwards.

I do not believe that the Chancellor should accept views put to him in that way, especially on the level of taxation. He is under great pressure from some of his hon. Friends to say that he will reduce taxation, and he is wisely resisting those pressures. I hope that he will continue to do so. Similarly, today he was pressed to say what he intended to do about interest rates, but rightly he resisted. The action that he has taken so far on interest rates has been strong and he has stood by it, as I hope he will continue to do.

That is especially important now because of the indecision—I almost said "tumult", but let us reduce that to "indecision"—in the United States. A new situation has arisen there with total Republican control of Congress. What will the Republicans' attitude be to internal affairs—interest rates, inflation and so on? What will they press the Fed to do? I believe that they may be rather more in tune with it than the Democratic Congress was. All that will affect the rest of the world, including us, and the Chancellor will have to take that into account in making his decisions. I am sure that he will do so.

The Chancellor rightly said that he could not deal with questions about the Budget today, and I do not want to try to give him lectures on that subject.

One thing that has always worried me is the Child Support Agency. In our constituencies, we all hear about the agency constantly. Many people arrived at my advice bureau last week with problems relating to it. The Government have said that they will review it and try to remove the impediments, but meanwhile the agency is causing agony to many people, and we know that its effects have included some suicides. There is a feeling of great unfairness.

According to the figures produced by the Child Support Agency for 1992 to 1994, £418 million saved in benefits has gone straight to the Treasury, and only £15 million has gone to help in any way those affected. That is an extraordinary relationship. I do not think that, when we passed the legislation, we realised that, with almost 90 per cent., if not more, of the money raised, it was a question of putting funds into the Treasury. I admit that I did not know that. The matter needs a fresh look and speedy action.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend not accept that it is the parents who should be looking after their children, not the parents of other children, who have their own responsibilities? The money has to come from taxpayers who are themselves parents, so the position seems to me perfectly fair.

Sir Edward Heath: I do not think that the way in which things have been done is fair. For example, I take great exception to the fact that parents who have settled their affairs in a court of law, have been told to pay a fixed sum and have carried out their obligations right from the beginning now find themselves suddenly landed with paying a very large sum.

I heard of a case last week in which the father had been notified of the amount that he had to pay. The agency said that it wanted an answer from him within a fortnight, and he sent his reply back immediately, in March. Although the agency promised to reply, it did not do so until October. It told him what he had to pay and then, a week later, he received a letter saying, "This is what you owe in arrears since we first wrote to you in March." That is intolerable, and I do not understand why the Government cannot deal with it, and at least stop such things happening. I cannot accept that that aspect of the agency's work is fair.

I was most interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove said about the conditions of the market and the situation that has arisen concerning the head of British Gas. I say openly that I condemn the chief executive, for a number of reasons. I once had to use the phrase

"the unacceptable face of capitalism"—

or at least, I did not have to use it, but I did. It is one of the two quotations from me in "The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations".

To me, what is now happening is the unacceptable face of post-privatisation. I condemn it because it shows that the chief executive has no understanding of the relations between his corporation and the public. He did not understand the reaction that it was going to produce in our fellow citizens, the press or elsewhere. First, he said that he was going to go ahead with it, but I have seen reports that he is now going to give it back, or to somebody or other. That shows a rather delayed recognition that he was in the wrong.

The other reason why I condemn it is that it does great harm to private enterprise as a whole. Those who want to cause harm to private enterprise are given an immediate weapon which they can use, and he ought also to have recognised that at the time.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Does my right hon. Friend not accept that he himself has just used that weapon against the chairman and chief executive of British Gas who, far from taking a 75 per cent. rise—as we have read in the papers—have recognised that, in a monopolistic company, there is no particular link between risk and reward for chief executives and that, in a spirit of openness, they have done away with lots of perks which they previously had and rolled them up into one open cash package, and have therefore pioneered openness in the way in which these salaries are set? Has not my right hon. Friend fallen for the mass of propaganda against what is the fair treatment of a chief executive?

Sir Edward Heath: I do not accept that, and the chief executive ought to have realised what was happening at the time.

[Sir Edward Heath]

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) mentioned that gas is not in a free market economy and that it is not up against all of the competition. We all know perfectly well that people who have gas supplies cannot afford to start switching over to other supplies of energy. In fact, British Gas is very largely a monopoly organisation and we must take that into account, as must the regulator.

The other question which has been raised is labour in the economy. The Chancellor has rightly emphasised—I think he has used the phrase "a modern workhouse"—that the modern situation for the labour market is quite different from what it was. The question is, what should be done about it?

One sees that people who were formerly in established positions, and who accepted them as such when they started their careers, are now entirely insecure. In my constituency, bank managers who thought that they were there for life and who are very skilled have been sacked at the age of 48. How do they make a fresh future in the labour market? That is a practical question, and it can only be answered by a Government, and a Department of Employment, who are prepared to think it through and organise solutions.

The solutions will not come from private enterprise. It is not in their interests to do so, and, in any case, they will say that they cannot afford the training which is necessary if we are to expand industry as we want. I hope that the Chancellor will succeed in persuading Government organisations to analyse the change, and see how it can be dealt with satisfactorily.

It is said that anybody leaving university in the United States can reckon on having three careers, and at each stage he is trained for the next one. There may be a considerable amount of truth in that. We cannot do anything of that sort—we hardly have any provision for it—but we ought to be thinking in those terms in the long term.

In saying that, I ask myself what the television viewer is thinking about the debate this afternoon. He could not really find anything about the debate to satisfy him. We sit in the Chamber, and we jump up constantly. Nobody on the Front Bench can any longer deliver a speech, as there are an enormous number of interventions. Hon. Members who intervene are not trying to find a solution, but are trying to find some way of knocking the other chap down.

The most distressing thing about the present situation is the loss of confidence of our citizens in this Parliament as an organisation and as a system, and the only people who can put that right are ourselves. I hope, therefore, that we can perhaps give some thought to the way in which we behave in the Chamber. People want to know what ideas we have, and not hear us constantly throwing back what happened in 1938 or 1949 to try to make capital out of the other side.

We have had the publication of Mr. Maples's manifesto. I do not want to say too much about it, as I no longer get mixed up in party affairs. *[Laughter.]* I have great admiration for those who are now responsible. The only thing I would say is that I do not understand how a deputy chairman can be appointed who is such a simpleton as to think that he could put all his views on paper and nobody else would ever see them. He must be an absolute simpleton.

We live in an age of leaks. The press used to complain to me that the trouble with my Government was that nobody ever leaked, and that they could not get stories. I was told that we had to change it. We did not, but now everything leaks, and Mr. Maples's views have all come out. He stresses in his analysis that people everywhere are suffering fear—fear of unemployment coming to them, fear of their health going when they get old, and fear about housing and whether they will be able to complete their mortgage and if they will be thrown out. If they are thrown out, where will they go? All aspects are governed by fear.

In support of Mr. Maples—and he needs support—I would say that I hope we take notice of his analysis. The views of the party's former supporters up and down the country were taken. Let us take notice of them, face up to them and say what we will do about each aspect of that spread of fear. That fear cannot be countered by contrary debate in the House, which will not give the citizen any release from his fears. He will go to sleep tonight, if he can sleep, with exactly the same fears he had before we began the debate.

When it comes to Mr. Maples's solutions, I repudiate them absolutely. I am disgusted with some of his proposals for inter-party warfare, yobbos and trying to trick people into positions. Those views are completely unjustifiable. I hope that the Prime Minister and the chairman of the party will repudiate all that as quickly as possible.

The fact that those views have been put on paper is already doing us immense harm in the country. I know that my supporters—such as I have—are disgusted by the idea of how we should play the party game. It has never been our case before, and I hope that it will not be in the future. It will be a big task to deal with the removal of fear, and whatever party is in power must tackle it.

My final object in this speech is to connect the economy briefly with other aspects of the Queen's Speech—defence and foreign policy. I believe, that at the moment, there is a big gap between the departmental approach and Government thinking. In a speech last night, the Chief Secretary said that we must emphasise a worldwide approach. We can no longer carry on a worldwide approach. We do not have the economy to do that. We cannot compete with other organisations which have a worldwide approach, and not many organisations have that approach. Unless we are in the European Union, and playing a full part in it, nobody will take any notice of our worldwide approach anyhow.

We must look today at the situation in the former Yugoslavia. Are we gradually being dragged further into an active war? If so, what are the justifications for that? One may say that NATO is involved, but organisations which are there for a purpose always feel that they should be carrying out that purpose. That is not what we want from NATO, and the situation must now be watched carefully. How much further are we to be dragged into this conflict?

On defence, we must have a much clearer idea, through Europe and NATO, as to our defence purpose in this new world. In defence terms, this is not the old world of the two super-powers and the nuclear threat—perhaps by

carelessness that threat is still there—but a new world. We cannot think that we can run the Pacific and the Atlantic, dab in Africa whenever we feel like it, and maintain our position in Europe. That is completely unrealistic. It is sad that it has taken our country longer than any other since the second world war to recognise that change in the power structure of world affairs. We must recognise it.

That change has its impact on the economy because of the cost of defence. If one tries to do everything all the time, the costs are tremendous. I hope that the Chancellor will face up to that when dealing with those who want us to have a worldwide defence role to show how important we are.

We must not forget the trade implications of foreign policy. We must make some radical changes, because we are losing out. We can say that our exports are going up, but if the Chancellor's predecessor had accepted the advice to go into the European exchange rate mechanism in 1985, when the rates of exchange for the mark and the dollar were almost exactly what they are today, we would not have had so many of the problems that we have encountered in the past 10 years. He was, however, overruled by the Prime Minister of the day—a ghastly and expensive mistake.

We can say that our exports are going up: well and good, but in comparison with what is happening in other countries, that rate of growth is small. It is not enough for us to maintain our position. If one looks at the rest of the world, we are dabbling in foreign policy at the expense of our trade and our economy. That must stop.

Let us consider the People's Republic of China, with which our relations are the lowest they have been since 1972, when I established full diplomatic relations. That country is flourishing and is expanding at the rate of 12.5 per cent. every year. It is attracting enormous investment. The Chinese will not accept any technological investment unless it represents the latest technology. Last year, I opened a plant in China for one of our biggest firms. The chairman took me to one side and told me that that plant was far more up to date than our own at home.

We must recognise what is going on there, but, alas, too few of our people do. Japan, the United States, Germany and France therefore conduct far more trade with China than we do, but we were the first in. Our trade with China is almost insignificant. People may argue that that trade is increasing, but it is increasing from such a low level that it will never reach anywhere near comparison with the trade conducted by those other countries.

What about more controversial trade, such as that with Iran? People may say that Salman Rushdie had the right to write a book, but I do not believe that it is necessary for us to damage our trade and our relations with Iran because the Iranians took offence at a religious book. They are entitled to take offence, and their religious people can do so.

It is a complicated issue, so I will not go into at the moment, but there is no point in just saying that we should do nothing, because we could do valuable trade with Iran. The trade that is done now is nothing like what we could get. The same argument applies to Libya. Two suspects live there, but no one can be absolutely sure that they are guilty, yet we have no relations with that country.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): This is a modest intervention, as is the intention behind it. I find the characterisation of the situation in which a British author, a British citizen, finds himself a very unhappy one. I accept that much, if that is what my right hon. Friend is saying, but it is intolerable that, as a result of a fatwah, a United Kingdom citizen is under threat of death. We expect the instruments of our Government to defend our citizens in such circumstances.

Sir Edward Heath: That means that he gets the protection that the Prime Minister and others get. He can be protected—

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely.

Sir Edward Heath: But that does not mean that we must stop our trade. That is my point—we go too far in such matters. In any case, Salman Rushdie has the answer; he could give an apology quite simply, and say that he did not mean to insult the Muslim faith. That would have settled matters, but he did not offer that apology. Now we have a situation in which the death decree was laid down by the head of the religion; he is the only person who can remove it, and he is dead. That must test the ingenuity of the Foreign Office a little.

Apart from Libya, we also have the continuing problem of Iraq. Iraq is now complying with United Nations resolutions in turn and that compliance should be recognised, just as it has been recognised in Serbia. If people start to accept UN resolutions and that is confirmed by a UN organisation, we too should accept that and say, "Okay, you are moving on the right path."

The obvious cause of the problem with Iraq is that the Americans can never forgive themselves for not having got rid of Saddam Hussein. They had no authority from the UN to do so—no one had—but that failure governs American policy all the time. It shows a complete misunderstanding of the problem, because the more Iraq is attacked, the more Iraqis will support Saddam Hussein.

We are in the position to learn the lesson of Nasser and Egypt. We were determined to get rid of him, but we failed, and he remained in power for another 18 years. Look at the damage he did to us. Everyone else went in and took all the trade and the business. We should learn from such events.

We should continue to get the Iraqi resolutions carried and show the Iraqis that, when they accept them, things will change, particularly for the people of Iraq. I feel for them most strongly, because millions in that country are suffering enormously. The children are not getting properly fed, and the hospitals do not have the medicines to deal with sick people.

People may argue that that is their fault, because they should get rid of Saddam Hussein, but that is completely unrealistic. How can they get rid of him? They cannot say that they will have a general election in six weeks' time and vote for another person. They cannot possibly do anything like that. The more that Saddam Hussein is attacked, the more the people will dig in and support him. We should think about the people of Iraq.

[Sir Edward Heath]

I have always supported sanctions, right from the days of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. One must look carefully at the whole business of trying to bring about results through sanctions, without any regard for the impact on people of the country, and consider whether that policy reinforces that attitude or not. We should take a good look at our policy.

I hope that the Foreign Office will take an entirely fresh look at the world from the point of view of how we support trade and investment for our industry and all the facilities that industry requires. The petty carping about the amounts spent by embassies on entertaining should stop. In 30 years' connection with the foreign service, I have never yet met an ambassador who wanted to entertain for the sake of it. All ambassadors entertain to support some national cause; the last thing they want to do is indulge in private entertaining for its own sake. They are only too glad to get a night off. Such carping does us no good, and does infinite harm among people who understand such things. We must support that Foreign Office policy.

We will be able to discuss Europe on Monday. We have already had a typical outburst tonight in which an attempt was immediately made to falsify the figures. The Chancellor has already cleared up the amount that goes to Europe.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: No, I am sorry.

Mr. Marlow: What was the falsification?

Sir Edward Heath: My hon. Friend can read *Hansard* tomorrow.

We are hypocritical, and that is what infuriates our fellow members of the union. We damn extravagance and waste, but those partners then read the British press and see that the Government put £40 million into a private hospital which has gone bankrupt, so the £40 million has been lost.

Mr. Gallie: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: No, I am sorry. We can discuss the European Union on Monday, and after that we can discuss the Budget.

I conclude by congratulating the Chancellor. He has been very steady. I hope that he will remain firm, because that is how he will best produce the results for us.

6.9 pm

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): I am pleased to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to make a brief contribution to this afternoon's debate on the Gracious Speech.

I am also pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). During the miners strikes of 1972 and 1974, which we fought bitterly, I never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would face the right hon. Gentleman across this Chamber. The battles of 1972 and 1974 were fought honourably and the miners gained tremendous benefits, one of which was a free pit helmet and free pit boots for the first time in our lives. I shall discuss that later when I deal with my local economy.

Much has been said this afternoon about the global, European and national economies, but to the people whom I represent the most important is the economy in the district of Easington. Since 1979, we have lost about 15,000 jobs and 10 collieries have closed. We have seen the demise of the coal mines and of the Peterlee and Easington coal mines development corporation, the only development agency in the area with direct access to central Government funds to build and manage huge industrial estates. It succeeded in attracting some 9,000 jobs into the area. Unfortunately, the Government, in their so-called wisdom, decided to abolish the corporation six years ago.

In the past 18 months, Ministers have proposed the establishment of 235 acres of enterprise zone within Easington district. During that period, we have seen the closure of collieries at Easington, Dawdon, Vane Tempest, Seaham, Murton and South Hetton, but no decision has been made about the enterprise zone. I appeal to the Minister to make a determination immediately. Our superb east Durham task force, the county council, the district council and East Durham development agency have fine teams of men committed to regenerating and strengthening the local economy.

Vane Tempest colliery closed in 1992. A report prepared by the Coalfield Communities campaign, an all-party organisation, stated:

> "The survey carried out at Vane Tempest shows that 52 per cent. of the men are still out of work over a year after the closure was announced. Only 28 per cent. are in paid employment or have set up in business for themselves. Moreover, the majority of those men who are now working have experienced a drop in their earnings, often a very substantial one. Only a handful of the men who left Vane Tempest have found better paid work outside the mining industry. But more than 90 per cent. of former miners are worse off. The picture is not therefore a rosy one for the local economy around Vane Tempest."

A "substantial drop" in wages means a drop of between £50 and £75 a week. That alone is having dire consequences on local trade, shopping centres and shops not just in Seaham, the location of Vane Tempest, but throughout the Easington area.

To regenerate the economy we must quickly get to grips with disposing and reclaiming the hundreds of acres attached to redundant colliery sites. Some 263,000 tonnes of coal have been stocked on a site in Easington. They are surrounded by several hundred former colliery houses that are in a deplorable condition. The miners were prepared to live with coal heaps on their doorsteps so long as the mine was providing work and reasonable wages to allow them to live a reasonable existence. Now, however, the mines have gone but the coal stocks and deplorable colliery housing are still there. Unless we are prepared to tackle the problem of decaying housing, coal heaps and a decaying local economy, I fail to see how we can attract investment into the area.

The area has many qualities. We have a fine, skilled work force, who may require retraining to prepare for modern industry. We have good means of communication, such as the east-coast railway, a dual carriageway and international airports to the north and south of my constituency. But unless we are prepared to tackle decay from within, I doubt whether we shall attract investment.

I question the value of jobs that are coming into the area. For example, the terms of engagement for temporary workers—packers with a minimum pay of £1 an hour—employed by ABC Contract Services Ltd of 5, Great Queen Street, London, which has a plant in Newcastle and is now acting as a third party providing labour for modern industrial units in Peterlee, say:

"Unless specifically agreed to the contrary, The Temporary Worker is not entitled to payment from the Employment Business or its clients for time not spent on Assignment whether in respect of holidays, illness or absence for any other reason."

In 1994, those are the terms and conditions for workers in sophisticated industries located in Peterlee. Former mine workers, who have given a lifetime's work to the industry and the country, must expect a minimum wage of £1 an hour. Conservative Members cannot manage on £31,000 a year with a clutch of directorships thrown into the bargain and react vehemently against Labour Members who want a minimum wage of £4.05. We now have an example of a minimum wage of £1 an hour, and it is not unique. We must consider the morale of a work force that has always had the dignity of real jobs earning real wages in a real industry. That matter must be dealt with if we are to have a buoyant economy in the north-east.

I recently read a report in the press, which may have been leaked by Ministers, that the Government intend to examine the old workmen's compensation legislation of 1948. I shall read a letter from a gentleman who, in 1946, when he was 14 years old, lost a leg at Vane Tempest colliery. It says:

"My . . . colleagues took a pithead collection and raised six pound five shillings and sevenpence"—

there were no large sums before the workmen's compensation legislation.

"I never at any time received a lump sum from the coal owners or British Coal insurance. You may recall (or have been told) men would lose life and limb and receive nothing prior to the National Insurance Act . . . I make no claim to a lump sum nor do I wish to do so. I have no axe to grind but never the less I do feel that the 'Old cases workmens compensation' are a forgotten cause."

He is not alone in being a forgotten cause: 5,000 people in the Easington constituency are dealing with Peterlee and Seaham officers in relation to workmen's compensation. I am sure that the figure can be multiplied many times over throughout the country.

If the Minister wants a buoyant, mobile, motivated, skilled work force, the correct ingredients must be present to enable them to respond positively. Ministers should not seriously contemplate removing any aspect of the workmen's compensation legislation. The ordinary operative will find it beyond his means to prosecute a case in a civil court. I therefore ask Ministers to consider that very carefully.

In conclusion, I have enjoyed making a brief contribution to the debate on the Loyal Address—perhaps not very gracious to the people whom I represent—but perhaps I shall have another bite of the cherry when the Chancellor presents his Budget next week.

6.21 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Having witnessed the amazing footwork of the Chancellor and enjoyed the tour de force of the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), it is embarrassing to have to make a speech, but I shall not sit down. I shall make one or two observations about the Loyal Address.

The Loyal Address makes it clear that the Government believe that the economy is strengthened by privatisation and that they want to increase competition. I was confused, therefore, about why they confined competition and privatisation to the gas industry, rather than finishing the job in the aviation industry.

There are three legs to the aviation industry—airlines, airports and airspace. The Government privatised British Airways and got the best out of it, after which they privatised the airports and got the best out of them. They failed to privatise the Navigation Air Traffic Control Service to obtain the best from airspace management. NATS has a turnover of £500,000 million a year, employs 5,500 people and has spent £350 million on its new traffic control centre in Hampshire.

Although NATS was not ready for privatisation in the 1980s, when it had out-of-date organisation and was riddled with restrictive practices, today, thanks to the charismatic chairmanship of Christopher Chattaway and its director general, it is ready to benefit from the involvement of the private sector. We shall be able to give more incentives to staff, achieve better productivity from them and manage airspace more efficiently to absorb the capacity that will inevitably increase as new terminals are built.

Too often, nationalised industries become a haven for mediocre management who are protected from the disciplines of the marketplace, whereas in the private sector the ethos is one of achievement. If shareholders are not happy, the management goes. By delaying the privatisation of NATS, which is not mentioned in the Gracious Speech, the Government are holding back the full potential of our airline industry, which is one of the most successful in Europe. By keeping one facet in the public sector, they will reduce available airspace and, as a result, slow opportunities for expansion.

The crucial lubricant for the airline industry is the privatisation of NATS. In turn, money for additional investment will not be forthcoming because NATS is still in the public sector and is confined by Treasury rules on the public sector borrowing requirement.

You may ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the relevance of that to the country. It has serious economic consequences. Heathrow is the hub airport of the world; the importance of allowing it to develop and expand is all too evident. However, because of our tortuous planning processes, the fifth terminal will not be on stream for a decade or more to handle the ever-growing traffic, which instead will be diverted to Schipol in Holland or Charles de Gaulle in France. Holland and France have recognised the significance of airports to economic regeneration, because airports attract not simply more tourists but highly important imports and exports of cargo. No wonder France and Holland have special arrangements for planning inquiries and funding arrangements for airports.

Britain will maintain its share of international air transport only by ensuring that minority pressure groups, who often have little interest in the economic regeneration of an area or the nation, are not given too much influence to them to disrupt and delay the planning process.

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

Although environmental damage and noise nuisance are important, they should not be allowed to become buzz words for extended delay and procrastination.

I think that we all accept that there is a physical limit to the size of airports such as Heathrow. No one wants to build a third runway in Harlington or Staines but, in exchange for a commitment not to go beyond the present boundaries, the planning process must be relaxed so that new terminals can be built faster and use can be made of the increasing number of slots and movements that new technology will make possible. Let us not forget that the airlines have already made great investments in quieter aeroplanes, but, just as railway stations are noisy places and living near motorways is not peaceful, we must accept some noise footprint around the perimeter fences of airports. Often, people who buy homes near airports work at them too.

Why are the Government, who are committed to competition, committed to privatisation and committed to freeing up the market, not privatising the public utility, NATS?

I have identified three culprits. First, no doubt British Airways had something to do with it. It has done a complete U-turn from backing the idea to absolute disapproval, probably because it foresees new slots arising from deregulation reducing its dominance and increasing the competition. No doubt it is especially mindful that, on routes where British Midland Airways has a foothold and has competed, prices have tumbled by as much as 25 per cent. I must declare an interest as I have been involved in British Midland for the past 12 years.

Routes from Glasgow, Edinburgh and London are among the cheapest air miles in the world. We all know that, where there is competition, prices come down; where there is no competition other than from other state European airlines, one will find that fares remain unnecessarily and uncomfortably high. Competition reduces air fares. By not privatising NATS, air fares are kept up because independent airlines cannot get the slots to compete with the main carriers.

In addition to British Airways not wanting to loosen the slots, the air vice marshals are opposed.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: I shall give way in a minute.

The air vice marshals of the Royal Air Force are involved in the management of NATS. They say that the Royal Air Force should not be prejudiced as its slots would be at risk. The RAF has 5 per cent. of this country's airspace. Surely some arrangements could be found to accommodate the air marshals.

Finally, a chorus of voices uses the deregulation buzzword "safety" and believes that things are safe only when they are in the public sector. British Airways is a privatised airline that is very safe and has a good track record. Those responsible for safety at airports are even more vigilant following privatisation. The fact that something is privatised does not mean that it is less safe.

We all know the benefits to this country's economy of privatisation and competition. We all know how consumers have benefited. The Government need to free the third leg of the aviation tripos and allow the airline industry to be liberated.

6.30 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). I do not know whether he has lived near an airport, but there is an airport in my constituency. One of the biggest problems with all airports is noise. The hon. Gentleman did not touch on that subject.

I also understand that the Secretary of State for Transport has promised to introduce legislation that could go a long way towards controlling noise. I should be interested to know when he will stop procrastinating and bring the legislation before the House so that we can debate it. The control of airport noise does not necessarily mean threatening competition. The bulk of the noise comes from old piston engine aircraft. The hon. Member for South Hams should take a good look at airports before he says that we should let private enterprise rip and should not worry about anyone who is kept awake all night by noise. The Secretary of State has not even provided grants outside London so that people can insulate their homes from aircraft noise. I thought that the hon. Member for South Hams would make an issue of that, but he chose to talk about something else. His fifth problem in relation to airports is the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East—me.

Listening to the Queen's Speech, I wondered whether perhaps, instead of increasing Ministers' salaries, they should be cut. This year's Queen's Speech and many others have been about Ministers taking less and less responsibility for their actions and those taken on their behalf. Today, if I ask a Minister a question about an outside quango, he or she refers me to a quango. The quango has to answer, not the Minister, but the Minister proposed the legislation in the first place—a sorry state of affairs. Perhaps we do not need so many Secretaries of State and Ministers, and could save the taxpayer some money by reducing the number.

I was disappointed that, in his speech, the Chancellor only touched on the general agreement on tariffs and trade and Pacific rim countries. I take GATT seriously, as I do the fact that, as a country, we must be involved in the Pacific rim trading area. We have not received much information from the Government about those two specific subjects.

In relation to those two issues, I am concerned that it is not clear how the American Senate and Congress will react. There have been many signals about GATT and the Pacific rim agreements from the Republicans and it seems that they may well start to hold up the agreements. One must wonder exactly what that would mean for Britain's trading position in those areas. It is vital for the Government to give us more answers to the questions on that subject and to monitor the position closely.

Another element of the Queen's Speech that gave me cause for concern was the hint that public expenditure was to be cut. The Government may think that that is wonderful, but I do not. Will local government once again be used as whipping boy? Will the Government knock local government about? They can certainly cut local government expenditure by deducting grants to it. If the

Government do that this year, more and more services will be affected. I have no doubt that the Government will say that they have not yet prepared the Budget, so we shall have to wait and see what happens when it is announced.

Over the years, the Government have subtly cut local government expenditure. They have cut about £300 million, one way or another, from Coventry city council over the past 15 or 16 years. There was not much on that subject in the Queen's Speech—only a small hint of what might happen. When we try to push for more information, we are told that we had better wait until the Budget, when all will be revealed. That will be interesting.

Last Monday, colleagues and I presented a petition with a quarter of a million signatures to No. 10 Downing street. Many people from the Coventry region signed that petition, which referred to the public's revulsion at increases in VAT on fuel. I am sure that if Conservative Members have taken soundings in their constituency associations or surgeries, they will know that the public want the second phase of VAT dropped, as they did the first.

Over the weekend, Conservative Members were saying in the press that the Government's financial objectives had been achieved and they should perhaps consider dropping the second phase of VAT. I hope that those Conservative Members will use their influence with the Chancellor to persuade him to drop the second phase. There is no justification for it—the Chancellor keeps saying how well he is doing in balancing the budget and how wonderfully the economy is doing under his stewardship.

My city has a major industrial base, which has been eroded. Coventry has two large aircraft factories—in fact, it has one and a half, as one has been run down. When I talk to people involved in the aircraft industry, it becomes clear that their concern is that money and Government assistance for research and development are not forthcoming. We do not need to talk about the aircraft industry alone but can consider the broad spectrum of British manufacturing, including the car and electronics industries and other technologies. One of the biggest cost factors, apart from labour, is research and development. I was disappointed that that subject was not mentioned.

It is interesting that the richest people in our country pay only 8 per cent. of total VAT, whereas the poorest pay about 20 per cent. So the rich do very well and are well protected and, once again, the poor are penalised.

I am sure that many hon. Members would agree that pensioners who have taken out private pension schemes—there are about 6 million pensioners—have every right to be worried. The proposals at which the Government have been hinting notwithstanding, pensioners are still concerned about the lack of accountability for such schemes, which have not delivered what was promised in the late 1980s when these people left the state earnings-related pension scheme to join private pension schemes. There have been too many scandals and it is about time the Government did something to end them.

I note that the Government have been using underhand methods when it comes to the so-called assistance for poorer families and pensioners who have to pay the increased VAT. That help is taken into account in DSS calculations of their grant eligibility. In that way, the Government give with one hand and take away with the other.

When hon. Members supported the legislation that set up the Child Support Agency, they intended to go after absent parents who never paid a penny for their children. I shall not rehearse the arguments against the CSA tonight. Suffice it to say that all the fears that were expressed about it have now come home to roost. The Government publish figures to show how successful the agency is, but once again it is the innocent people who honoured their court commitments to their families who have discovered that they will be the ones to be penalised.

As a matter of urgency, the Government's proposals to change the operation and formulae of the CSA should be brought to the House, and parliamentary time must be found to debate the issue. It is no good condoning press leaks stating that the Cabinet have been discussing this or that idea for the CSA. Why do not the Government show a little heart and introduce legislation as soon as possible to stop the misery that they are inflicting on first and second families alike?

The Queen's Speech also failed to mention the problem of homelessness and how to deal with it. The Government seem to be hinting that they will do something to control drugs, but many young people in Coventry in shelters such as Norton house, run by the Cyrenians, now rely on charities to raise large subscriptions because the Government have steadily reduced their grants in recent years. While the problem has multiplied, grants to deal with it have been reduced.

I have only skimmed over the surface of some of the omissions from the Queen's Speech. The Government may claim to want a steady ship and no more controversy: "Let's see how the economy develops." That may be the Government's view, but while they await events, events may overtake them. They must realise that, by their inaction and failure to put matters right, they are inflicting more and more hardship on the most vulnerable people. They must reconsider their so-called steady course and introduce some humanitarian legislation, just for a change, based not on greed but on human need.

6.43 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I do not want to enter into a lengthy argument with the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) because I have the honour of serving with him on the Home Affairs Select Committee. Politically speaking, he is decidedly an improvement on his predecessor. I should point out, though, that the VAT compensation scheme does protect pensioners and poorer households, to the extent of £2.5 billion. Added to that are other benefits, such as cold weather payments and energy efficiency schemes, to say nothing of granny bonds, and so on; thus are the Government protecting people who would otherwise have to pay more VAT on fuel.

I should have liked to tell the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings)—he is not here now—that, much as I was moved by his speech, I hope that he will not mind my observing that if the president of his union, the National Union of Mineworkers, had not led the miners into a long and crippling strike, demand for coal

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

would not have transferred to gas and the six collieries around Easington about which he was worried might still be open today.

Mr. Etherington *rose—*

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I was directing my observation to the hon. Member for Easington. If the hon. Gentleman would like to intervene on another topic later, I shall certainly take his intervention.

I came into the Chamber because there were rumours of a rare sighting of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in the Lobby. I hurried in to hear so great an intellectual expounding his post-neoclassical symbiotic relationship endogenous growth theory. I was sadly disappointed. Apparently, his speech about Labour's economic policy and Labour's pledges is to be made outside the House. It is perhaps not too cynical of me to suppose that the reason for that is known as Brown's law, which the hon. Gentleman expounded for the first time on the "Today" programme 10 months ago. When challenged about an absurd pledge, he answered:

"Unless you can quote me chapter and verse about commitments made in the House of Commons, then they were not made."

So we shall no doubt hear all sorts of commitments in tomorrow's economic speech, but they were actually not made because the hon. Gentleman did not make them in the House.

I hope that the Chair will allow me to deal with that part of the Gracious Speech which declares:

"My Government will play an active part in tackling drug misuse, drug trafficking and organised crime at home and abroad."

Drugs and organised crime have become so serious in some countries that they pose a threat to economic stability as well as to democracy and political stability.

Most people in Britain today are rightly worried about law and order and are finding it a little difficult to accept the truth: we are at last beginning to reduce crime. I think it particularly alarming that most people who feel so strongly about crime do not have the faintest idea of the extent or potential of the organised crime that is coming to us across national boundaries. As George Staples, head of the Serious Fraud Office, told an international symposium on organised crime held in Cambridge in September, three of the fraud cases in his office at the moment exceed by several hundred million pounds each the entire proceeds of burglary in England and Wales in one year.

Most fraud is simply never investigated and its perpetrators are never caught, let alone brought to trial and convicted. Millions of pounds can be moved out of one country's jurisdiction to another's in the twinkling of an eye along the electronic highway, without any police force being aware of how, where, why or when it happened—until long after anything can be done about it. Many international banks have investigators running around like headless chickens, yet they are keeping quiet about what is happening lest confidence in those banks be diminished. It is clear, therefore, that we face a very serious problem.

It is not just the computer and modern technology that are to blame. International barriers have broken down in other ways. There is easy international travel, burgeoning international trade, and the disintegration of the communist-centred world. That results in vulnerable, confused systems in small new countries which seek a fast track to economic success, stability and recognition. There is a growth in gangs which exploit the vulnerability of confused systems in which there has been a breakdown of law and order. We do not know how many of the 2,000 banks which, I am told, have been set up in Russia are properly supervised and controlled.

We can add to that the spread of the drugs culture which, through money laundering, is responsible for much international economic crime. It is almost impossible to be too cataclysmic in one's assessment of the potential for international crime.

Massive drug addiction is causing terrible human suffering, but we must also consider the financial aspect of such a drug culture. In Bolivia, the total profit from the illicit sale of 56,000 tonnes of coca products is $750 million a year. Peru produces 60 to 75 per cent. of the world's entire supply of cocaine, which yields $1,000 million a year. Colombia, the world's main processor of cocaine, yields profits of $300 million. In those countries, most of the total exports and gross domestic product are drug related. A third of the best agricultural land is owned by drug barons, who have private armies, form their own political parties and use terror gangs to intimidate politicians, security forces and judges, and operate by bribery and murder.

By the time the drugs are processed and distributed, the world value of the cocaine trade alone is put at several hundred thousand million US dollars. That is as much as the entire gross national product of countries as big as the United Kingdom. With that money, land is bought and developed, factories are bought or constructed and businesses, including banks, are set up to process and launder the money. It is invested in legitimate businesses where it grows to become a significant part of national economies.

I have not so far mentioned the organised crime in the countries of transit such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay and Venezuela where processing takes place and drug consumption grows and destroys young lives. I have not mentioned the United States, where 5 million people use cocaine and crack, or the Caribbean. Some 80 per cent. of the heroin seized in Britain comes from south-east Asia—the golden triangle of Burma, Laos and Thailand, or from the golden crescent of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

There are millions of opium and heroin addicts. There are 2 million heroin and 1 million opium addicts in India. Pakistan has 1 million heroin addicts and there are 2 million in Iran. Other centres are in China and Hong Kong. Then there is the herbal cannabis of west Africa and Jamaica and the cannabis resin of Lebanon and Morocco. Millions of addicts and billions of dollars are being created by drug trafficking operators who are looking for financial systems to infiltrate, Governments to buy and economies to undermine.

It has been authoritatively estimated that at least five countries are known to be under the control of their crime syndicates, and that others in eastern Europe and elsewhere are becoming sitting targets for future attack. Some of that activity is bound to come our way. Already, we are told that 50 to 60 per cent. of all crime in the United Kingdom is drug related. Some people even want to legalise cannabis, and that would lead to more young people getting the drug habit. As Governments control

supply and demand rises, even more gangsters will reap the rewards of drug trafficking. It is a relief to us all that the Government have set their face against any move to legalise drugs.

Although drugs are certainly the largest field of activity of organised crime in the United Kingdom, there are many others: the dealing in and supplying of firearms, the theft of cars and lorries, the smuggling of illegal immigrants, forgery and counterfeiting of currency, the pirating of goods, the theft and disposal of works of art, illegal gambling, prostitution, extortion, blackmail, protection rackets, benefit fraud, computer fraud, credit card fraud, fraud against the European Union budget, bootlegging, tax evasion and violence in support of those activities and terrorism. Whatever else we know of those crimes in Britain, we know that by their very nature they will be substantially under-reported.

The Select Committee on Home Affairs is looking into organised crime, and public evidence to the Committee has shown that the nature of organised crime in the United Kingdom has changed. There is no longer a British "Mr. Big"; nor are there large gangs of domestic organised criminals. Now our gangsters are the tentacles of international organisations.

Much of the United Kingdom's serious crime is based on overseas cultural or ethnic groups such as the mafia and the Jamaican and Caribbean yardies who distribute drugs, employ violence and set themselves up as role models for the young. The Chinese and Vietnamese triads are involved in drugs, fraud, extortion and intimidation. There are the Colombians, and I have been told that there are about 40,000 illegal Colombian immigrants in Britain, most of whom are connected in some way with the drugs trade. There are Japanese, Turkish and Kurdish gangs and middle east terror gangs. Only last week the Jewish community was warned by the police to take extra care, even though a middle east peace settlement is in the making.

Now there are eastern European gangs. The national criminal intelligence service told the Home Affairs Committee that up to 40 per cent. of Russia's GDP may be controlled by organised crime. Mr. Giacomelli, the director of the United Nations drugs commission, told us that law was breaking down in Russia and that countries around it were threatened. That has spread to Germany, and we were told that there are already about 200 money laundering cases with Russian connections. An estate agent has said that a significant number of houses and prime sites in London are bought using Russian money. Much of that international activity is facilitated by our still tolerant immigration laws and, of course, by the 20,000 to 40,000 refugee asylum seekers who come to this country every year or who seek asylum when their studentship expires.

How are we to control crime? We educate, or we should, those who are most susceptible to infiltration or attack. It was heartening to see in today's issue of *The Daily Telegraph* an article about an education committee that invited an ex-junkie to tell sixth formers about the terrifying consequences of taking drugs. We can prevent crime by stimulating awareness, vigilance and close monitoring. We must develop our means of gaining intelligence about drug activities through international co-operation and perhaps by changing the law to allow greater access to tax records.

We target organisations and individuals who are known to be at criminal work. We bring offenders to trial where there is sufficient evidence, convict them, if we are lucky, and deprive them of their assets. We should impose deterrent sentences as well, because depriving such people of their assets is not enough to deter them. They will just try again.

During all that, we co-operate with all the international agencies using all the international conventions—with the United Nations drugs control programme, the G7 financial action task force, the chemical action task force and the European Union ad hoc working group on organised crime. We co-operate with Interpol, Trevi, CELAD, MAG—and with Europol, when it comes about—and with individual countries sharing our problems. All that is good, necessary and likely to prove helpful.

The one blot on the horizon of effective international co-operation and national control, the one positive obstacle to our campaign to control international crime, would seem to most of us here in Britain to be the proposed dismantling of formal border controls in accordance with the Single European Act. That Act, as everyone knows, amends the European Community treaty on measures to establish a internal market.

On the face of it, anyone from a European Union country can come to the United Kingdom without check, bringing goods without check, providing services without check and using capital without check. Anyone who has managed to get into a European Union country from outside Europe and become a citizen can also do those things.

On the face of it, the Single European Act drives a coach and horses through all the necessary preventive controls on potential economic crime coming into Britain. The consequences to us are too horrific to contemplate. Already, we have reduced customs checks on persons and goods travelling between member states and entering the United Kingdom, hence the blue channel at our international ports of entry.

We have to ask whether and to what extent this concession to the aquis communautaire is making crime prevention potentially more difficult for us. In his evidence to the Select Committee, Mr. Neil Dickens, the national co-ordinator of the Regional Crime Squad, thought that it had, and that international criminals from outside the European Union—never mind those within it—had only to enter the European Union at its weakest part to move freely around as they wish.

Of course the Government has retained some important defences and I welcome that. We do not concede that the Single European Act requires any reduction in immigration controls. We argue sensibly that we retain the right to require inspection of the status of all persons entering the country, whether or not they are from another member state. As we have the right to control entry by non-EC nationals, we must be able to see whether they are genuine EC nationals by inspecting them.

We also argue that the qualifying words of article 7a—that the free movement of persons, etcetera, should be in accordance with the provisions of the treaty—mean that the other treaty articles allow us to exclude persons or restrict the export or import of goods where public order, safety or security are threatened.

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

There is also a general declaration attached to the Single European Act which gives member states the right to take such measures as they consider necessary for the purpose of controlling immigration from third countries, combating terrorism, crime, the traffic in drugs and illicit trading in works of art and antiques. We retain the discretion to apply such measures as we consider appropriate.

Having said all that, it is clear that a majority of our European Union partners take a literal interpretation of article 7a and want nothing less than the complete abolition of internal border controls, although they are prepared to allow some compensating measures. The European Parliament has started formal legal action against the European Commission over its failure to ensure that we dismantle all our border controls, although that case is unlikely to be heard until the latter part of next year, and I understand that we are intervening to put our case.

I am sure that the British Government are quite determined to defend our frontier controls. That is because, unlike the rest of the European Union, we are a island, we do not have continuous borders with other countries and our borders are themselves a control. I hope that the Government will continue to hold out against such intervention in our protection because I am sure that that would be consistent with the wishes of the people whom we represent. That is why we have not signed the Schengen convention. We believe that border controls are more effective than any internal checks, even if we had compulsory identity cards, which we do not. The Government must not weaken in that resolve.

Regardless of the argument about border controls, even closer co-operation, particularly with our European partners under the third pillar of Maastricht, title VI, which the Home Affairs Select Committee monitors, is absolutely vital if we are to continue to contain the international crime wave which otherwise will come to us.

I know only that if the threat of organised international crime is anything like that which I have supposed it to be in the course of my remarks, it is absolutely vital that we do not erode any of our powers to keep out criminals, illegal immigrants, drug traffickers and terrorists and that we ensure that the external frontiers convention, on which we are working with our European Union partners, is an effective weapon to protect our borders.

Our free society is under sustained attack. We must not be defeated by technology or by unacceptable laws that bind us and are imposed on us by others. I, for one, do not accept that crime is the necessary price we pay for a free society and I hope that everyone in the House and the Government agrees.

7.6 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am pleased to follow the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), but I found his opening remarks about the mining industry rather disappointing. If he looks at the historical record, he will see no evidence to support his remarks. However, his overall contribution was interesting.

The Gracious Speech was less ambitious in comparison with previous years; nevertheless, it takes us in the same old economic and social direction. It is an approach that has caused a great deal of suffering for a substantial minority of our citizens and it has severely restricted the manufacturing capacity and competitiveness of British industry.

The warning in the Gracious Speech that there is likely to be a further reduction in the share of national income going to the public sector signals another assault not only on the minimal welfare state, but this time on the workplace. Established working practices are now under attack. Those include the 40-hour week, rising real wages, paid holiday leave and employers' contribution to pension funds.

The assault arises because the Government's analysis of the problem facing the United Kingdom economy is seriously flawed. It is clear that the blame for the United Kingdom's ills is being put at the door of the welfare state and the burden that it places on employers and the state budget. That is patent nonsense. The growing cost of unemployment and the ill health that results from unemployment is a cost that is directly attributable to economic mismanagement over the past 15 years.

The complete surrender to the concept of the unfettered market has released forces that can destabilise entire social systems. We are already experiencing the impact of that negative side in the United Kingdom—growing poverty, high unemployment, increasing crime and drug abuse.

Markets can help direct resources and maximise their use, but if the mitigating influences are dropped, the worst effects can win over the best. By driving down wages and terms and conditions in industry, the Government are unwittingly creating the conditions for the United Kingdom's industrial demise.

The United Kingdom can hope to compete only at the higher-value end of the market; we cannot compete at the lower-value end of the market with the newly industrialised countries. If we are to equip our industries so that they can compete, we need an industrial strategy to ensure that we are keeping our lead in the industries in respect of which we have an advantage. We must also strengthen and encourage the industries in respect of which we are weak. That means more spending, not less, on supply-side factors such as research and development, education and training.

A major problem is that the markets are now global in their character. Bringing the forces that have been released back into a framework will not be easy, but it can be achieved. Many new industrial countries have a competitive advantage precisely because they can exploit their labour markets outrageously by paying poor wages and avoiding spending on social provision.

The way forward is to improve living standards for all, not to worsen them. Therefore, in exchange for the western world keeping its markets open to the new industrial countries, they should be called on to agree and recognise trade unions and collective bargaining as part of a social package of rights for working people. That could be extended to include an environmental code to protect the world against further pollution. Without that, it is inevitable that the world will divide into trading blocks. Protectionism will be inevitable. America's drift down that road can already be detected.

Those were part of the conclusions of the participants in a seminar at the International Labour Organisation headquarters in Geneva a fortnight ago. The participants included the World bank and the International Monetary Fund. Is not it ironic that the one thing that the Conservative party likes to hate most—the social chapter—is a concept that could save European manufacturing industry?

When the Minister replies to the debate, perhaps he will tell us whether he would agree to a social and environmental clause being added to the constitution of the World Trade Organisation. That would create a world trade policeman and the effect would be to increase the quality of life of people in the new industrial countries. It would also protect the environment and stimulate further world growth.

Without those measures to mitigate the worst effects of the market and to create a new global code of world trading practices, it is unlikely that we shall increase permanent jobs in the European Community. However, as the hon. and learned Member for Burton said, we can be sure that we shall experience more of the already creeping economic and social decay.

I want to consider the United Kingdom in relation to jobs. Most of the jobs created between September 1993 and September 1994 were, according to a Trades Union Congress report, white collar, insecure and low paid. The report was based on Department of Employment figures, which showed that 130,000 new temporary jobs had been created, but over the same period 26,000 permanent jobs had been lost. The latest research on pay undertaken by the Library for my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) reveals that 10 million workers in the United Kingdom are living on earnings that are less than the European Community decency threshold.

Clearly, we need a more positive response from the Government than that which is contained in the Queen's Speech. They must recognise that job security and full employment, to which they claim they are now committed, go hand in hand; and perhaps the Minister can tell us later whether the Government still accept the commitment made by the previous Secretary of State for Employment when he visited the TUC.

The Government must do three things. First, public sector-led investment must be increased. At the moment, investment is 20 per cent. below its peak in 1989 before the recession. It is well below that of our major competitors. Secondly, greater investment in research and development is called for. Again, we spend less on research and development than our major competitors.

Finally, there should be an end to the unfair discrimination against the public sector. In that respect, the Government could make a start by freeing the Post Office from the straitjacket of the external financing limit. That would allow the Post Office to compete on an even footing with other commercialised but publicly owned postal services such as the French, German and Swedish services.

According to what the Post Office management told the Trade and Industry Select Committee, no other successful Post Office in the world has divided its post and parcel services from its counter services, as was proposed by the President of the Board of Trade. The Post Office can remain public and profitable.

We must be clear that the gas Bill proposed in the Queen's Speech is not about creating conditions for cheaper gas prices; it is about making a national private monopoly into a series of smaller monopolies. It is really about sharing out the spoils. That point was made clear by the announcement that gas prices are to rise by 3 per cent. while the management has awarded itself fat increases. That is one of the things which people find obscene about Tory Britain.

It would have made more sense and been more helpful if the Government had declared their intention not to increase VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in 1995 and if they had announced a planned extension of the gas transportation network to rural areas of the UK, to end the existing situation of haves and have-nots.

My constituency is partly rural and many of my villages, such as Stainborough, Wortley, Greenmoor, Crow Edge and Dunford Bridge, have no natural gas supply. That must also be the case in many other rural constituencies. Many of my constituents must pay 30 per cent. more for liquefied gas than users of natural gas, or they must buy more expensive smokeless fuel. The inclusion of VAT means that they are paying more tax per unit of energy used than people on natural gas. That inequality in the access to domestic energy should not be tolerated in a modern industrial society. When the Minister replies, I hope that he can tell us whether there are plans afoot to deal with that situation of haves and have-nots in respect of people living in urban areas as opposed to those in rural areas.

In the energy economy, large amounts of gas are now being burnt to generate electricity. According to *The Financial Times Coal UK* there is currently 7,380 MW on stream and another 6,380 MW under construction. Another 3,300 MW are planned before 1995. That capacity, together with the 6,500 MW that have been given section 36 approval, means that by 1999-2000, we shall be burning the gas equivalent of 55 million tonnes of coal. That is an inefficient way of using gas. I do not believe that any hon. Member believes that we can continue to use it at that rate without it impacting on prices and, ultimately, on British competitiveness.

At the same time, a great amount of coal has been locked into the ground by colliery closures. As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) said, mining communities continue to suffer from the effects of the unwarranted colliery closure programme. When referring on Monday to unemployment rates in mining communities, the President of the Board of Trade used the travel-to-work statistics. He should have considered a recent report, which shows that male unemployment in some mining villages is as high as 60 per cent. That occurs because mining is generally a rural occupation and unemployment tends to be in pockets.

Villages such as Woolley in my constituency seem to have been forgotten since the colliery was shut. The community hall has closed down, and so have the school and the last shop. The causeway that links the village with Darton and crosses British Coal property needs resurfacing, and the derelict land that British Coal owns around the village needs cleaning up.

Dust from substantial coal stocks still on the stocking ground is a nuisance. Life for the mainly elderly residents worsens day by day. My representations to British Coal and to the Minister for Energy and Industry and requests

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

for assistance have met rebuffs. The regeneration package of £200 million for areas affected by pit closures was clearly insufficient, and more needs to be made available. The Government have failed miners and mining communities.

Another regrettable omission from the Gracious Speech was a proposal to replace the outrageous regulation that currently prescribes chronic bronchitis and emphysema as industrial diseases in relation to deep coal mining. Of the 43,827 claims received by September 1994, there have been only 4,469 awards. Some 13,995 cases were rejected on X-ray evidence, and another 18,658 failed the so-called forced expiration value test—the FEV 1 test. That is a disgrace and it needs to be dealt with immediately. I hope that the Minister will impress on his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security the need to tackle that outrageous regulation.

Even if a miner is diagnosed as suffering from that terrible debilitating disease, he cannot claim compensation from British Coal's pneumoconiosis scheme. That is despite the fact that, in order to succeed with a disablement assessment, he must show X-ray evidence of simple pneumoconiosis. The Minister for Energy and Industry will not widen the scope of the current scheme. No doubt the Treasury has a hand in that, fearing that the effects of such a move might influence the attitude of would-be buyers into the coal-mining industry. That is a disgraceful decision. It means that men who have made an enormous contribution to the United Kingdom economy, most of whom are elderly, have now to prepare for long, drawn-out court battles to try to win compensation at a time of life when they could do without such worries.

The Gracious Speech offers the people only more of the same, and they have had a bellyful. It exposes a Government who have run out of ideas and a Government who have no vision. The sooner they make way for a Labour Administration, the better will be the fortunes of the British people.

7.22 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I am grateful for this opportunity to deal briefly with the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

Opposition Members ask us to

"regret that the Gracious Speech excludes positive measures to remove the fear of unemployment".

It goes on to suggest that we

"tackle the unacceptable and clumsy reforms of the NHS and to cease treating education as a business rather than a service".

I wish to demonstrate that that premise is false, and why that is so, especially in respect of education and unemployment.

One has only to look at page 3 of the Gracious Speech to see that the Government intend to deal with unemployment in very straightforward terms. The Gracious Speech states:

"My Government will continue to promote enterprise, to improve the working of the labour market, and to strengthen the supply performance of the economy. They will bring forward legislation to promote increased competition in the gas industry and to reform the agricultural tenancy laws in England and Wales. A Bill will be introduced to create a Jobseeker's Allowance, reforming benefits for unemployed people and giving them better help into work."

If that does not deal with those issues straight on, I do not know what does.

People in my constituency, which is both rural and urban, will be delighted to see reform of the agricultural tenancy laws as it will stop the leakage of people away from farms and will open farms to increased tenant farming. At present, landlords and farmers who are keeping their own land in hand are inhibited from providing land for tenants because they consider that the tenant and his successors will, in effect, be able to hold on to the land in perpetuity. The new tenancy laws and the more businesslike arrangements to be introduced in the agricultural tenancy Bill will provide greater flexibility and therefore better chances for young people, which had previously been denied them.

The employment picture in my constituency is extremely good. The Library figures for the past few years show that unemployment has gone down consistently and at a pretty good rate since July 1986. Unemployment in my constituency—which, as I have said, covers rural and urban areas and about a quarter of the area of Leicestershire—was 2,524 in July 1986. By October 1993, it had fallen to 2,070, and in October 1994 it was 1,863. There have been decreases of 26.2 per cent. since July 1986 and 12.1 per cent. from September to October this year. That evidence demonstrates inaccuracy of the implications of the amendment.

Harborough has the lowest unemployment in the midlands and the 10th lowest unemployment in England. I venture to suggest that my constituency is not much different from many others represented by Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Members. We have lower unemployment because business men and women do not allow themselves to be interfered with by local or national Government unless it is strictly necessary.

My local authority works hand in hand with the business community. Indeed, Harborough district council recently produced an admirable brochure advertising the good sense of doing business in Harborough. The cover states that Harborough is

"the right place for your business".

The figures demonstrate that Harborough is the right place to do business. The brochure proudly points out that

"The area is renowned for its engineering, shoe, hosiery and graphics sectors. Nevertheless the industrial base is very broad indeed. Market Harborough accommodates the head offices of HP Foods and Golden Wonder as well as manufacturing industry such as Tungstone Batteries, Crosby Valves and Harboro Rubber.

The area is rapidly becoming the 'hub' location for many major UK concerns . . . There are approximately half a million working people within the 'travel to work' area around the district, a great recruitment advantage."

There are good schools and good universities in Leicester. I refer to Leicester university and De Montfort university at Loughborough, which is just outside my constituency. All those factors persuade business people at home and abroad to set up business in Harborough and thus to provide employment in the east midlands. Those figures and facts demonstrate to the Henley centre for forecasting that Harborough is one of the top 25 local authority areas in respect of future economic prospects. If local authorities in other parts of the country, including those saddled with Labour and Labour-Liberal Democrat authorities, would follow the policies of the Government and of Harborough district council, things would be a lot better in those areas as well. The Labour party wants to

introduce the social chapter and the minimum wage, and increase Government intervention, all of which would be deleterious to the economic strength of my constituency and others like it.

Business men in my constituency tell me that their order books are filling up in both the long and the short term. Only a couple of years ago, they wondered whether they would have any work to do in six months' time, or even in one month; now they are crying out for additional labour. The local papers are full of job vacancies, and businesses are finding it difficult to fill those vacancies with people of the right calibre and with the right skills. My constituents are beginning to reinvest their profits in their businesses.

As I have said, the local picture looks extremely good and is likely to improve further. That picture, however, is not confined to my area; it is replicated throughout the country, as people would discover if they could be bothered to look. We are now enjoying vigorous, sustainable export-led economic growth as a result of effective, comprehensive Government economic policy.

In the third quarter of 1994, British gross domestic product increased by 4.2 per cent. year on year—faster, I believe, than was predicted even by independent City analysts. Manufacturing output rose by 5 per cent. in the three months to September 1994 against the same period last year, and over that time industrial output rose by 5.9 per cent. In October 1994, retail sales were 3.1 per cent. up on the previous year; in the third quarter of this year, company profits rose by 5.6 per cent.—up 18 per cent. on last year. Both the IMF and the OECD expect Britain to be the fastest growing of the major European Union countries, and at least equal with France in 1985.

Where in that evidence is the basis for the amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition? It does not exist. Let us examine the national employment figures, which reflect those in my constituency. Unemployment fell by 45,000 in October, and has fallen by 450,000 since December 1992. The stock of vacancies at job centres has risen for 12 consecutive months, with well over 200,000 new vacancies being notified every month and probably twice as many available from other sources. That reflects the good news in my region.

We are also seeing the benefits of low inflation. Inflation is firmly under control, with underlying inflation remaining at 2 per cent. in October for the second month running. If that is not good news, I do not know what is. Interest rates, at 5.75 per cent., are at their lowest since the 1970s, and their reduction from 15 per cent. in December 1992 means £13.75 billion a year off industry's annual interest rate bill. That is just what my local business men want, and what business men want throughout the country. The reduction also takes £150 off monthly payments on the average £33,000 mortgage. That is what my home-owning constituents want, along with those who hope to own a home. I trust that the Opposition will come to realise that, no matter how dismal the picture that they want to see, the facts tell a different story.

On top of that—

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Unit wage costs?

Mr. Garnier: I am glad that my hon. Friend is following my remarks; like me, he represents a manufacturing constituency.

Mr. Shepherd: I also have the same brief.

Mr. Garnier: We are singing from the same song sheet for once, and there is no harm in that. We must not keep these matters to ourselves: we must let the world know that the Government are doing a superb job, and that our party is leading the economic revival in this country and, indeed, in Europe. I look forward to a strong and helpful Budget from my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on 29 November, which will continue that trend.

The picture that I am painting, both locally and nationally, is of sustainable improvement. The Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues, however, not only complain about the dismal unemployment picture—looking, as they do, through the wrong end of the telescope—but complain that we treat education

"as a business rather than a service".

On the contrary, the three grant-maintained schools in my constituency are leading the way in education. Moreover, they are not in the leafy suburbs of Leicester, such as Oadby, or the well-off parts of my constituency such as Market Harborough; nor are they in the rural villages. They are in the poorest parts of the constituency, in Wigston and south Wigston, where the so-called working class that the Labour party wishes to keep in poverty are crying out for the schools to change from state-dominated high schools to schools that they can run themselves. Indeed, they have elected to allow their own governors to run them for the benefit of their children.

I visited South Wigston high school yet again last week. It has recently installed a new workshop containing computer-aided manufacturing and computer-assisted design equipment, which is providing children aged between 10 and 14 with the latest technology—technology that is not only interesting for them to see and use, but highly relevant to the needs of the local economy and to their own needs as future employees in science, technology, engineering or manufacturing. That would not have been possible under local authority domination, but it is possible now that the school has been freed from that yoke and become grant maintained.

Opposition Members often say that the grant-maintained system is no more than a massive bribe to encourage perfectly good local education authority-run schools to move into the independent sector, and that once the so-called bribe money has run out the schools will be in trouble. South Wigston high school has been grant maintained for some time; not only has it kept up its teacher numbers, but a long queue of parents are waiting to send their children to it. It has seen its neighbouring LEA schools having to cut teacher numbers and make other cuts, not because the Government have starved the education system of money but because the LEA is incompetent and cannot manage its affairs sensibly.

The Opposition amendment complains that the Government should

"cease treating education as a business rather than a service".

[Mr. Garnier]

My constituents send their children to a grant-maintained school precisely because they are fed up with the way in which the LEA fails to provide a service because it is not conducting its affairs in a business-like way. There is nothing wrong with a state-funded business providing a service if it does so sensibly, but that LEA has gaily lost £6 million in the past year without even knowing where it has gone. The director of education has had to take early retirement owing to ill health.

Mr. Clappison: Does my hon. Friend's constituency resemble mine, in Hertfordshire, where many children in low-income families are choosing to enjoy the benefits of an independent education through the assisted places scheme? Will his constituents, like mine, wonder how the abolition of that scheme would enable them to receive a service, as the Opposition would have it? How would they feel if they were told that they could not have the opportunity to choose for their children?

Mr. Garnier: As always, my hon. Friend makes his point eloquently and forcefully. I cannot add usefully to what he has said, but he has backed up my argument and destroyed the argument that apparently underpins the amendment.

I have taken enough of the House's time to make the few points that I wanted to make about unemployment and education—

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Why not go on?

Mr. Garnier: I could go on much longer, but I must allow others to speak.

I trust that Conservative Members will demonstrate with renewed vigour that the Government's policies on employment and education are succeeding, and that the Opposition's ideas—such as they are—are vacuous and devoid of content. Nothing that we heard from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) suggested that he had applied his mind to anything of an economic nature this afternoon, let alone during the time in which he has held the post of shadow Chancellor. I trust that he will continue to hold that post for many years.

7.39 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I am pleased to be called in the debate. I was unlucky in the debate on Monday, which was my first choice. I was offered only five minutes, so I thought that it might be better to try again and I am grateful that I have been successful.

I start by mentioning the several measures that I welcome. I welcome the proposal to set up an independent criminal cases review authority. That is long overdue. It has been obvious for many years that there is a gap in the criminal justice system, which as a result has failed to address the problems of fairly obvious miscarriages of justice such as the cases of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, among others.

That measure is timely, coming as it does when we are threatened with the implications of reduced legal aid, which is a potential minefield for further injustice if people decide that they cannot afford legal advice and try to do things themselves.

I am pleased that, as befits a body of this nature, the review authority will be free of the courts and the Government. I look forward with interest to the debate on this measure when it comes before the House, and I hope that it will also be free of any influence from the police. I do not say that as an anti-police or a pro-police speaker, but one must recognise that many of the famous cases of injustice in recent years have involved the police either failing to disclose evidence to the defence or, on occasion, tampering with evidence.

There has been maladministration within the police force, and it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that the review authority has its own investigative body which is independent of the police. If they cannot go that far, they should at least say that when there is any question of police probity in a case of an alleged miscarriage of justice, some independent system will be introduced.

I am also pleased to see that powers are to be introduced to curb dangerous mental patients. That issue has caused great public concern at a time when society is grappling with the Government's policy on care in the community which has replaced institutions and, on occasion, hospital places. The problem of dangerous mental patients has been exacerbated by the failures of the care in the community programme.

I sincerely hope that there will be some improvements. Care in the community is an excellent concept, but if it is not properly administrated—to date it has not been—or properly resourced, I fear that it will become debased and that the public will lose confidence in the concept, which would be a tragedy.

There is a proposal to abolish the regional health authorities. I do not feel strongly one way or the other on that, because I have had little to do with them. However, if the Government intend to abolish local health authorities and, in particular, the Sunderland health authority, I will welcome that with open arms.

I also welcome the monitoring of national health service trusts. That is not being done effectively at the moment through the purchaser-provider system. I give an example of something that has caused me great concern, which I am pleased to bring to the attention of the House.

Recently, a number of people in my constituency were collecting signatures on petitions against the Sunderland health authority's proposal to get rid of 400 hospital beds. During their endeavours, I saw four people who worked for the two hospital trusts, Priority Healthcare Wearside NHS Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust—the names are nearly always a mouthful; more words than deeds, in many respects—saying that they would like to sign the petition but they did not dare do so because there could be repercussions and recriminations with their employers. That is scandalous.

Those people are not just employees of the hospital trusts; they are also citizens living in the area who are affected by whatever happens within the health service in their region, and in a democracy, they should be free to air their views. In the health service reforms, we are seeing the systematic gagging of employees. I hope that the more liberal-minded Conservative Members will support any argument against such activity. That is long overdue.

When I raised the matter with the chairmen of the Sunderland health authority and the Sunderland health commission, they both agreed that that should not happen, that it was immoral. I then asked what they intended to do about it, but they both said that it was nothing to do with them; it was a matter for the hospital trusts.

I may have a simplistic view of a market, but I always thought that, in a market, the buyer could control the seller. I should have thought that, if a buyer told a seller that he did not like what he was doing, and that if matters were not put right he would cease purchasing from him, he could carry out that threat. Therefore, I was not too convinced by what those two gentlemen had to say.

The fault within the NHS at the moment is the lack of democratic accountability. I hope that the Government's proposals will do something about that. It may be that the organisation would be better off run by civil servants rather than Government-appointed quangos. We may find in the long run that that is more democratic—something that I hope Conservative Members will consider.

I welcome the legislation for the Channel tunnel rail link. Like many hon. Members, I recently travelled from London to Paris on the new train. It was a wonderful experience but, paradoxically, from Waterloo to the Channel tunnel I felt as if were on a suburban branch line, but once the train hit the tunnel and from there on to Paris, one is talking about modern latter-day travel.

I recall three years ago when I was in France that the link between Paris and Calais was under construction. The French have done wonders to complete it so quickly, and it is disappointing to find that there was not the same enthusiasm and support from the Government for the line on this side.

One reason I look forward to that legislation is that, if we have a decent link between the capital and the Channel tunnel, we will also have better links between the regions, the capital and the tunnel. I should like more freight to go by rail—the potential is there. That would coincide with the views of the recent Royal Commission report on pollution and transport, which was not particularly in favour of road transport.

It is interesting that a country similar to ours—at least, it was before unification, but it has changed somewhat now—the former West Germany, sends 35 per cent. of its freight by rail, whereas we send 7 per cent—one fifth of what Germany sends by rail. If we tried to match the figures in Germany, we would have a much better life, a better environment and a little more relaxation for our citizens.

I was interested to read about the agricultural tenancies legislation, at present in embryo. It is interesting, but a word of warning. If the Government want it to be worth while, they may have to forget their paranoia about deregulation. Landlords always have more power than the tenant. That applies throughout Britain. It always has, and it has been exacerbated since 1979 by the Government's legislation.

Landlords will ensure that there is only enough land for tenancies to allow them to get a good price. There could be certain problems with that. If anyone doubts that, they should consider office tenancies. We are led to believe that there is plenty of office accommodation, but anyone who tries to negotiate an unjust lease with a landlord may be told to stuff it. I hope that that is not unparliamentary language. Other landlords will have exactly the same type of contract.

It is clear that a cartel is being operated. Rent officers point to clauses that allow rent increases but not to clauses that permit decreases. The market seems not to work in that respect. I hope that that will not be the result of the proposed agricultural tenancy Bill.

I welcome the Bill that will establish environment agencies, not least because I represent part of an area in which there has been great concern about the possibility of polluted drinking water because of the presence of mine water. It would be a good thing to bring all the relevant organisations under one umbrella.

The Bill is to be welcomed also because a recent report suggested that the United Kingdom does not come out too well when it comes to environmental conditions and protection of the environment. Our performance does not compare well with that of some of our European colleagues or competitors within the European Union.

Organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth do not have a political agenda in the sense of politics as we understand the term in this place. They say that, unless the Government tackle industry in an appropriate manner, their efforts to protect the environment will be meaningless. There is a widespread view that sometimes there is laxity when it comes to tackling industry, which is still the greatest polluter in the United Kingdom.

Domestic violence has always been a problem. To introduce worthwhile legislation would require—I do not say this flippantly—the wisdom of Solomon. Nevertheless, I am glad that the Government recognise that there is a problem. We cannot begin to solve a problem unless we recognise that one exists.

I am unhappy about the proposed Bill that will bear on evidence in civil courts. It is proposed, it seems, to allow hearsay evidence. Earlier in the century, Lord Justice Birkenhead said succinctly that, in civil cases, the burden of proof was not beyond reasonable doubt, as it was in criminal cases, but somewhat lighter, in as much as it was based on the balance of probability.

Surely hearsay evidence is the last thing that is wanted when the test is the balance of probability. I hope that the Government will think extremely carefully about that before they introduce their Bill. The admittance of hearsay evidence would have many ramifications and could lead to abuses as great as those that have flowed from the Child Support Agency. It could be unpopular with everyone, while benefiting no one.

We are told in the Gracious Speech that the Government intend to introduce a Bill

"to tackle discrimination against disabled people."

It is interesting that the Government said that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), would cost £17 billion. Not everyone agreed with that assessment, but that was the Government's view. The Government say that the cost of their Bill will be £17 million. They claim that it will cost only one tenth of 1 per cent. of the expenditure that my hon. Friend's Bill would have entailed. I do not accept that we can have an equivalent Bill that is reasonable and acceptable at a thousandth of the cost. The proposal is scandalous.

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

The way in which the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood was dealt with was a disgrace. It was a blight on the House, and an even greater blight on the Government. A Minister had to admit that he had been somewhat economical with the truth. A Conservative Member was rebuked by Madam Speaker for misleading the House. I hope that those involved will never forget that scandalous state of affairs.

One of the worst proposals in the Gracious Speech—it has not attracted much publicity, but it seems that there has been a softening-up operation for about 18 months to two years—is the equalisation of the state pension age. The position of women will be worsened, while men will have the same retirement age. That, of course, is equality. The dictionary is specific when it comes to describing the concept.

I would have liked to see—I think that my view is reflected by many milllions of our people—a common retirement age of 60 years. I think that people would have been prepared to pay for that. That common age of retirement would be popular. It might help people to live longer lives. It would create job opportunities for the young unemployed, who often have families to support. If a long-term view had been taken instead of the short-sighted expediency for which the Government are noted it might have been found economically beneficial to have that common retirement age in terms of public expenditure.

The Government could, at no real cost, have equalised retirement age at 62.5 years. Surely that is not asking too much. That equalisation would have benefited one section of the population while disbenefiting another, but there would have been a tangible result. The present proposals constitute a retrograde step. They amount to deprivation in the name of equality. The object is to save money. There is no concept of justice, equality or even decency.

There is to be a moral breach of contract between the Government and their citizens. I understand that women of about 45 years of age will be worse off. They have been paying national insurance contributions since they became employed. They will get a raw deal. If the same conditions were being offered by a private company, I am sure that they would not be acceptable to the Government or to the population generally.

The activities of the private pensions industry are scandalous, and will cost the taxpayer billions of pounds. A tremendous amount of public money has already been used to subsidise the industry and to try to get people to opt out of state earnings-related pension schemes, and in some instances occuptional pension schemes. If the Government are so concerned about the national insurance fund and future liabilities, and if they want to give people additional pensions, why do they not bring forward legislation to make occupational pensions compulsory upon employers?

I challenge Conservative Members to rise—I am willing to let them intervene—to state that they have opted out of the parliamentary scheme to go into a private pension scheme. I wait with interest. It seems that none of them has done so. That says it all.

Some people have reached retirement age and have then decided to go abroad to join their sons, daughters or other relations. They may have paid their various contributions for 40, 45 or 50 years. They find that, when they go to live abroad, their pensions are frozen at the level that applied when they reached retirement age. That is scandalous. Any private company who tried to renege on a pension arrangement in that way would rightly be condemned, and would soon be out of business. It seems that the relationship between our citizens and the Government does not matter. There should be trust, but there is not. Instead, there is exploitation.

The retired people to whom I am referring do not live in the United Kingdom and do not have the benefits or disbenefits that flow from that, although they have the disbenefit of frozen pensions. At the same time, they are still allowed to vote in our elections. Even some Conservative Members may perceive that there is a paradox. I hope that they will speak to their Front-Bench colleagues or the Government Whips to ascertain whether something can be done to bring the scandal of frozen pensions to an end. It is a terrible injustice and an indictment of our country.

There is no mention of housing in the Gracious Speech, but in the various different debates many hon. Members have mentioned the problem of social housing in this country. We do not have much trouble with people who are fortunate enough to buy their own homes, although it has to be said that the stock of private housing is deteriorating in quality and there will be a problem in the not too distant future.

It would be wrong to say that we have a housing crisis, although there are increasing numbers of homeless people and homes considered unfit for habitation. I recently happened to read an interesting article by Patrick Minford—I know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer knows him, because Professor Minford is one of his advisers. That article revealed two important facts, the first of which is that, since 1988, private sector rented housing has increased by 11 per cent.

As the Government's deregulation of rents has meant that, in general, private rented housing is about twice as expensive as equivalent council housing, with housing associations somewhere in between, one would have expected the increase in private sector rented housing to lead to more subsidy being paid for housing. We know that, as the private sector is getting more, the public sector is getting less. That must be so, because, according to Professor Minford, since 1979 subsidies for tenanted housing have fallen by 9 per cent. What an indictment.

I hope that, at some time in the future, when introducing a housing Bill, the Government will not try to tell us that they cannot afford to pay housing benefit. They brought the change about. They decided to transfer subsidy from the dwelling to the tenant, and now we are seeing the results, with high private rents having a debilitating effect on the resources available—and heaven knows, those are few enough.

Every Queen's Speech that the Government have produced has shown that they are good at going back to policies with a proven record of utter failure. Bus deregulation is one example, and another is the obsession with trying to transfer tenancies into the private sector. The only time that we have had a good house building programme it was within the public sector, and we shall not get back to that position until the Government change their views.

Anyone who reads any history on the subject will find that, before the big house-building programmes of the 1920s and 1930s, which were carried on until 10 or 15 years ago, the private landlord was detested, because he provided substandard housing at outrageous prices. That is why we went in for public sector housing. That was a success, so, as one might expect, the Government decided to abandon it.

I tell the Minister that, unless something is done about the accommodation problem, the Government are sitting on a social time bomb. Less and less housing is being built and things are getting worse, yet the Government are not interested enough to suggest anything in the Gracious Speech to help alleviate the problem.

Finally, perhaps the worst, most spiteful and mean-spirited legislation that the Government propose is the persecution of the unemployed that is being introduced under the euphemism of the job seeker's allowance. I should be interested to know what the connotations of that term are. If we require people to be classed as "job seekers", there should be some jobs for them to seek. That does not seem unreasonable, and I do not think that anyone would disagree. People are being trained, often not very well, for jobs that do not exist.

That is not quite the worst thing. The meanest and most despicable aspect is the fact that, although Government economic policies have created unemployment, the Government now seek to shift the blame on to the people whom they have made unemployed. That is totally immoral, and I have no doubt that, as time goes by, people will become increasingly aware of it.

All that is happening at a time when employees' national insurance contributions have never been higher. Already, employees have to subsidise their own common law damages claims against employers, and then have to refund to the national insurance fund anything they have had in benefits—benefits for which they have already paid in their contributions. That is an absolute scandal, chicanery of the worst sort.

Now we find that unemployment payments have virtually been cut by 50 per cent. overnight, from 12 months' entitlement to six months. What a deplorable breach of faith. It should not be allowed in any so-called civilised society. However, I was pleased to notice that that cut will not be made until 1996, and by my reckoning we may be rid of this deplorable Government by then.

I am pleased that there is to be no denationalisation of the Post Office, but I warn my hon. Friends and any Conservative Members who may share my views about that to beware. People such as the President of the Board of Trade are never wrong; they always think that it is other people's fault when they cannot get their own way. Make no mistake about it; the Government will come back to the Post Office in some form or another.

We must be vigilant and wary. The idea has not gone away; we have simply had a stay of execution, as we did with the coal industry. About the coal industry too, apparently, the President of the Board of Trade was right and everybody else was wrong.

I had some sympathy with the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) when he explained to the House on Monday how he had been ill used by the press and the other media. I share his concerns, although I am talking not about the facts of the case but about the way in which they were presented. However, I should have more sympathy for the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members who feel that they have been treated in the same way if they would press the Government at least to make a start and introduce a statutory right of reply. That does not seem unreasonable.

Individuals with no resources who have been attacked unfairly, unjustly, incorrectly and "unfactually" by the media should have a right of reply. So if the Government want to do something about the media, that is an idea for them to consider. It would also be better if we had an independent statutory press or media complaints council, if not both. Self-regulation seems to be all right for the City and for the media, but it is not considered satisfactory for the trade unions or for local authorities. Surely people must realise that that is inconsistent and deceitful.

The Government have had a rough ride from the media over the past two years, but I should have a little more sympathy for them if they had shown any sympathy when others were similarly attacked. We hear Conservative Members saying that it is deplorable how the royal family, the Prime Minister and certain other people are attacked by the media, but they did not say that it was deplorable when Arthur Scargill was being attacked by the *Daily Mirror* and the "The Cook Report". That was all right, apparently, but it is not all right now. There should be more consistency and more honour in dealing with such matters. I sometimes think that the Government are frightened to attack the media, whether because of the money involved or for some other reason.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) has left the Chamber now, but I must refer to what he said about the demise of the coal mining industry. That affected me directly, because the last colliery in County Durham was in Wearmouth, in my constituency, but it has recently been closed, to everyone's regret.

It is totally unjustified to blame Arthur Scargill or the National Union of Mineworkers for the demise of the coal industry. There is no proof, and if that is some people's opinion, it is not borne out by the known facts. The people to blame are Lord Wakeham and Lord Parkinson, with their deregulation of the electricity supply and distribution industry, and the President of the Board of Trade for refusing to take cognisance of the most important parts of the Select Committee's report on the subject. They are the people to blame. The Conservative Government closed collieries, not the NUM or Arthur Scargill. I speak as a Member who is sponsored by the NUM, and I often wonder who sponsors the people who condemn the NUM—I will find out.

I was a little disappointed by the Chancellor's response to my intervention earlier this afternoon. I asked why, if the economy was doing as well as we were being led to believe, he needed to punish the less well-off and the vulnerable in society by the increase in VAT on fuel.

I appreciate that I am not allowed to say that the Chancellor is a liar in the House, but he told me something which I have never heard from any economic source whatsoever. He stated that the poorest in our society were being more than adequately compensated for the increase in VAT. That is what he said, and it will be in *Hansard* tomorrow. There is not an economist in this country that I have read who comes to the same conclusion. Apparently, it is only the Chancellor who has the information. He should pass it on to all of the learned

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

bodies. I did appreciate the right hon. and learned Gentleman giving way, but I am afraid that his answer was totally unsatisfactory.

8.11 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): If the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) will forgive me, I shall not follow on from his remarks entirely. His was a tremendous performance which covered the entire Queen's Speech. We all write our own Queen's Speeches, and we try to commend those things which we wish to support.

I support my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) in his comments about the Ulster Unionists and their leader, and the role of the Prime Minister and those hon. Members from Ulster who have played a part in a process that is clearly of enormous importance to us all. This is almost the first autumn of my adulthood in which, through hard work and difficult circumstances, we seem to have had a tranquillity that has not been here in more than 25 years. I commend—as did my right hon. Friend—the recent winner of the *Spectator* award and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

I agree with what has been said, and these matters are difficult. I am, by instinct, a Unionist, and the thought of the United Kingdom breaking up is as antipathetic to me as anything in the political spectrum. Therefore, one is mindful of the work that the Prime Minister has done.

I know that the debate focuses on the economy, and I also refer to the remark by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that this is a country experiencing fear. The observation was made that it is not fear but anxiety, but we all know what my right hon. Friend meant by that. There is great uncertainty. The certainty of our youth—that we would have lifelong employment in one job—clearly is no longer the constancy that is faced by our constituents.

There have been tremendous changes, and a society in transition is having to address issues that have perhaps been postponed, set aside and forgotten. Not a lot has been said today in the context of the Queen's Speech about education, as one day was given over to the subject. In essence, we put our education system into tremendous turmoil and there was a time when it looked as if we were entirely dedicated to working against the grain. I have always believed in the principle—although the Whips do not agree—that we should try to work with the grain.

In the end, what are we seeking to accomplish with the changes? Are we improving that which we were before, and is that the end of it? What is the benchmark? I used to ask the former Secretary of State for Education that question, because it is important to know the objectives of the changes and revolution. We have not yet heard a Minister say that the aim of all the changes is that the standard of education and training for the average child, across all ability ranges, will match that for Denmark, Germany or any of our other major competitors. That is a formidable benchmark, because Ministers and the performance of Ministries can be judged by a more absolute definition.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development relentlessly cites how poorly we perform, yet I see that we are not moving up the charts. I have the greatest faith in the present Secretary of State for Education and believe that, by working with the profession, we can identify the benchmarks and dates by which our children will be educated and trained to the standard of our competitors.

There are common outlooks across the Floor of the House, and we are from the same nation—our "ain folk"—and have common perceptions. One such perception is that improvement in training and education is essential, and another is that the level of investment is important. The Government are, of course, endeavouring to attract inward investment as a replacement for our industry's failure to generate capital and apply it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), a distinguished barrister, closely followed his helpful and prepared notes, and I heard all the things which we have done. All through my political career, we have cited the miracle of our management of the economy. Hon. Members on both Front Benches have cited it, and I am not making a partisan point. We say all the nonsense things, such as, "Between 12.30 and 12.45 on 1 January, we had the fastest-growing economy in Europe," or alternatively, "Between March 11 and 12, for one and a half hours, we had the fastest-rising rate of exports."

Those are, in truth, meaningless comparisons. They may stir up the press, and they may be points that we can score against each other, but in truth, our lifetime's history shows an almost relentless comparative decline. We are all engaged in a powerful endeavour to change that around.

I was a student in Italy in the early 1960s. If I had said to my fellow students, "I have a vision: one day, you Italians will be as wealthy and prosperous as people in the United Kingdom," they would have thought that that was perfidious Albion speaking sweet words yet again. However, I again refer to the OECD listings and projections which state that, by 1998, either our economy will be the same size as the Italian economy or the Italian economy will be slightly larger. That transformation has happened.

As we battle our way across the Floor of the House, scoring points against the other side and concentrating on the point that it was not 12.15 to 12.30, but 12.15 to 12.29, the nation knows that it has a task in hand. I believe that that rests on certain things which are, I would argue, conservative principles which are shared across the House—a belief in the community, in the maintenance of law and order and in the profundity of our institutions. In fact, the last—the aim of maintaining our institutions—is the most dedicated task of a Government. I touch only on those points because I do not mean to abuse the Government. They have embarked on an important task, and some of their plans are right, although not all by any means—that is the nature of things.

I reflect with some glee—it may be self-satisfaction—that both the shadow Chancellor and the present Chancellor must be joining the former Chancellor in their baths singing with relief at the release from the exchange rate mechanism. I take it that it was a political fashion that three great parties, dedicated to that one belief, were prepared to bring us the consequences of fixing our exchange rate with the third most-traded currency of this

nation, which comes after the United States dollar and our own currency. We linked into that currency which represents less than half our overall balance of trade.

I recommend to the House, although I am diffident about doing this, a course through Skidelsky's second volume of "The Life of Keynes". The arguments are not unfamiliar, even in the history of the House. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there were debates on fixed exchange rates, how they were to be fixed and what mechanisms and tolerances would be allowed.

Our economy seems to follow more closely the cycles of the American economy. If we fix our parity to a currency, as we did with the deutschmark, in essence—although it was the exchange rate mechanism—it means that when we get out of kilter, as our economies were, either the exchange rate is propped up by excessive interest rates, because of the needs of the domestic economy, or the reverse happens, as we saw during the Lawson boom.

Constancy of economic management and a clear set of objectives, which are understood by all of us—for example, by small business men, such as I was before I came into the House—are extremely important. Therefore, I give a cheer that, having released ourselves from that burden, we seem to be following a consistent path. That sentiment is, it seems, shared at this moment by those on both Front Benches—they do not want to excite or damage anything that maintains a low level of inflation. Of course, that is set out in the Maastricht treaty, so they can all swear that they are merely acceding to the Maastricht conditions of convergency and that, therefore, we will be governed by that. I support the Government in that policy.

One issue of domestic legislation about which I feel strongly and which touches on another is VAT on domestic fuel. My opposition to it is not based on any grand philosophy, but as a Conservative I believe that the central theme of my party—borne out by the history of the House in the 20th century—is that there should not be regressive tax. That was explained in a rather long-winded way and I am sure that that explanation was more accurate, but, essentially, regressive taxation means that people on lower incomes pay a higher proportion of their income in tax than those on higher incomes. It is an abysmal concept.

That is why, in the early stages in the development of Community funds, budgets and VAT, those things that were absolute basic necessities, the purchase of which represents a higher proportion of expenditure for people on lower incomes, were excluded from such regressive taxation. That seems to be manifestly fair and obvious. We exempted food—I must declare at this stage that I am a grocer—because everyone has to buy it. The food bill represents a higher proportion of the family budget for those on low incomes than it does for rich people. The food budget may be trivial for the rich, but it is a substantial cost for those on lower incomes.

Now we have imposed VAT on domestic fuel and heating. It is clear that many of my constituents—honourable people who have worked through their lives, who have no occupational pension and are dependent on savings which have been eroded by inflation, because of our careers in previous incarnations in the House—are grievously affected by that VAT. All the budgetary allowances that are said to exist still do not take away from the basic question, "Is it right or is it wrong?" People like me will say that to impose VAT, at a flat rate, on absolute necessities is wrong.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is a cheerful man and, amid the bluster, he often adopts poses. I should like to think that he has enough savvy to understand that, to ride public opinion and to take the British public with him, he must act with a sense of fairness. VAT on domestic fuel is regressive and has been perceived to be so by the nation. After all, if we cannot shout at, rail against and change policy in a democracy, what is the point?

The standing of Parliament has been debated in the House and was mentioned by the Prime Minister in his Guildhall speech. If we treat ourselves as if we are nobodies, although we are representatives of truly somebodies—our own people, remember—we are worth nothing. On Monday, we will have a debate on the finances of the European Community. We have not debated that subject since 1988—we could not because it requires a treaty change. That remarkable instrument is taxation by treaty. Somehow that is far more important than any taxation by Budget resolutions, which we shall deal with on Tuesday and subsequently. It takes all sort of precedence over the Budget.

Every year, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Government must secure the finances of the country. Every Member of the House may speak in those debates, move amendments and try to shift the Budget resolutions slightly. We all know, however, that if a Government fail to secure the finance to maintain the government of the country, they are no longer the Government.

The chairman of the 1922 Committee decided to make a constitutional intervention. He seems to think that taxation by treaty is of such paramount importance that he advised people to prepare for an election. On the face of it, that is absurd, because if there are people who are bound to maintain the revenues of Brussels it is those on the Labour and the Liberal Front Benches and, I regret to say, my own Front Bench. To suggest that Members of Parliament may not move amendments and may not honour the commitments they have given to their constituents is absurd.

For my part, my election address was particular—I know that I am not alone in that. It said that I did not believe in the Maastricht treaty and the arrangements that followed for it. I made it clear that I would not vote for citizenship for my fellow citizens. That is a decision so profound that only we as individuals can make such a step through a referendum. The House will know that, during the Maastricht debate, there was hardly anything in the treaty that I could support, because it purports to something that has never been put to the British people—that they should be subordinate constituents of another political organisation. My goodness, I have difficulty enough ever convincing colleagues on my own Front Bench to change a policy, but now power, decisions and laws flitter outside my grasp. I may rail here, but where do I sound? No common language exists, nor common Parliament that can reflect the visions, angers, frustrations and outlook of the British people, my own people.

I am told that the whip will be withdrawn on Monday should I move an amendment or not vote in support of the European Communities (Finance) Bill. I cannot believe that a Government of whom I am a supporter, a party that touches deep into the nature of our people, as

[Mr. Richard Shepherd]

does the Labour party, put above the imposition of tax on the people of this country through VAT on domestic fuel, the securing of funds through a treaty for another organisation. I cannot believe that the Government are prepared to do that without being prepared to allow Parliament to exercise the scrutiny and allow the freedom of speech that we expect and demand on the budget of the United Kingdom. It is a curious twist to me. What is the call that puts that demand above our own exigencies and needs?

I am mindful that train fares are going up. They are now so unaffordable that one almost has to take a mortgage out to go to Birmingham. My commuters who must travel will find that their incomes will be squeezed, but that is considered to be of lesser importance than supplying funds to Brussels. I cannot understand that when I try to explain it to my constituents. Why is it that I cannot debate the subject of that money? My constituents do not understand the imperative that makes the Bill the most supreme piece of legislation in the whole programme, which threatens the absurdity of a general election and the withdrawal of the whip. It is a curious balance, which I do not understand.

If we are to stand and reclaim our fortunes with the electorate, it can only be on the basis that we represent someone and something. There has never been a time in living memory when an Administration has been so low in the standing of the people it governs. For me as a Conservative, it is a very important task to reverse that. That is why we cry out.

As for the memorandum from Mr. John Maples, which has been published, I do not know a Conservative Member who has not written large chunks of similar words over the past year. That had no effect, alas, but we will make sure that the views of the people are represented and argued for, because we can make something of them.

I hope that, in the winding-up speech, that fellow traveller of mine for an award by *The Spectator* will be able to say that it is absurd to try to restrict the freedom of speech of his Conservative colleagues by the threat of the withdrawal of the whip.

8.27 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). In the short time that I have been a Member of the House, I have always found his speeches to be full of integrity, passion and independence of thought. That is to be commended and I genuinely appreciated his speech tonight.

In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings), I enjoyed the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). I joined the Labour party because of him, so it was interesting to find that I agreed with him about everything. I am not sure whether I have moved to the right or he has moved to the left, but somewhere down the line there has been a shift in opinion.

The case against the Government on the economy is clear and straightforward. The Gracious Speech covers a number of issues that promise more of the same on the economy, which means a poor deal for my constituents.

Under this Government, millions of British people now face reduced living standards. Tax rises from this tax-cutting Government are being pushed through to pay for economic mismanagement. Unemployment continues to be tolerated, while skill levels are ignored. Each year, £25 billion of taxpayers' money is wasted on unemployment rather put to positive use to create jobs and a better society. Many thousands of people, including many of my constituents, are forced into poverty pay while the Government ignore and, as we have seen this evening, effectively tolerate massive pay rises for executives of privatised companies and others.

The burden of the Government's failure falls on those who are least able to pay. Under the Gracious Speech, public spending will be dramatically reduced and, while much of the Government's policy is deliberate, incompetence still plays a large part in their policy failures.

A Labour Member is expected to criticise the Government, but we have heard much today about what the former hon. Member for Lewisham, West, Mr. John Maples, said in his new role as deputy chairman of the Conservative party. He is a former Treasury man and if we are now going down the pan perhaps he should be given the credit for our reaching this state.

The report, which has been heavily leaked, includes a number of interesting quotes about the state of the economy, to which the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills referred. I hope that I shall not score too many points by agreeing with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Maples said:

"What we are saying on the economy is completely at odds with experience."

We can all agree with that. He continued:

"The reality is now that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest who are getting poorer".

Every Labour Member in the House agrees with that. He went on:

"The Conservatives have let voters down, they have been in government too long, are complacent, have lost direction, and have failed to fulfil election promises."

What an epitaph for that former Conservative Member, who paid the price at the 1992 general election. I understand that he is now seeking a place in the House as the possible candidate for the constituency of Woking. He might be better getting a job as a gravedigger.

John Maples is not alone in his views. Today's issue of *The Economist* covers a number of points that compound the Government's current woes. In the latest economic forecast for Britain, it says that the best is over and that the economy will decelerate in 1995, living standards will slip, falls in unemployment will slow to a crawl and the country will slide back to its traditional place near the bottom of the international pile. Incidentally, *The Economist* is edited by the hon. Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), who may apply for a job as deputy chairman of the Conservative party in the near future.

One aspect of the Chancellor's opening speech that I found interesting was that he did not seem to realise that the Government have been in power since 1979. All the points that he made related to the past three months, the past six months or the past nine months—perhaps the past quarter of an hour on the clock, as the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said earlier. May I put the

Government's economic performance in the context of the past 15 years and thus illustrate the enormity of their failure?

Government investment has been lower than that of any other G7 country during the 1979-93 period. Exports have seen their lowest rate of growth since 1979. On skills training, we have the second lowest number of 18-year-olds in further education of all OECD nations, with the exception of Turkey. This year, £119 million has been cut from the training budget, and £400 million has been cut from the training budget in the past three years.

The number of people out of work for more than a year has increased by 50 per cent. to almost 1 million since 1979. Despite recent falls in unemployment, which we all welcome, 2.6 million people are still out of work in Britain. Perhaps the most damaging statistic of all is on poverty, which is a serious issue in my constituency. Since 1979, the number of families with incomes below half the national average has increased from 5 million to 13.9 million. That statistic brings home the misery caused by the Government's economic failure during their period in office.

We still have a trade deficit of £6.1 billion, which, according to Treasury forecasts, will rise to £7.5 billion in 1995. To pay for their prolonged economic failure, the Government in the Gracious Speech make clear commitments for continued public spending cuts and, in next week's Budget and beyond, they plan to impose massive tax rises. What Mr. Maples did not mention is that this is a Government of "pay more and get less". Even before the forthcoming Budget we shall see tax rises in the form of increased national insurance, VAT on fuel, home insurance, car insurance and on mortgage tax relief, with allowances frozen.

For an economy of which the Conservative party are so proud, the tax bombshell which the last election was supposed to bring has brought a Tory tax bombshell of a 7p rise in the effective rates of income tax.

As has been said by many hon. Friends, the most iniquitous issue is that of VAT on fuel. Last Saturday, my local Labour party submitted 6,000 postcards calling on the Government to stop VAT on fuel to houses in my constituency of Delyn. By today, 750 postcards had been returned to me, duly stamped, by constituents who are concerned about the iniquities of that tax.

That protest is in addition to petitions and the general concern that has been expressed about VAT. Every hon. Member knows that people do not send postcards in that number back to their Member of Parliament unless they feel extremely strongly about an issue. I hope that, if we achieve nothing else this evening, we can have a commitment from the Government that that tax will be stopped.

If it cannot be stopped for domestic customers, I hope that the Treasury will at least say something about the effect that it will have on charities. This morning I received a letter from a constituent representing a church. He complains bitterly about the tax on charities, which cannot claim back that taxation.

Perhaps we should not be upset about that tax but should expect it from a Government who have now imposed tax rises from 34.3 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1979 when my party left office to 37 per cent. of GDP in 1995-96. As has already been said, the taxes are unfair and regressive because anyone who earns £64,000 a year or more now pays less tax than in 1979 whereas nobody earning less than £64,000 a year pays less tax.

We have also seen public spending cuts on schools, housing and training. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) said in his speech, the pension age for women is to go up. The Conservatives are giving us less for more because of their basic economic failures. The experience of my constituency in north Wales is very much in line with the thoughts of chairman Maples. I want a strong Wales and a strong Delyn constituency, but the position is drastically affected by the Government's economic policies. North Wales has experienced the loss of its economic and industrial base. We have lost textile, steel and coal industries. When I was selected as the candidate for my seat seven years ago, 800 people worked in the coal mining industry in my constituency. Today, less than 160 people work in that industry.

Only today, I received a letter from British Aerospace on the borders of my constituency telling me of a further 200 redundancies. The Government's so-called "economic miracle" is missing my constituency and those whom I represent are paying for the Government's economic failures with their jobs, their livelihoods and tax rises. In my constituency, a quarter of 18 to 24-year-olds are unemployed and 2,500 people who remain unemployed face the job seekers' allowance, which is the only economic measure that the Government can bring forward with confidence. Massive blows have been dealt to the local economy with the transfer of jobs back to America and the deindustrialisation of Raytheon Jets, a British company which has produced British aircraft for many years but which has now been shipped back to America by a purchase on the free market.

My constituency remains among the lowest paid regions in the United Kingdom. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) is in his place, because I read yesterday, with great interest, the figures that he produced from the House of Commons Library. In Wales, 40 per cent. of the work force earn below 68 per cent. of average United Kingdom earnings—the decency threshold—and Wales is at the bottom of the pay league in Europe. How does that compare with the Government's attitude to chief executives of major companies in the private and public sector? I refer the Minister to early-day motion 87, which has been signed by a number of hon. Members present today.

In the past year, salaries of chief executives have on average increased to £208,000 per annum—an increase of £50,000 per annum on 1993. The Prime Minister has exhorted companies to continue to exercise restraint and to continue to exercise control on chief executives' salaries, yet overall there was a £50,000 increase in the average salaries paid to chief executives between July 1993 and July 1994. That statistic does not take into account British Gas's chief executive, Cedric Brown.

I should not be surprised because, since 1979, the top 1 per cent. of British taxpayers have received 30 per cent. of the tax cuts available, from £75 billion in tax cuts paid to those richest sections of our community. I am surprised, however, at the complete failure of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to condemn those pay increases adequately this afternoon, and to call for further regulation by the Government of shareholders' ability to authorise such pay rises at the moment.

[Mr. David Hanson]

We need a radical shift in policy. We need to consider a range of issues to raise the profile of a strong economy and to rebuild that economy for our people. We need to ensure that we release capital receipts to boost housing, because housing is needed for our people. We need to ensure that there is long-term, Government-led investment in infrastructure, in rail and capital health and education projects. We need to ensure that there is a real skills boost for training and a job guarantee for school leavers. We need to ensure that there is public spending on energy efficiency and environmental improvements—on the things that people need.

The one thing that surprises me in the Gracious Speech is the Government's commitment to reduce the national share of income taken by the public sector and public spending. Public spending provides things that people need. It provides jobs and investment, and we should seek to increase it in the future. We need social justice, we need a minimum wage for Wales and we need to take steps to tackle the salaries of chief executives. We need to ensure that there is fairness and justice in our tax system, that value added tax increases are stopped and that windfall taxes are imposed on the profits of privatised utilities.

We need to ensure that there is fairness in our approach to society. It is blatantly not fair for chief executives to increase their salaries, week in, week out, at the same time as the Government abolish wages councils, do not allow a minimum wage and continue to force people into low-paid, low-skilled employment. It is not fair to have regressive taxation, such as value added tax on fuel, when people in the richest sections of our community are receiving massive tax handouts.

We need to start to tackle unemployment and poverty, not attack unemployed people and poor people. That is why the Government are wrong, that is why they will face a vote this evening on the amendments and that is why I will be proud to support my colleagues in the Lobby.

8.43 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson), who spoke forcefully about matters that he regards as being important to his constituents. I am sure that they would be pleased to hear him speaking forcefully. I do not know whether Opposition Front Benchers will be quite so happy with what he said.

It sounded very much as though the hon. Member for Delyn was making a strong plea for higher taxation for its own sake and to fund extra public expenditure commitments. Opposition Front Benchers appear hesitant about that. I am not sure that they will welcome the large increases in taxation that will be necessitated by that.

It is a great pleasure to follow some of the distinguished speeches that we heard earlier, and to follow a former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), and an experienced Member of the House, who spoke forcefully and from conviction, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd).

If I may, with some temerity as a junior Member of the House, I shall follow what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said. Two points in his speech struck a special chord—first about the standing of Parliament and, secondly, about the fear of unemployment.

As for the standing of Parliament, I hope that I shall not be unduly partisan if I say that, had I been one of the television viewers whom my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup took as an example, I would have been somewhat surprised by the debate—at least by the way in which it began. It was supposed to be a debate about economic policy.

As I listened to the opening speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), I waited and waited for mention of economic policy, but very little came. We had a tour around identity cards, executive pay and the public utilities, and we certainly had a lot of the flotsam and jetsam of political tittle-tattle, but we heard little about economic policy. Whenever the hon. Gentleman mentioned economic policy, he moved on as though he had touched on something that was extremely dangerous for him.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup mentioned the fear of unemployment. I think that it is important, although I take some issue with the way in which it has been presented to the House because it is the political fashion of the moment to talk about fear of unemployment. Undoubtedly, such fear exists. It has been driven by profound economic changes that are taking place in the world economy, with changes in technology, developments in technology, developments in the economic process and the rise of new and competitive economies.

That has not happened overnight. It was happening long before the pundits of political fashion started talking about fear of unemployment, and it will continue to take place long after they have stopped. I know from my constituency, Hertsmere, that the fear of unemployment was at the forefront of electors' minds at the last general election. My constituency was one of those parts of the south-east that was touched by the recession for the first time after a long period of economic growth and prosperity. I know that that is very much on my constituents' minds.

At the last general election, my constituents wanted policies that would reduce unemployment, and I am pleased to say that since then unemployment in my constituency has fallen by about 20 per cent. There are now 700 more people in jobs, and I very much hope that unemployment will continue to fall.

What is the answer to the fear of unemployment? We cannot turn back the important changes that have taken place in the world. Even though people are in jobs, people are changing jobs more often and job security is not what it was, and that worries people.

As people enter the work force, we must educate and equip them for the changes in technology and in working conditions that they will experience throughout their working lives. I welcome the profound changes that have taken place in education in the past 15 years. The huge increase in the proportion of young people entering higher education must help in meeting that economic change; so too must the revolution that is taking place in vocational

education, and the great importance that has been attached to that through the introduction of national vocational qualifications and general national vocational qualifications. I welcome those developments, which will help my constituents a great deal.

Although there is no mention of new legislative measures for education in the Gracious Speech, I welcome the fact that legislation that we have enacted is driving on a process of reform in education, raising standards and creating new opportunities. I am pleased to see that the Labour party is at last responding to those changes. It must be ironic for the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) that her opposition and hostility to league tables has now been ditched. I look forward to Opposition Members being dragged kicking and screaming towards other reforms that are definitely helping to raise standards.

I hope that the Labour party will reconsider its hostility to grant-maintained schools and assisted places. I feel strongly about that scheme because, as a result of it, many hundreds of children from lower-income families in my constituency now have the benefit of being able to choose an independent education. One way that we must deal with big economic changes is through improving education and revolutionising our attitude to skills and training. The second way to deal with the changes is to create sustainable long-term growth. Even if we have an increasingly well-educated and well-trained work force, they will still suffer if the economic policies are not in place to create sustainable growth, which is such an important part of our future.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East mentioned sustainable growth once in his speech and then passed on rapidly. He may feel a certain discomfort in talking about sustainable growth. Even bearing in mind the strictures of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills about economic policy and its transience, it is important to keep in place the conditions that are making our industries and businesses more prosperous and profitable, and providing jobs for so many of our constituents. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East would have done far better to devote more attention in his speech to the conditions for sustainable economic growth and the sort of policies that will nurture it.

Earlier in this Parliament Opposition Members started to talk about some of the constraints on economic policy that traditionally limit economic growth in this country, and have done so for a long period—problems of inflation and balance of payments constraints. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not mention trade. Conservatives can take some satisfaction from the fact that we have introduced policies that are resulting in high growth and low inflation. Although it may be painful, I urge Ministers to keep taking important long-term decisions to keep inflation down. That may be mundane, but it is extremely important because so many times in our recent economic history—certainly up to 1979—growth has been achieved and then blown off course by inflation after a short period.

It is also important that we should maintain our good balance of trade. Opposition Members have devoted little time to that. Exports are performing well—a fact that bears repetition. Much encouragement can be drawn from the recent good news on exports and our future prospects. That may have a good deal to do with our present competitive exchange rate. Once again, I accept the economic views of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills—certainly our increasingly competitive exchange rates have been a factor in promoting exports.

Our position is also explained by the underlying strength of the economy—the strength in the real economy, manufacturing, production and investment has been reflected in our balance of payments figures. Some measure of the underlying strength of our economy and the successful conditions now in place is reflected in the high level of inward investment in this country. Overseas investors come to this country, see that it is a good place to set up in business, produce and expand, and in turn make a definite contribution to our exports and balance of payments.

I welcome the fact that 36 per cent. of all inward investment in the European Community comes into this country. I also welcome the fact that some of it is at last finding its way to my constituency. Various firms from Germany, the United States and other parts of the world are choosing to set up in Hertfordshire and helping to create employment. Many hundreds of the jobs that have been created in my constituency since 1992 are no doubt due to inward investment. I strongly urge my right hon. Friends to keep in place those policies that are doing so much to stimulate inward investment, which is a tribute to the strength of our economy.

Rather than talk about sustainable growth, Opposition Members, particularly the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, spent much time talking about the so-called windfall tax and attacking public utilities. Since the election of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) as Leader of the Opposition, we have heard a great deal about new Labour. One of the propositions said to apply to new Labour is that it is friendlier to the market than old Labour, with its tradition of clause IV, high taxation and excessive regulation. But there is not much evidence of that in Opposition Members' approach to the windfall tax.

The best form of regulation of the utilities is competition wherever possible. For that reason I welcome the proposal in the Queen's Speech for the liberalisation of the gas industry. Where competition is not possible, regulation must be applied, but it must be done in such a way as to enable profits to be made and investment to take place. Opposition Members show no enthusiasm for extending and promoting competition and do not talk of regulation; their first instinct is to reach for taxation. That is their answer to the problem, but is it the right one? What effect would taxation have on the privatised utilities?

Those utilities are already regulated, and subject to ordinary levels of corporation tax and other taxation. The effect on them of more taxation would undoubtedly be to take away all incentive to invest and seek a return on capital. It would take away all incentive to keep down cost, innovate and manage affairs efficiently. The effect would be to depress investment in the utilities and depress their performance in providing customer service and lower prices.

We have had an artificial debate about the utilities, but we should not lose sight of the progress made by the privatised utilities in providing better services at lower cost and passing on benefits to the consumer. The Opposition have not attacked any of those aspects of the performance of the privatised utilities, but have attacked executive pay. That illustrates Labour's basic hostility to the market economy.

[Mr. James Clappison]

The reasons for Labour's policy run deeper, though. The Opposition face their traditional problem of how to fund public expenditure. The trap that they face—higher taxation for higher public expenditure—has been avoided, they believe, by their series of gimmicks and irrelevant ideas such as the windfall tax. That problem will come back to haunt the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East after his speech today. The Opposition will just have to face up to the fact that their commitment to increasing public expenditure will inevitably mean higher taxes. There is no way out through gimmicks.

The Opposition must also face up to the fact that ours is a growing economy, in which people are going back into jobs and paying tax instead of receiving benefits. We have a policy framework which is achieving economic growth. If the Opposition want any credibility, it is incumbent on them to say how they will change our policies, how they could do any better and how they can avoid the risks associated with their traditional ways of managing the economy, which amount to lower growth, higher inflation and higher taxation. Those problems remain for the Opposition to confront.

After all the flotsam and jetsam that we heard from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East today, after all the lighthearted banter, the Opposition still have to face up to some serious policy decisions, which they conspicuously failed to do in today's debate.

8.59 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I should like to comment on many aspects of the Gracious Speech, but I shall confine my remarks to those parts of it that relate to the conduct of economic and monetary policy in the United Kingdom. First, however, I should like to comment on some of the excellent speeches made in the Chamber today. I think in particular of certain speeches by Conservative Members.

I strongly agreed with what the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said about unemployment and the rising tide of insecurity that is overtaking so many communities. His remarks were highly pertinent and they threw into stark relief some of the more bumptious comments by the Chancellor.

I also strongly agreed with what the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) said about the need to win the battle against drugs and drug-related crime. We know that in many countries around the world crime is having a measurable effect on economic activity. Furthermore, I strongly agreed with what the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said about the need to avoid the second stage of the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. I am sure that, if that question were to be resolved by a free vote in the House, there would be no majority for the Government's policy.

It was clear from the Queen's Speech and from speeches by Conservative Members tonight that the Government have committed themselves to a continuation of current economic and monetary policies. The Chancellor painted a rosy picture of the economy, but it is important to appreciate the full impact of what John Maples, deputy chairman of the Conservative party, had to say on the subject: that there is a gulf between what Ministers say about the economy and what our constituents experience.

There have been, to be sure, some welcome developments in the UK's performance. I think of the fall in unemployment—although there are real arguments about how many new jobs have really been created in the past two years. I think also of the continuing low level of inflation and the increases in output. All these are welcome, but we need to take into account, too, the advice of many economists, who maintain that, although there have been positive developments in the economy, they relate exclusively to macro-economic statistics. Everyone knows that the British economy continues to suffer from a number of serious structural problems.

Behind this cyclical recovery there are continuing difficulties: low levels of investment, increasing job insecurity and—despite what the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) may say—problems to do with the quality of certain supply side measures, especially those that relate to training and education. So, although there may be signs of improvement in the economy, they should not be allowed to mask the continuing difficulties that British business and our constituents will experience in the years ahead.

There has been a great deal of comment in this debate on the Maples memorandum. It is important to remind ourselves of the observations by the deputy chairman of the Conservative party on the Government's record. It is a rather miserable audit of the Government's credibility and their stance on the economy. Mr. Maples says that most people believe that the Government are

"out of touch, lying, don't care, . . . are stupid".

He also draws attention to the fact that previously strong Conservative supporters complain:

"There is a feeling of powerlessness and insecurity about jobs, housing, health service, business, family value, crime . . . and no vision of where we are heading . . . Very few people think we are out of recession."

For obvious, partisan reasons, the Chancellor of the Exchequer thinks that we are. We cannot have sensible debate about the economy and economic policy by ignoring the difficulties that have still to be overcome.

The Government's economic policy has been characterised by boom and bust. Booms, which are usually short term, are followed by ever-deepening recessions. Since 1979, Conservative Government has been characterised by unacceptably high unemployment. Those years have been marked by increasing signs of social division. There have been significant reductions in manufacturing capacity and a completely inadequate approach to training and vocational education.

To examine the first of those three significant structural economic problems, let us look first at investment, which is still 8 per cent. below its pre-recession level. In the period 1979 to 1993, the United Kingdom invested a smaller proportion of GDP than any other G7 country. Although the annual rate of investment increased by 5.4 per cent. in the second quarter of 1994, it was lower than in the previous quarter. That percentage is largely accounted for by an anomalous low figure in the second quarter of 1993.

Many hon. Members will have noticed that last week there was evidence that manufacturing investment is still not increasing. It fell in the third quarter of this year. Spending on plant and machinery, which is fundamental

to maintaining competitiveness and building for the new markets of the 21st century, rose barely at all in that quarter. It was little different from the amount invested a year ago. That must be set against the background of record cash surpluses being held by leading British companies. It now amounts to £9.5 billion, but investment in manufacturing plant and equipment remains static. That is worrying and it should worry the Government.

Rolls-Royce is one of our key industrial companies, but last week it announced that the future for car engine manufacture in the United Kingdom will depend upon finding a foreign partner to support its investment programme. There is much talk that that partner could be Mercedes. Rover has been sold to a foreign car manufacturer. That paints a more realistic picture of some of the continuing problems on investment.

Hon. Members may have seen in *The Observer* an interesting survey of recently established small businesses. More than 700 such businesses were surveyed and some of the findings are significant. One of them was that five times as many service companies are being established as are companies producing goods. I have nothing against the service sector. It employs millions of people and provides essential employment throughout the country, but it is clear that our manufacturing base continues to shrink. That is clearly evidenced by the number of new businesses that have been set up in the manufacturing sector.

Another significant indictment is the fact that 73 per cent. of the small businesses that were surveyed in *The Observer* survey felt that the Government were not providing enough help to set up small businesses. Only one third of the companies surveyed had heard of the Government's enterprise investment scheme, which is supposed to act as a sort of business angel to attract private capital into small businesses. There has been considerable progress, but we should, and could, be taking additional measures to help those small businesses which are so important for the future of the United Kingdom economy.

Before leaving the subject of investment, let me say something about the shipbuilding industry, which is of particular importance in my constituency. Employment in the VSEL yard stood at more than 14,500 in 1990. It was, without question, the largest and most significant employer in the south Cumbria area. That figure has fallen to below 6,000 in less than four years and all the available evidence suggests that it may fall further. There have been significant job losses throughout the shipbuilding communities in Britain—in particular, because of the deplorable closure of the Swan Hunter yard in Tyneside, which could have been avoided had the Government shown any commitment to the shipbuilding industry.

The shipbuilding industry is not a smoke-stack industry; it is not an industry of the past; it is not about dragging heavy objects over steel floors and men wearing hobnail boots. It is a high-tech industry with some of the most recent investment in plant, equipment and machine tools anywhere in the heavy engineering sector of the United Kingdom economy, but it is still struggling and facing significant job losses.

The Government should first recognise the importance of the shipbuilding industry to the manufacturing economy, but they should go further than that and recognise that the technologies associated with shipbuilding can play a important part in reviving our manufacturing base and providing new jobs for the future.

In that context, the Government must clarify their policy towards the shipbuilding industry. We know that the seventh directive is to expire at the end of the year and we have had some suggestion from the President of the Board of Trade that the Government intend to maintain the shipbuilding intervention fund at a 9 per cent. subsidy throughout 1995. It is important that they do that until there can be full and comprehensive implementation of the OECD agreement on state subsidies to shipbuilding.

In addition, the Government could take a more significant step to help the merchant shipbuilding industry in the United Kingdom by improving the home shipbuilding credit guarantee scheme operated by the Department of Trade and Industry.

At the moment, a company that wants to secure the construction of a new merchant ship in the United Kingdom has access to guaranteed loans and a low rate of commercial interest on those loans, but the loan has to be repaid within the fixed period of eight and a half years. That compares unfavourably with similar regimes operated in many other OECD nations, particularly the United States.

The Government and the DTI can examine the scheme without needing to bring any further legislation to the House. They should ask themselves whether the loan period could be extended and whether it would be reasonable in the circumstances, and against a background of an expected substantial increase in the volume of demand for merchant shipbuilding in the European Union, for the Government to adopt a more generous approach to that loan guarantee period. Shipbuilding and ship repair associations are urging the Government to move to a 12-year loan repayment period. That would offer the prospect of many United Kingdom yards securing extra valuable business.

The shipbuilding industry therefore reflects and provides a example of where the Government have gone wrong on manufacturing. It is a modern industry. It is capable of competing with the best yards in the world and Europe. Many United Kingdom merchant shipbuilding yards are among the most efficient and viable yards anywhere in western Europe. I hope that the Government look seriously at a range of measures—two of which I have mentioned tonight—to help the merchant shipbuilding industry in the United Kingdom get on with the rest of its life and prosper into the 21st century.

Another area where there is significant reason for concern and for reservations about the conduct of United Kingdom economic policy concerns an issue referred to by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup—the growing tide of job insecurity that is plaguing many communities in the United Kingdom. It is ironic that the Government's policy of labour market flexibility which the Secretary of State for Employment has been trumpeting recently may be one reason why there is no feel-good factor in the British economy.

The Government have pointed to signs of recovery in the economy, but our constituents cannot see those signs. There is no evidence that people feel better off. In fact, people feel that they are under increasing financial

[Mr. John Hutton]

pressure. They are worried about losing their jobs. They know that the welfare state is being attacked and that employment rights are constantly being undermined.

The policy of labour market flexibility is a problem for the Government because it is compounding those feelings of insecurity. It is also encouraging a neglect of proper training and investment in our work force. Quite simply, that policy has misfired. There must be a balance between social justice and economic efficiency, but the Government have moved the balance between those two issues too far in one direction. Successful economies around the world, particularly in western Europe, have shown that it is possible to combine higher levels of social protection and improved economic performance. Germany and Japan provide good examples of that.

We should bear in mind the comments of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that it is important that we recognise the limits of private enterprise in dealing with some of the huge problems associated with regularly retraining our industrial work force. It is unreasonable to expect the private sector to cope with those huge problems on its own. We need a greater and improved commitment from the Government. The Department of Employment's budget reveals that expenditure on industrial training is likely to fall.

We should be pursuing policies that will enable those on welfare to find a way back into full and relevant employment. The challenge for the Government is not to find ways to dismantle the welfare state—which is what the Government seem to have set themselves as their principal objective—but to find ways to modernise the welfare state and make it more relevant to the needs of people who find themselves, through no fault of their own, out of work.

With regard to the job seeker's allowance and the possible threat to industrial injuries benefit, to which the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup referred, the agenda in the Queen's Speech is bleak. It is also irrelevant, because the Government's task is to promote not greater feelings of insecurity but more social cohesion. Through the promotion of greater forms of social cohesion, the problems that we are experiencing with the British economy and the lack of the feel-good factor could well be addressed successfully. In addition, the taxpayer has to foot a huge and irrelevant bill for expenditure which should not have been incurred. I believe that we can do considerably better than that.

If we look back over the past 12 months and consider the achievements that the Government have claimed for themselves in respect of the conduct of economic policy, I believe that we can conclude that the Government could have done better. The signposts that the Chancellor of the Exchequer laid before us today as providing evidence of the Government's success are much more mixed than he wanted us to believe.

The evidence is mixed. There is a considerable area in respect of which the Government can make improvements across the spectrum of the conduct of economic policy. I urge my colleagues to support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to show that we believe that the British people deserve better than this.

9.18 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): The final day in the debate on the Queen's Speech began with discussions on the economy and it ranged very widely, as is inevitable on such occasions. I must admit that, two hours ago, I considered asking the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) if I could re-run some of his remarks instead of making my own speech as I thought that his comments were very pertinent to many of the problems that the country is facing. I was particularly interested in the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the salary of the chairman of British Gas and the agony of the large number of his constituents who are affected by the Child Support Agency. In particular, I draw the attention of the House to what the right hon. Gentleman said about the fears and insecurity facing the people of Britain at present.

Other hon. Members have also struck a chord. My hon. Friends the Members for Easington (Mr. Cummings) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) spoke in detail and with great feeling about the way in which their communities have suffered from the colliery closure programme and the Government's insensitivity to their plight. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) made a strong, passionate speech about how his constituency has been affected by major problems in the national health service. My hon. Friends' speeches will be appreciated.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer hid behind the need to preserve Budget secrecy as a reason for refusing to answer any vital questions. My suspicion is that the Budget, when we see it, will have as little relevance to this country's problems as the Queen's Speech has. Indeed, I expect it to be in line with the Chancellor's overall strategy of keeping his head down and looking for a way of selling the remains of the family silver so that he can fund temporary tax cuts at the time of the election.

I saw no sign in the Chancellor's speech that he is heeding the advice of the deputy chairman of the Conservative party. There was an absence of killer facts, as we have been told to expect, in what the Chancellor said—except perhaps the one potentially suicidal statement which might come back to haunt him in future. The Chancellor said that he could not have imagined a better economic background against which to introduce his Budget—what a hostage to fortune, especially as he explained a few minutes later that we should not take too much notice of estimates because the outturns are always different. If we take the Chancellor's statement at face value, and if everything is as good as he claims, there will be no need to double VAT on fuel on Tuesday.

We shall remind the Chancellor of his remarks today on many occasions in the coming year. We shall see whether he is right, or whether *The Economist* is right to predict that the economy will decelerate in 1995, with living standards slipping and with falls in unemployment slowing to a crawl. Perhaps we should not have expected much of substance from the Chancellor, who was distinctly uncomfortable this afternoon, especially when reminded of his comments about the lack of value that we should attach to promises made in Dudley—another remark that we shall hear more about in the next couple of weeks.

By contrast, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has outlined the purpose of our amendment—the

"positive measures to remove the fear of unemployment"

and to reduce unemployment. My hon. Friend outlined a programme of measures which could make an enormous difference in a very short period. They are designed to meet the need to release capital receipts, the need for a small business expansion scheme, the need for an environmental task force, and the need for tax rebates for employers who take on the long-term unemployed. In short, it was a constructive package of positive measures to which the Chancellor of the Exchequer would do well to listen, because the country would certainly support them.

Many people watched the state opening of Parliament on television. Some watched for an insight into the workings of Parliament, some for the pomp and pageantry, and some to hear the content of the Gracious Speech. This year, those who watched and listened were left with a common thought: "Is that it? Is that all? Is that the extent of the Government's solution to the problems that Britain faces?" Was that all that Her Majesty's Government believed needed to be done—all that they were offering? If this year's Queen's Speech represents the collective wisdom of the Cabinet, the poverty of its content proves that the Government have run out of steam.

Given the Government's record in the past 15 years, it might be considered a blessing if Ministers intended to start twiddling their thumbs for the next year—a relief not to have more so-called radical legislation. That might not matter so much, were it not for the desperate problems faced by so many people: unemployment, fear of job losses and the prevalence of temporary contracts are all breeding insecurity, as is the fear of crime and the loss of confidence in our health service. There are no answers to those problems in the Queen's Speech.

What the Queen's Speech tells us is that the Government are completely out of touch with the needs of the country and the priorities of its people. Not only Opposition Members believe that; Conservative Members who read *The Daily Telegraph*, as I am sure that many do, will have read the comment that the

"legislative proposals and policy initiatives were so insubstantial that one wondered why it was necessary for Her Majesty to drive down Whitehall to deliver it."

Nothing that we have heard in the past few days has done other than confirm that view.

The Government should be tackling unemployment; instead, they attack the unemployed. They should be reducing the need for people to claim benefit; instead, they reduce the rights of claimants. They should be tackling the problems of the Child Support Agency, not sweeping them under the carpet. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North pointed out, the Government should be intent on improving front-line services in the national health service; instead, as the Queen's Speech tells us, they are to

"bring forward legislation to make further improvements to the management of the National Health Service".—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 6.]

We all know that every so-called reform of that kind has simply led to more bureaucrats. The number has increased from 510 in 1986 to more than 20,000 last year, and the total administrative salary bill for the NHS is now £1.5 billion.

Mr. Gallie: The other day I visited a hospital in the constituency of one of the hon. Lady's hon. Friends, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), where I met a lady who had been advised seven weeks ago that she needed the hip replacement, which she was now in hospital to receive. That is something that the Labour party could not have dreamed of a few years ago. Does that not show that the Government are doing well in the health service and will continue to do well in other areas?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has a nerve to talk about hospital services in Scotland, where the Government have just wasted more than £30 million of taxpayers' money on a private hospital.

Our constituents do not want further improvements of that kind, which only lead to bigger bills for the administrative side of the health service. Nor are they lobbying for the privatisation of the Crown Agents, or indeed for competition in the gas industry—which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) pointed out, will result in regional monopolies in place of a national monopoly. But Labour Members—and, I am sure, Conservative Members—are hearing what our constituents think of the new surcharge on those who cannot pay their gas bills instantly. Even more, we are hearing what our constituents think about the unbelievable and outrageous increase in salary for the British Gas chairman.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Is it not the case that the regulator of the gas industry will not permit the company to increase prices to the consumers in order to pay salary rises? Those salaries have to be paid for out of the money which would otherwise go to the shareholders, who can complain about it at the next shareholders meeting if they see fit. Moreover, the 2.9 per cent. price increase is spread over the past three years and thus amounts to a rise of less than 1 per cent. a year—well below the present extremely low rate of inflation.

Mrs. Taylor: I think that the hon. Gentleman doth protest too much. If he takes that view, he cannot object to the new measures proposed by the Labour party to give new powers to the regulator. It is interesting that today and throughout this week not one Minister has condemned the increase to the chairman of British Gas—*[Interruption.]* There is condemnation and condemnation, obviously. The only Conservative Member who clearly condemned it was the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. That increase in salary is an insult to every family and every pensioner in Britain, especially when the Government are on the verge of doubling VAT on fuel and not compensating pensioners for all the increased bills that they will have to pay.

Recently, Ministers have started to complain about the cynicism of the British public. That seems to be their latest theme in countering the fact that they are doing so badly in the polls. I wonder who Ministers think is responsible for the cynicism that exists in British politics. How can Ministers promise that there will be no increase in VAT or national insurance and no reduction in

[Mrs. Taylor]

mortgage tax relief and then, when they break those promises, complain that the British public are cynical? As my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) said, do Ministers think that the British public cannot add up the costs of the tax increases that we have seen since the last election?

National insurance is up from 9 per cent. to 10 per cent. Mortgage interest tax relief has been reduced. Personal allowances have been frozen. There is a new home insurance tax, a new car insurance tax and a new airport tax on those who can afford holidays abroad. And there is VAT on fuel. Clearly, Ministers are hoping that the electorate will fall for the pre-election bribe which seems to be the sole objective of the Chancellor's economic policy.

To be fair, however—we have to be fair on these occasions—not every member of the Conservative party is totally out of touch. John Maples seems to have made a rather accurate analysis on many points. The Government would be wise to follow some of his advice—though not, of course, his advice to promote a yob culture in the Commons. The Government would be wise to follow the advice of the deputy chairman of their party to shelve the impending rise in VAT on fuel, as is Labour party policy. They would be wise to tax executive share options—also Labour party policy. They would be wise to recognise that they can never win on the NHS, especially when they promote increased bureaucracy. They would also be wise to recognise that

"Reversing Labour's 39 per cent. poll lead on education issues will be tough . . . talk of competition, budgets, management . . . triggers negative perceptions of treating education like a business."

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said in the Chamber a short while ago that many Conservative Members had been trying to get the Maples message through to Ministers but had so far failed. Perhaps they need to try harder. I heard the hon. Gentleman say that he wanted to stand by his election promises on the EC but that he has been threatened with withdrawal of the Conservative Whip if he does not line up and vote with the Government on Monday. I noted that comment with interest. We so often hear how Government Back Benchers intend to rebel, but I fear that on Monday, when it comes to the crunch, they will back down once again.

We are told in the Gracious Speech that the Government

"will continue to implement policies and programmes responsive to the needs of the individual citizen, in line with the principles of the Citizen's Charter."

That passage has received little attention from Conservative Members. I have listened to much of the debate over the past week and I am left wondering whether Conservative Members even remember that we have a citizens charter. I have not heard them praising it.

The charter must be the fastest evaporating policy that any Government have ever introduced. Conservative Back Benchers realise, if Ministers do not, that the Government have made a joke out of the word "charter". Yet on Monday the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster boasted that there are now 42 charters. The Government's citizens charter unit is so impressed with that fact that it does not even hold a copy of each of the charters, although that is perhaps not surprising when we consider how little the charters have delivered.

A cones hotline was set up costing £120,000. Yet it receives fewer than 30 calls a day. That, again, is perhaps not surprising in view of the quality of information on offer. A reporter from *The Daily Telegraph* who phoned to complain about cones choking the A21 was told that they were presumably there because of road works. As taxpayers, we are paying £120,000 for that sort of information. What a waste.

The Department of Education has not fared much better. When parents went to collect their child benefit at Post Offices this summer, they were handed a Government leaflet on school tests. A parliamentary question revealed that the Department was paying the Post Office £99,000 for that service. The leaflets were also being handed out at Argos stores and goodness knows where else. Ministers were so proud of the leaflets that they have now been withdrawn. Again, what a waste.

Ministers need to learn that charters have contributed to the cynicism of which they complain. The same is true of Government waste. Indeed, waste has become one of the most obvious features of the Government. Even today the President of the Board of Trade is sending out propaganda videos and wasting taxpayers' money. The right hon. Gentleman is sending them to every Member of this place. That is typical of the Government's priorities. They choose to spend money on propaganda videos, for example, rather than on the real issues.

Under the Tories, we have seen a waste of resources. Up to 1994, £125 billion of North sea oil revenues have been wasted. At the same time, investment in manufacturing industry is less now than it was in 1979.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: No, I have to finish in a moment.

We have had a waste of talent and of the potential of our people. That is what is so obscene about the Government.

The Chancellor and other Conservative Members have talked again today about wanting to bring public expenditure down. Yet the Queen's Speech does not even address the basic problem of public expenditure—the high cost and the waste of the public money that the Government are having to spend on unemployment. The Queen's Speech does not deal with that. Instead, its objective is primarily to keep the Tory party together.

The single theme of the Government, the theme that drives all others, is their desperation to be re-elected, at any cost to anyone. They see their re-election no longer as a means of furthering the good of the country, but as an end in itself. They have no policies whatever for the country—only a party survival strategy. That is their most fundamental flaw, worse even than the internal divisions, the policy sidesteps and the U-turns. Not even the sleazy cover-ups and fudges are more important than that.

The Government have lost their direction, their vision and their purpose. The Queen's Speech proves that they are out of touch and out of steam. That is why we shall press our amendment.

9.40 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I see that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has not yet been able to return to us tonight, but last Friday, at an earlier stage of the debate, he said that he had read

"every speech made by Conservative Home Secretaries to each Conservative party conference since 1979."

He described that as

"a numbing experience, but worth it."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 253.]

Having studied the rest of the hon. Gentleman's speech, I wondered whether the effect had worn off.

Nevertheless, impressed by the hon. Gentleman's diligence, I engaged in the somewhat similar exercise of reading all the Opposition winding-up speeches in Queen's Speech debates over the same period.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): We don't believe you.

Mr. Newton: It is true, I promise the hon. Gentleman. I was less lucky than the hon. Member for Blackburn, because in the end I was not sure whether the exercise had been worth it, but it was certainly not entirely without interest. Especially in the light of some of the policies urged in the speech by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and some other Opposition speeches, perhaps the interest lay most of all in reminding us how much the world has moved on in the intervening period.

It has not always been the shadow Leader of the House making the winding-up speech. In 1979 it was Albert Booth, a former Secretary of State for Employment, explaining the merits of the industrial relations legislation that had just given us the winter of discontent. In 1981 the late John Silkin, who was much respected on both sides of the House, explained the essential need for Britain to leave the European Economic Community in order to return to exchange controls and import controls. In 1982 it was John Silkin again, declaring that privatisation would destroy British Telecom.

That reminder of a world that now seems so long ago as to be almost beyond memory was one of the interesting things. The second one was the interesting pattern whereby every four years the speech equivalent to the one just made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury had the flavour of winding up, as the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) more or less specifically wound up his speech in 1991, with words to the effect of, "We look forward to the next Queen's Speech, because we shall write it." Those speeches were invariably followed a year later by a speech congratulating the new Conservative Leader of the House on his appointment.

Thirdly, I came across something that might interest hon. Members on both sides of the House, a quotation from an Opposition speech again made by the late John Silkin, in 1983. I shall quote—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Dewsbury will listen to this. *[Interruption.]* If I might just have the hon. Lady's attention for a moment, I am about to refer to her in a quite friendly fashion. I shall quote from the equivalent speech in 1983 to the one that she has just made.

The late John Silkin said:

"The hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) paid tribute to Ann Taylor, of whom we are very fond and whom we miss greatly. Unfortunately, I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), but I understand that it was extremely interesting, and we hope to hear from him again soon."—[*Official Report*, 29 June 1983; Vol. 44, c. 658.]

Eleven years later, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) is happily still with us, the hon. Member for Dewsbury has happily been restored to us and the House has fulfilled its wish to hear more from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard)—now the Home Secretary—most recently, of course, in this debate last Friday.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I bring the Leader of the House back to serious matters? He will know that Mr. Patrick Nicholls, a vice-chairman of the Conservative party, resigned tonight following a number of appalling statements that he made about our European partners. Can we presume to have a statement from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman can assume that there will be ample opportunity to debate European matters within a short space of time.

There is another thing that emerges, which I think the House will want me to get on to. It has become the custom of the Leader of the House in these debates to say a little about House of Commons matters. I have sought to follow that practice, despite early advice from a former colleague to the effect that I should forget all that and get on with bashing the Opposition.

Looking back on my speech on this occasion last year, I see that I was noticeably cautious—rightly, as the intervening year has shown—about the prospects for prompt early moves on modifications to our working arrangements along the lines proposed in the report of the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). I am glad to say, and most—though I know not all—in the House will be glad to hear, that tonight I feel able to be much less cautious on that front to the point at which both I and the hon. Lady, whose endorsement I have for what I am about to say, believe that we are now close to the point at which we can jointly recommend a package of changes to the House.

The House will not expect me to go into full detail tonight, since neither the nature of the occasion nor the time available would make that practicable or appropriate, and many of the report's specific proposals involve the technicalities of our procedures. But I can say that we believe that we can agree on virtually all the specific changes proposed in the report and on achieving its main strategic objectives, although not always precisely along the lines originally proposed.

In particular, we think that the timetabling of most Government Bills, as envisaged by the report, is best achieved by voluntary agreement through the usual channels, rather than by some formal mechanism, which would, in practice, be hard to distinguish from a formal guillotine. Apart from its other merits—most noticeably, the greater flexibility that it allows—that has the merit of reflecting the underlying reality that making the changes work will depend on people wanting to make them work.

I should add that we have agreed that the changes that we hope to propose should be instituted on an experimental basis for the present Session, and that we should review them towards the end of it. The formal changes required at this stage will be provided for, should the House approve them, in sessional orders rather than

[Mr. Newton]

by changes to the Standing Orders as such. The orders brought forward would include one to allow the House to choose, if it wished, to exchange some of the business that it now does at other times—including private Members' motions on some Fridays—for equivalent time in sittings on Wednesday mornings, with every effort being made by the business managers to avoid hon. Members being kept here beyond 7 o'clock on Thursdays before non-sitting Fridays.

I hope that the House will welcome that brief report, and one other point that I can make in what I shall call the spirit of Jopling. I am aware that many hon. Members have already registered that Easter next year is very late. They have asked for guidance about what that might mean for any Easter recess. I hope that it will help them if I say that, subject as ever to progress on business, I would anticipate the recess to focus on the week before Easter rather than afterwards.

Mr. Morgan: Before the right hon. Gentleman reaches his characteristically charismatic peroration, may I ask him whether he has had a chance to study the documents that the Chancellor of the Exchequer issued this afternoon concerning European Community financing? Will he take the opportunity before 10 pm to explain the following inconsistency? Last year, the Chancellor announced on page 97 of the Red Book, like a rabbit out of a hat, a cut of £1.3 billion in this year's net financial contribution to the European Community, all of which now appears to have disappeared; if one takes the figures for last year, this year and next year, the contribution to the Community is £1.3 billion higher.

Madam Speaker: Order. Interventions should be short and pertinent to the point.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was admirably clear in the remarks that he made this afternoon in response to a number of interventions during his speech. Moreover, he made it very clear that the implications of the Edinburgh agreement, for which the European Communities (Finance) Bill provides, are £75 million in the short term and £250 million towards the end of the century. He has repeatedly set out those implications and made them clear to the House.

I have no doubt that, when the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) has had more time to study the document that my right hon. and learned Friend published this afternoon, it will all be clear to him as well.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My right hon. Friend will know that a few days ago my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said on the "Today" programme that the figures I had put forward concerning Community financing were rubbish.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cash: I notice that my right hon. and learned Friend still maintains that view, so can my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House explain how it is that a new piece of information has had to be put in the Vote Office to demonstrate the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend appears to have changed his mind?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that my right hon. and learned Friend has changed his mind. He has simply done what he said this afternoon he had done—he has set out papers to make the position clear in the way that he described this afternoon.

Since the debate on the Loyal Address started, we have had many speeches that have covered the wide-ranging legislative programme. Those speeches have been made from the Front and Back Benches and started with excellent contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson). In the first of those speeches, there occurred one of those exchanges with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) which I suspect will stick in parliamentary memories long after the arguments of the day have become hazy.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What happened?

Mr. Newton: I shall readily remind the hon. Gentleman of what occurred. The exchange was as follows:

"**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): He is a retread.

Mr. Dunn: I heard a pip squeak."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 8.]

That is one of those exchanges which I believe deserves to be taken out of *Hansard* and framed.

In due course, some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in relation to education reforms and what the hon. Member for Dewsbury said about the citizens charter might be taken out of *Hansard* and framed. To be told by the hon. Gentleman that our education reforms have failed, when the Labour Front-Bench spokesman has just announced the Opposition's conversion to a major part of them, and to be told by the hon. Lady that the citizens charter has failed, when education league tables were a key feature of it, practically beggars belief.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the Leader of the House explain why the Secretary of State for Education has dropped league tables for seven, 11 and 14-year-olds and has now said that crude examination league tables at the age of 16 are not useful?

Mr. Newton: That is plain smokescreen stuff. As with almost every previous education reform, the Labour party has spent two or three years denouncing the present reform and has then announced its conversion to it. That has happened this week and the hon. Lady will not divert attention from it.

I wish to pay tribute to a number of speeches in today's debate by Front and Back-Bench Members on both sides of the House. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) made a speech of impressive dignity and thoughtfulness and paid a generous tribute to the Prime Minister. He drew attention to possibly the most encouraging and important single change since the previous Queen's Speech, which is the new hope of a better future in Northern Ireland, including the hope of a better economic future there.

The speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was characteristically wide ranging and went well beyond our narrow domestic concerns. He rightly gave my right hon.

and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the credit that he deserves for the substantial improvement in our economy since the equivalent debate a year ago.

Unlike his leader, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East appears unwilling to acknowledge that an improvement has taken place. The Leader of the Opposition said:

"There is recovery and growth, and inflation is low. We welcome that."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 20.]

That is another extract from *Hansard* which could be taken out and framed because it is the first time that the Opposition have acknowledged those very facts. Whether the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is willing to recognise them, let alone welcome them, they are manifestly the reality.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer reminded us, unemployment is down by nearly 500,000, growth is making us the fastest growing economy in Europe, both this year and next, and underlying inflation is at its lowest for a quarter of a century. As the recovery proceeds, one by one the sound bites of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East turn round and bite him back. We were told that unemployment would rise and it has not; we were told that we would see a widening trade gap and we have not; we were told that we could not break "stop-go", yet it is steadily becoming clearer and clearer that the economy is now better placed to do just that than at any time in the political lifetime of most of us in the Chamber today.

If Opposition Members do not wish to look at the statistics, they have only to look at the action of overseas manufacturing investors as they vote with their feet to come and do business in Britain. Samsung is only the latest and largest example of a trend which, last year, brought 40 per cent. of all US and Japanese investment in Europe to the United Kingdom. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech at the outset, it has even brought Black and Decker to the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition.

I shall say this to the House and, not least, to the Opposition, because it picks up the key themes of the Speech on which we are concluding our debate and links back to what I said earlier: those firms would not have come to the Britain of the late 1970s, with its chaotic industrial relations, loss-making nationalised industries, and exchange and import controls extolled in Labour speeches in debates 15 years ago.

At the end of the 1970s under the last Labour Government, those firms—Toyota, Nissan, Fujitsu, Samsung and many others—would not have touched Britain with a bargepole. Moreover, they would not continue to come to Britain under the policies that Labour is extolling today: a minimum wage; a social chapter; and a persistent and insistent intervention in industry. Those companies are here, and those companies will stay, because of the policies which we have pursued and which the Gracious Speech carries forward in a wide-ranging programme of further improvements to the competitiveness of our economy and modernisations to our welfare state.

That programme meets the country's needs, will obtain the support of the House today and will build further on the economic record that is clear for all to see.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 312.

Division No. 2] **[22.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Coborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David

Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Neill, Martin
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bourn'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baker, Rt Hon K *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by're)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Straf'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sh)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hartford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, at the end of the Question, to add,

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech omits measures to promote long-term investment in the country's economic competitiveness and the advancement of individual opportunities; and calls instead for measures to improve the country's performance in education and training, a programme to increase public and private investment and implement a structure for private-public partnership, policies to close the widening gap between rich and poor, reforms to create a more pluralist system of Government and encourage more public participation in decision-making including a system of fair voting, freedom of information legislation and devolution, a strategy for positive and constructive participation in the European Union to promote the country's interests, measures to increase energy efficiency, reduce the use of pollutants and actively promote public transport, and substantive reforms to the Child Support Agency.—[*Mr. Ashdown.*]

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 32 (Calling of amendments at end of debate), That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 25, Noes 311.

Division No. 3] **[22.17 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Davis, Cynog
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Harvey, Nick
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Maddock, Diana
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Simon Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baker, Rt Hon K *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*

Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shs)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Labour Market

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I did not ask for this debate on instructions from No. 10 or from the Whips Office. If Keir Hardie had not invented the Labour party, Jeremy Beadle would have done. Labour Members surely represent the biggest practical joke ever played on the British people. It might even be funny, if the consequences for the country were not so dire.

I pay tribute to Janus—no, not Janice, but the two-headed Roman god of beginnings, after whom the month of January was named. Janus's two heads enabled him to look back to the past while facing the future. I would like to emulate that technique this evening, as I believe that we need to look to the disastrous conditions of the previous Labour Government before we can fully appreciate the miraculous achievements of the Conservative Government throughout the 1980s and 1990s in setting the foundations for an exciting future which will continue to bring prosperity to the nation.

A trip down memory lane is necessary to inform and warn an ever-growing section of the electorate who are too young to remember the Frankenstein horrors of the previous Labour Government, although the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is a passable imitation of the real thing from Count Dracula's castle—he certainly scares me—and so have little understanding of the reality of voting Labour.

To enable the Government to focus on a policy for the labour market today, they had to consider what happened during the late 1970s. Even to this day, the scars are visible for all to see. No one will forget—that lot over there would like us to forget—the previous Labour Prime Minister, having returned from a trip to sunny Barbados in January 1979, saying, "Crisis—what crisis?" The crisis, which everyone except he and his Cabinet could see, was only too evident. I could give a hundred reasons to highlight that fact, but, for the purposes of this debate, I will focus on 10.

One: rats as big as cats were running around Leicester square, where the capital's refuse was being dumped because members of the Transport and General Workers Union, supported by their sponsored Labour Members of Parliament, refused to collect the rubbish.

Two: the dead lay unburied outside our cemeteries because the TGWU, supported by sponsored Labour Members, refused to dig the graves or to let the corpses cross the picket lines.

Three: patients were not admitted to hospitals, nor were vital drugs and medicines allowed in, because the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees, again supported by sponsored Labour Members, said no. Our reforms have meant that, every week, 40,000 more patients are treated in the national health service than was the case in 1979—instead of 40,000 more union meetings.

Four: we have to remember, too, the humiliation of the Chancellor of the day, a certain Denis Healey, who boasted that he would turn the economy round. The only thing he turned round was the 747 taking him to America, because on that morning the International Monetary Fund, or, as I call it, the receiver, had refused to lend the United Kingdom any more money. In other words, we were bust, with our name being dragged through the gutters of Europe, and our national pride gone. Under Labour, Great Britain did not mean Great Britain, it meant "gone bust".

Five: who can believe now that, in 1979, one was allowed to take only £50 per year out of the country to go on holiday? Labour believed that, if it allowed any more to be taken out, it would all go overnight to foreign countries, where people's money would be safe and not subject to the ravages of inflation in the United Kingdom. While we are talking about £50, who did not pay the pensioners their £50 Christmas bonus when they were in power?

Six: who can believe now that, under the last Labour Government, inflation reached a peak of 27 per cent., and that, on a weekly shopping trip, every can of beans had acne? It was possible to peel off four or five price increase stickers—and that was just in one week.

Seven: when the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—or is it Belgravia?—regularly talks about closing pits and sacking miners, roared on by his colleagues, he should remember that facts are facts. The Labour Governments of 1964-70 and 1974-79 closed 313 pits—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We could do with a little more quiet.

Mr. Evans:—with the loss of 205,700 jobs. Between 1974 and 1979, the Labour Government were committed to expanding the market for coal; in fact, output fell by 16 per cent. in that period, from 142 million tons to 119 million. A former Labour Energy Minister, now Lord Marsh, said on 20 October 1992:

"We genuinely believed that with a benevolent mixture of good intentions and massive subsidies we could reverse"—

I repeat: reverse—

"the market trend.

My Lords, we completely misled ourselves and them."—*[Official Report, House of Lords,* 20 October 1992; Vol. 539, c. 692.]

By "them" he meant the miners.

Eight: what was the higher rate of tax in 1979? With the higher rate now at 40 per cent., it seems inconceivable to us now. Was it 50 per cent.? [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] Was it 60 per cent.? [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] Was it 70 per cent.? [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] Was it 80 per cent.? [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] Was it 90 per cent.? [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] Was it 95 per cent.? [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher.] Was it 98 per cent.? [HON. MEMBERS: "Unbelievable!"] And some of us actually managed to pay 103p in the pound.

Nine: the present leader of the Labour party tries to rewrite Labour's history in order to keep up with our agenda, having to eat his words daily. Over the past 20 years, his party has changed its mind no fewer than eight times over whether we should be in or out of Europe, and pledged allegiance to a non-nuclear defence policy. It is funny how people and times change—or is it promotion that does it?

With regard to Europe, it is worth mentioning that every member of today's shadow Cabinet, as a Member of Parliament in 1972, voted against British entry. On defence, even at this year's Labour party conference—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, may I point out that the choice of

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

topic was his, that topic being Government policy. To me, that did not suggest past Government policies. I think that the hon. Gentleman should now come to the title of his Adjournment debate.

Mr. Evans: Forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am trying to paint a picture—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I know very well what the hon. Gentleman is trying to do; I am saying that he must come to the point.

Mr. Evans: People today do not believe that 13 million days were lost under Labour in the 1970s owing to strikes, as against just under half a million lost in 1993.

Those are some of the reasons why Labour lost the general election in 1979; lost the general election in 1983; lost the general election in 1987; and lost the general election in 1992. Labour has played four and lost four. Even Graham Taylor had a better record than that as manager of the England football team.

It is a simple rule of government that, in order to fight unemployment and develop the conditions for growth, investment and job creation, it is vital that the strategy towards the labour market is built upon the foundations of solid and sensible economic policies.

The next time that that lot on the Opposition Benches have the audacity to criticise the Government's economic policy, I should like to play to them the video of the winter of discontent—strikes, inflation, taxes and misery, the four corners of socialism throughout the world.

Since 1979, it has been the task of Conservative Governments to pick up the pieces from the socialist suicide of the seventies. We like a challenge. We leave that lot on the Opposition Benches to do the whingeing. We get on with the job—and what is more, we deliver. Conservative Governments' top priority has been to reduce inflation so that business can have a firm and steady basis on which to plan and invest. We delivered.

In 1993, inflation remained below 3 per cent. for 12 months, the first time that that has happened since 1960. Inflation currently stands at 2.4 per cent., the lowest it has been for 30 years. Compare that with our international competitors. In Germany, inflation stands at 3 per cent. and in Italy it is 4.1 per cent.

We cut taxes to encourage enterprise and initiative. Since 1979, the basic rate of income tax has been brought down from 33p to 25p. Beer and sandwiches at No.10 are gone for ever. Since 1979, exports have risen by three quarters. By taming the unions, we have got the country working again, and working hard. The United Kingdom rose to the top of the productivity growth league in the 1980s, having been at the bottom in the 1960s and 1970s.

Manufacturing industry has been transformed under Conservative management. Britain is now an international leader in key sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals and telecommunications. It was only by defeating the unions that we could regain Britain's position as an industrial world leader and give British management the confidence, freedom and incentive to manage properly and professionally.

Nowadays, when one mentions unions, there is an eerie silence on the Opposition Benches. That silence is caused by confusion. On the one hand, the unions still give Opposition Members a nice juicy pay cheque at the end of each week. Every Member of the shadow Cabinet is sponsored by a union. They have a cheek to talk about sleaze. What is more sleazy than a block vote or a late night shop stewards' election? Labour party policy emanates from their back pockets.

On the one hand, the unions are still Labour's paymasters, but on the other hand there is the so-called "new look" Labour party, led by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, who looks more like a ladies' hairdresser than a credible statesman. He lacks only a velvet jacket and a pouffy buttonhole to become the Teazy-Weazy of the trade unions.

That has resulted in a form of political schizophrenia. When addressing a conference of business men, the Labour leadership, Mr. Trade Union Teazy-Weazy promises not to amend trade union laws that we have established, but when the deputy leader addresses the unions, he talks of taxing the undeserving rich, of minimum wages and of reforming Tory laws. Like Janus, they face both ways. If fact, if one compares the Labour leader's speeches with those of the deputy leader, it is difficult to tell whether they are on their janus or their anus. Will the real Labour party please stand up, or is it too late?

The Conservative party's policy on the labour market is the one that delivers the goods. Unemployment in Britain fell again last month by 45,000 to 2.5 million. That marked the eighth successive monthly fall, and fits into a consistent downward spiral in unemployment since 1992.

Our achievement in the labour market compares very favourably with that of our European counterparts. For example, unemployment in the United Kingdom is 8.9 per cent. That is well below the rate in France, which is 11.3 per cent. It is 12 per cent. in Italy and a staggering 21.8 per cent. in Spain. It is worth noting that Spain has a minimum wage. Need I say more?

Throughout the 1980s, the Conservative Government saw the importance of providing the nation's children with an education to equip them with the skills that they would need to enable them to compete in a future labour market. About £2.8 billion a year is spent by the Government on training, enterprise and vocational education. That is two-and-a-half times more in real terms than under Labour in 1979.

In addition, spending per pupil under the Conservatives has risen by 47 per cent. in real terms since 1979 Spending on books and equipment has risen by 31 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Average teachers' pay has risen by 57 per cent. on the same basis since 1979.

Conservative reforms and policies have worked. That is plain for all to see. In Europe, 40 per cent. of all inward investment comes to Britain. Foreign companies are flooding into Britain to take advantage of our sound economy, our low taxation and the skills of our honest work force.

Britain, the poor man of Europe in the 1970s—there was the brain drain, when all our best doctors, business men and scientists left for foreign parts— has become the investment magnet of Europe. How can that lot over there on the Opposition Benches seriously question anyone on economic policy when they remain committed to clause IV? Their commitment to nationalisation shows that, despite the recent influx of slick party political broadcasts,

sober soundbites and cheesy grins, there still lurks a union boss behind every Labour leader— the string of the Labour party puppet.

Try as he might to get his so-called new-look team to be taken seriously, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield cannot teach his old dogs new tricks, especially when they are kept on a tight Transport and General Workers Union lead, housed in a Trades Union Congress kennel and allowed to eat from a GMB bowl.

The Conservative party is the party of the people. The British people vote Conservative because their vote is returned with a guarantee. We shall deliver.

In the second quarter of 1994, gross domestic product grew by 3.7 per cent. when compared with the same period last year. According to the European Commission— not a source I tend to quote too often— in 1994-95, GDP in the United Kingdom is set to grow faster than in any other EC country.

Politics is about delivering the goods; we have done that. Consumer goods are the layman's thermometer for assessing wealth. Since 1979, the number of households with a washing machine has risen by 14 per cent; with a car, by 16 per cent; with central heating, by 48 per cent. We have injected initiative. enterprise and opportunity into the economy. That has resulted in growth, success and jobs.

How dare that lot over there challenge our record in the labour market when they are financially bound to the unions, chained to clause IV and committed to the suicidal social chapter? Even when taken together, they have less employment and economic experience than a bingo caller.

A Labour Government would allow every man, woman and child in Great Britain to participate in the biggest lottery ever seen. The lottery would be based on which policy they implemented first. Would it be higher inflation, higher taxation, crippling national debt or trade union terrorism— in other words, a lottery from hell? It is a lottery ticket that the people of Great Britain must not be allowed to buy.

10.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Paice: Madam Deputy Speaker, if only I could answer in a way adequate to deal with the inimitable style of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans)—a style of which we in the House are proud, and of which we know that Janice is also proud.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend on achieving the debate. He is right to recall the situation in the 1970s, against which the electorate rebelled so decisively in 1979. When we examine the labour market, we must start with one fundamental belief: Governments do not create jobs. Jobs come from businesses producing goods and services at a price and of a quality that people want. My hon. Friend knows that from his own successful business career. Government's role is to provide the right framework for enterprise to flourish, and that is what we are doing.

As my hon. Friend has said, inflation is low, well below the average of our European competitors. We are now in a third year of economic growth, with GDP at its highest level ever. Manufacturing output is 4 per cent. higher than a year ago, and we have the fastest industrial production of any major industrial country. Export volumes are up 12 per cent. on a year ago, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund predict that the United Kingdom will have the fastest growing major European Community economy this year. The policies are working.

As my hon. Friend also said, United Kingdom unemployment has fallen again, and is now below 9 per cent., down by 450,000 since the recovery in the labour market began. That fall began much earlier in the recovery than in any pervious economic cycle. It did so because we have a flexible labour market. Flexibility delivers jobs. The least regulated countries are also those with the best record on job creation.

The United States and Japan not only have fewer people out of work than most European countries; they also have more people in work. Only a handful of European countries can match their record, and those countries, such as the United Kingdom, are also among the least regulated. We have a higher proportion of our work force in employment than any other major EC country. Unemployment is falling faster here than in any other member state. Youth unemployment stands at 13.1 per cent, compared with an EC average of 19.4 per cent.

Perhaps most important are the findings of a survey by the EC Commission—not the one to which my hon. Friend referred—showing that 27 per cent. of employers in Europe regard inflexibility as a very important deterrent to recruitment. The figure for the United Kingdom was 10 per cent., the lowest in any member state.

Our aim is to minimise the burdens on business, while at the same time safeguarding employees and the public. We have transformed industrial relations and labour market flexibility since those days that my hon. Friend recalled. Strikes are now at the lowest levels since Queen Victoria was on the throne, and our strike rates are among the lowest in all industrialised countries—lower than those in Germany, France and the United States. We ended the closed shop; we got rid of the dock work labour scheme; we have created trade union democracy, and given power back to union members.

The Government are not interested in a low-wage economy. Nobody seriously believes that we can compete on wage rates with the Pacific rim. We want a high-skill, high-tech, high-productivity economy, because that will lead to high wages but to low unit wage costs. In the past 20 years, unit labour costs in manufacturing have risen by almost 200 per cent. in Europe. In Japan, they have risen by about 30 per cent.

The Government's policies are reversing that trend, and keeping non-wage costs down. Unit wage costs in manufacturing are now down by 1.4 per cent. on last year. Productivity in manufacturing is up by 6 per cent. on last year, and labour costs as a percentage of total hourly costs are lower than all of our major competitors.

But there are threats to those great achievements. There is not just the vague and remote possibility of a Labour Government, to which my hon. Friend referred and properly put into context, but the threat of new regulations and burdens at European level. That is why the Government chose, rightly, to keep out of the social chapter.

[Mr. Paice]

Let me make it clear that we do not really mind if businesses want to set up works councils, or if businesses want to give workers three months' or three years' parental leave, but we do mind if they are forced to do so. It is for businesses to decide, not Europe, or, in most cases, Westminster.

We have in this country a solid framework of protection for workers in health and safety, sex and race discrimination, trade union membership or non-membership and rights against unfair dismissal. But beyond that framework, we believe that employers and employees should be left to decide which arrangements suit their individual needs.

I referred to a high-skill economy. The main responsibility for training still rests with employers. It is estimated that UK employers spend more than £20 billion a year on training. A CBI survey only last month showed a substantial increase in the percentage of manufacturing firms expecting to increase training, compared with last year.

The centrepiece of our strategy is the "investors for people" initiative, to encourage employers to invest effectively in the skills needed for business success. It aims to improve business performance by linking training and the development of employees to business objectives.

Britain used to lag behind the rest of Europe in education and skill levels. We have done much to change that. More than 70 per cent. of 16-year-olds, and more than 55 per cent. of 17-year-olds are now in full-time education, compared with just 42 per cent. and 29 per cent. respectively in 1979. Training people in work has increased sharply during the past decade. In spring of this year, 79 per cent. more people received job-related training than in spring 1984.

We have not forgotten the unemployed. Listening to the Opposition, one could believe that "the unemployed" were one large homogenous mass. They are not—they are 2.5 million individual people, each with his own needs and expectations. Some need skills, some need motivation, some need literacy and numeracy, and some need to learn how to apply for a job. That is why my Department has a large menu of options for the unemployed, and it is why around half of those who become unemployed leave the count within three months, and two thirds leave within six months.

We have developed national vocational qualifications and modern apprenticeships to drive forward the skills needs of our country. Together with the changes in the labour market brought about by the experiences which my hon. Friend recalled, we are equipping Britain with a work force for the future.

I read today that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) said that the Labour party plans to make the Department of Employment a "driving force" for a more competitive and dynamic economy. I have news for her—she is years behind the times, as my hon. Friend described. This Government and this Department, of which I am proud to be Minister, is already there. We are pushing forward the skills frontiers of Britain and pursuing flexible labour market policies to get unemployment down.

My hon. Friend has done the House a major service in allowing us to recall and recount just how far we have come during the past 15 years, and just how much we have achieved in that time. The House should be grateful for his contribution.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 24 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police

1. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost of employing a police officer.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): The present average cost of employing a police officer is £34,200 a year.

Mr. McWilliam: Given the high level of crime and individual risk to which police officers are now subjected, does the Home Secretary agree that that is a small price to pay?

Mr. Howard: I do indeed agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have always maintained that police officers deserve to be rewarded properly for the very considerable risks that they run on our behalf and for the difficult and dangerous job that they do.

Sir Donald Thompson: What will police officers think about the boy in my constituency who committed 130 crimes, who was arrested 88 times, who was a burglar, a shoplifter and a vandal yet who finished up doing 24 hours' community service?

Mr. Howard: I think that most police officers will react to those reports in much the same way as my hon. Friend and I react to them. The courts have powers to commit young offenders who are clearly out of control to the care of local authorities, which can ensure that they are detained in secure accommodation. The powers of the courts to deal with such young offenders will be much increased when the operative provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 are in force.

Mr. Bennett: Given the considerable cost of employing police officers, does the Home Secretary agree that it is very important to ensure that they are employed on police duties and not on minding remand or convicted prisoners in police cells? Given the many occasions on which his predecessors have condemned the practice of holding prisoners in police cells from that Dispatch Box, can the Home Secretary tell us when the practice will stop, at least in Greater Manchester?

Mr. Howard: I very much hope that it will stop as soon as possible. We have provided a great deal of additional prison accommodation. I do not like the practice of detaining prisoners in police cells any more than the hon. Gentleman and I hope that we will be able to stop it quite soon. It occurs much less now than in the past.

Right to Silence

2. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what comparison he has made of the use of the right to silence by criminals tried in the Crown court and by criminals tried in the magistrates court.

Mr. Howard: Research cited by the Royal Commission on criminal justice suggested that exercise of the right to silence may be higher in cases that go for trial in the Crown court.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful for that answer. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that research suggests that it is the more experienced and professional criminals who try to hide behind the right to silence, giving only their name, rank and serial number when questioned, which is one of the reasons why this change in the law is welcomed so widely not only by police men and women but by many law-abiding citizens throughout the country?

Mr. Howard: I do indeed agree with my hon. Friend. Research carried out on behalf of Kent constabulary suggests that experienced offenders with five or more convictions are more than three times as likely as suspects without convictions to refuse to answer questions during interviews. That bears out the proposition that was put to me by my hon. Friend: that experienced and professional criminals have made use of this device to a much greater extent than other suspects.

Mr. Mullin: In order to minimise hypocrisy, will the Home Secretary inform the House of any of his colleagues who have drawn an adverse inference from Lady Porter's decision to maintain her right to silence?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that we are talking about the right to silence in criminal proceedings. I thought from his intervention in last week's debate that we would be able to welcome him as a late convert to the change in the law. I am sorry that his question shows that such hopes are doomed to disappointment.

Knives

3. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to deal with the criminal use of knives.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): The carrying of knives in public is severely restricted by the Criminal Justice Act 1988. Stronger police powers of stop and search in relation to offensive weapons have been introduced in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my hon. Friend on responding to deep public concern about the carrying of weapons, and particularly knives, in public places. Will he confirm that the police welcome this measure

and that it will help them in their task of protecting the public? Will he please keep the powers under review and extend them if necessary?

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend the assurance that she seeks. Of course the police are keen on the new stop and search power in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, but that is not the only power to deal with those who carry or use knives. Those who carry knives in public can be caught under two provisions—that covering the possession offence or the offensive weapons rules if they show an intent to use a weapon. That offence can carry a sentence of imprisonment.

Mr. Cox: I welcome the Minister's reply. Is he aware that I recently tabled a question to his Department about banning the importation of a fountain pen that, within seconds, becomes a most deadly weapon with about a 4in blade? The Department replied that it did not regard the pen, which was found in a prison, as a lethal weapon, but the police, and especially the prison governor, regard it as such.

Mr. Maclean: We have power to ban certain weapons and we have used it to ban 14 weapons that can be imported. They range from rare and exotic implements from the far east to flick knives and other weapons. We are perfectly prepared to use that power again to deal with any other knives or offensive weapons if it is possible to come up with a legal definition that is sensible and is restricted to the item in question. In many cases, our ability to ban a knife is irrelevant because we have powers to deal with those who carry and use knives. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that it is possible to devise a rule to ban a knife that will deal with the people who wish to carry all sorts of knives in society, I am afraid that he is very much mistaken.

Mr. Key: Does my hon. Friend find it rather strange that knives are freely available in high street shops behind clear glass for people of all ages to see, yet betting shops are shrouded in secrecy behind smoked glass? Would he kindly consider deregulating betting shops and imposing tighter regulations on shops that sell knives?

Mr. Maclean: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that of course we wish to improve visibility into betting shops; we shall certainly do that. The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) asked about the regulation and control of knives. There are hundreds of millions of legitimate knives in society that are used for perfectly legitimate purposes. I am perfectly happy to consider any individual case for banning an offensive weapon if that weapon can be clearly defined, but the most recent reports clearly show that the knives that have been involved in some attacks have been Stanley knives, kitchen knives and vegetable knives. It would not be sensible to draw up a law banning every Sabatier knife in the country.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

4. Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the tariff scheme for criminal injuries compensation following the appeal court's recent judgment.

Mr. Howard: The divisional court found that the introduction of the tariff scheme was not unlawful. By a majority, the Court of Appeal took a contrary view. The court granted leave to appeal to the House of Lords, and I intend to appeal. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further while the matter is before the courts.

Ms Jowell: May I press the Home Secretary on this matter? As the Court of Appeal has found the tariff scheme to be unlawful, will he listen to Lord Carlisle of Bucklow, who said in another place that the scheme would discriminate most unfairly against those with the worst injuries? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconsider the scheme and withdraw it immediately?

Mr. Howard: No, though it always pains me to disagree with the noble Lord. Our scheme is by far the most generous in the world. More than 40 per cent. of compensation for criminal injures paid across the world is paid in Britain. We pay more than the rest of Europe put together, more than the United States and, after the changes, our scheme will continue to be the most generous in the world.

Mr. Trimble: I appreciate the Home Secretary's reluctance to anticipate the House of Lords' decision. Will he, therefore, give an undertaking that, irrespective of that decision, he will introduce legislation to put the criminal injuries scheme on a statutory footing so that the House can scrutinise the details of the scheme and victims in England and Wales can have legal, enforceable rights?

Mr. Howard: That is my ultimate aspiration, but it would be sensible to see how the tariff scheme works in practice before introducing legislation of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Straw: Will not the whole House applaud the unexpectedly perceptive insight of the Secretary of State when he said in September,

"Victims have had a raw deal"?

Is it not time for the Secretary of State to recognise that the victims of crime have had the rawest deal of all from the Government? When will the right hon. and learned Gentleman admit that he is now making victims pay the price of his own inability to control the relentless rise in violent crime, and that by these shabby changes, for which he has had no mandate at all, he has betrayed both the voters and the victims of crime?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that everything he says on the subject is so much hot air. He resolutely refuses to say whether any future Labour Government—should there be one—would restore the criminal injuries compensation scheme. As to the relationship between the payment of compensation and violent crime, as I told the hon. Gentleman when we last discussed these matters, the facts are that since the introduction of the scheme in

1965 violent crime has increased by 500 per cent., the number of Criminal Injuries Compensation Board applications has increased by 3,000 per cent. and the average award has increased by 40,000 per cent., so there simply is not the correlation that lay behind the hon. Gentleman's question.

Police

5. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the actual number of police officers employed in England and Wales in (a) April 1992, (b) April 1993 and (c) April 1994.

Mr. Howard: There were 127,760 police officers in England and Wales in April 1992, 127,963 in April 1993 and 127,489 in April 1994.

Mr. Vaz: Will the Home Secretary confirm that there will be no further reductions in the number of police officers as a result of the implementation of the core function policy?

Mr. Howard: As the hon. Gentleman may know, we have published the interim report of the core function review, on which we are working very closely with the police. The objective of the review is not to reduce the number of police officers but to enable the police to concentrate on the issues that matter most, and we are taking it forward with the police.

Mr. David Martin: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that a relevant consideration is how police time is used? Will he do all that he can to ensure that the police are not required to pursue to court spurious crimes of rape, such as the one involving a former university student in Portsmouth, especially as the Crown Prosecution Service often undermines police efforts by failing to press proper charges in real crimes of violence?

Mr. Howard: The key to the concern behind my hon. Friend's question lies in the need for greater co-operation, communication and liaison between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. The system works very well in some parts of the country and less well in others, but I am keen to encourage the whole country to emulate the standards of the best as soon as possible?

Mr. Beith: Will the Home Secretary explain why this year he refused requests from almost every chief constable in the country to deploy additional police officers, and why he presented the new police authorities with draft proposals for the limits on their budgets which would have meant that some of them would have to reduce the number of police officers on the beat?

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong in the first part of his question. The truth of the matter is that many chief constables have been able to employ more police constables by slimming the middle management ranks of their police forces in a way of which I hope the right hon. Gentleman would approve. As for the second part of his question, he will have to await my announcement next week of the detailed financing arrangements for police authorities.

Mr. Butler: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the statistics that he gives are both accurate and misleading in the sense that the true test is not the number of policemen employed but the number deployed? Has not the latter increased significantly and more than pro rata with population growth in most police areas as a result of civilianisation and a reduction in paperwork in the past several years?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the key test and it is the objective that we seek to achieve. It is shared by chief constables, who are concentrating more and more of their officers on the type of duties that we all want to see them perform.

Mr. Michael: But does not the Home Secretary accept that the effect of the review of core functions will be a further serious cut in the number of police officers available on our streets? Does he accept that the Government reneged on a promise to increase the number of police officers by 1,000 at the last general election, because the actual number of police officers available for ordinary duty fell between April 1992 and April 1993 by 401?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman must have prepared his question not only before he heard my answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) but as long ago as before the publication of the interim report from the core function review. Had he read that report, he would know that there was no substance whatever to his introductory comment. The figures all depend on precisely which month one takes. If one took the month of May instead of April, one would find a steady increase year on year for all three of the years mentioned.

European Immigration

6. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will support making European immigration issues subject to qualified majority voting.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): No, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jenkin: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the provisions for qualified majority voting in article K and, moreover, the cross-reference with article 100c in the main body of the Community treaty, which also provides for qualified majority voting? Can he give a categoric assurance that the Government will take all steps to prevent other member states or the Commission from trying to involve qualified majority voting in immigration and other issues covered by article K?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend will be familiar with K.9—I mean not the character from Dr. Who but article K.9 of the treaty on European Union—which provides for article 100c of the treaty to be extended. Article K.9 makes it clear that that can be done only by unanimity and with the consent of the House. The Government would never bring such a proposal before the House.

Dr. Howells: If the Minister is forced to take the advice of the Europhobes on his Back Benches, will he also put a little more pressure on the Government to start punching their weight to ensure that our invaluable links with the British Commonwealth are not weakened by draft legislation currently with the Commission in Brussels, which would ensure that Commonwealth

citizens who currently do not need a visa to enter the European Union, including this country, will need a visa in future?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman refers to the provisions of article 100c of the treaty on European Union on the common visa regime. That was part of the Maastricht treaty, which the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends supported. It will still be for Britain to decide which countries are added to the common visa list. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would know that. As for Europhobes on my Back Benches, as he put it, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) was making the point that we would never give up our right of veto, which Opposition Members would give away at the first opportunity.

Police Bail

7. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest statistics on breach of police bail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In 1993, about 59,600 defendants bailed by the police failed to appear. That figure consists of those on police bail who failed to present themselves either at a police station or at a court when required to do so.

Mr. Streeter: Is my hon. Friend aware of the widespread public support for the measures recently introduced by our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, which tighten procedures relating to bail? Will he assure me that anyone who offends while on bail will be dealt with most severely and will certainly never be granted bail again?

Mr. Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for warmly welcoming the proposals in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which tighten bail procedures such as the new police power of arrest for breach of police bail and the ability to attach conditions. It is a source of concern that many people who are charged with an offence and granted bail commit another offence. That leads to an unnecessary 50,000 crimes and an unnecessary 50,000 victims per annum. We have introduced a new power whereby in such circumstances magistrates need not grant bail. We have given them the power, which will be available for them to use. It is a pity that the Opposition could not wholeheartedly support those proposals when the legislation was going through the House.

Mr. Tony Banks: But what about people on remand in prison who, if found guilty of the offences with which they are charged, serve more time on remand than they would if they had been convicted? In such circumstances, surely bail needs to be looked at objectively, because there are plenty of people inside who should be on bail now.

Mr. Maclean: Of course, bail must be looked at objectively by the courts and magistrates, but many people who have been granted the important privilege of bail have breached that privilege. I do not accept that they have a God-given right to remain at large in the community committing offence after offence. The new power will help to reduce the 50,000 unnecessary victims each year.

Residence Rights

9. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the current rules regarding residence rights for nationals of countries which are not members of the European economic area.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): Rights of residence under the EC treaty apply only to EEA nationals and their accompanying family members. Our policy is to restrict severely the number of third-country nationals coming to live permanently or to work in the United Kingdom. We keep the effectiveness of that policy under review.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend join me in applauding the United Kingdom immigration service for the work that it does? Does he agree that other EU countries may not be quite so stringent as us on immigration? Does he further agree that Churchill's reference to the "soft underbelly of Europe" possibly still applies? Will he ensure that the immigration service continues to maintain controls on people entering the United Kingdom from outside and within the EU?

Mr. Baker: I echo my hon. Friend's praise for the immigration service. I assure him that the Government's position on immigration controls is clear. In line with our interpretation of article 7A of the EC treaty, we are determined to maintain full immigration controls at our ports and airports on third-country nationals arriving from other EU member states. Frontier-based immigration controls on third country nationals are supported by a light passport or identity card check on EEA nationals.

Right to Silence

10. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what view he has formed of the right to silence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 will enable inferences to be drawn by a court or jury if a suspect fails in the specified circumstances to answer questions put to him by the police or does not give evidence at his trial. These provisions, while not requiring anyone to forgo his right of silence, will ensure that silence will no longer be hidden from magistrates or the jury.

Mr. Shaw: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply, but in some ways have we gone far enough? Are not there serious crimes, such as terrorism and drug dealing, where suspects should be required to make a statement about what they were doing at the time of the crime.

Mr. Howard: The measures in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 represent a substantial step

forward. They are closely based on provisions which have worked effectively in practice in Northern Ireland for some time, and they represent about the right balance.

Mr. Skinner: Are the Government not operating double standards in relation to the right to silence? Why do they not call on the last Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher, to give evidence at the Pergau dam inquiry?

Mr. Howard: I am delighted to welcome the hon. Gentleman as a late convert to our right-to-silence proposals. Will he now give them the support that seems to lie behind his question?

Mr. Deva: What views has my right hon. and learned Friend formed about the effectiveness of current laws against racially motivated attacks?

Mr. Howard: I refer my hon. Friend to the wise words of the Lord Chief Justice recently when giving judgment in a case in which it was made clear that the courts now have powers to pass appropriate sentences in cases of racially motivated crime without the need for a separate offence—which would be counter-productive, lead to unnecessarily prolonged trials and do little to deal with the mischief that many people, from the best of intentions, desire to remedy through the creation of a new offence.

Madam Speaker: The Home Secretary might also have referred the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) to question No. 27 on the Order Paper, as the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question was totally out of order.

Mr. David Shaw: But it was clever.

Madam Speaker: Order. It was not at all clever.

Asylum Seekers

11. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are in detention.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: On 18 November 1994, 654 people who had claimed asylum at some stage were detained under Immigration Acts powers.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister accept that it is totally disgraceful that more than 600 people who have committed no crime nor been charged with one are in detention? They have no right of appeal to an independent appellate body or of access to the courts. Some have been detained a long time. Is the Minister not disturbed at the number of people in detention under asylum legislation powers who have undertaken hunger strikes to draw attention to their plight? Is it not time for an independent appeal body to which such cases can properly be put?

Mr. Baker: Those detained represent well under 1.5 per cent. of asylum seekers, which is a small proportion. I assure the hon. Gentleman that detention is used only as a last resort. Most people in detention have rights to appeal and to apply for bail. They have that protection, and I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's other points.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that rather than talk about the interests of foreigners who are in most cases properly in detention, and if the Labour party is to be taken seriously in its protestations about being tough on crime, the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) should stop using every opportunity to speak out against the police? Until he and other Labour Members stop attacking the police, the hon. Gentleman should not talk about people who seek asylum.

Mr. Baker: Like my hon. Friend, I urge every Member of Parliament to give the police and other lawful authorities the support that they deserve.

Mr. George Howarth: Will the Minister confirm that it costs £800 per week to detain asylum seekers? Of the 600 current applicants, 230 are likely to be detained for between two and six months at a cost of £6,500 to £20,000. Is it not time that the Home Office took a long hard look at the procedures involved and speeded up the process, to save taxpayers money while at the same time providing some relief for detainees?

Mr. Baker: The costs cited by the hon. Gentleman represent a considerable overestimate. On the other hand, a firm detention policy, which does have a cost, is an essential part of immigration control.

Police

12. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers will be returned to operational duties by his plans to cut paperwork and to reduce the number of police middle-managers.

Mr. Howard: This is a matter for individual chief constables to determine in the light of the particular circumstances of their own forces, but it should be possible over time for some 5,300 police officers to be redeployed to front-line operational police duties.

Mr. Rowe: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, according to the latest information from Kent, not much hope is held out for redeploying police officers as a result of computerising? However, will he commend the chief constable of Kent for redeploying up to 112 officers back to the beat as a result of his management review?

Mr. Howard: I am always happy to commend the chief constable of Kent, particularly for the reason given by my hon. Friend. That is a welcome example of the kind of progress that can be made in increasing the number of police officers deployed on operational duties as a result of the kind of reorganisation which lies behind my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Does the Home Secretary not understand the great concern among police officers about the mountains of paperwork with which they have to deal, much of which has been generated by the 56 Bills, including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, passed by the Conservative Government since they came into office? The paperwork needs to be reduced.

Mr. Howard: Many of the provisions that have led to extra paperwork were inserted into those Bills at the Opposition's request. Whenever the Government want to take tough action to deal with law and order, the Opposition always come along with proposals for more and more so-called safeguards, most of which add to the burden of paperwork.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, even before the implementation of those

proposals, the City of London police force has cut crime by half over the past three years? Will he congratulate it on that outstanding achievement?

Mr. Howard: I do, indeed, congratulate the City on the success that it has achieved. Other forces throughout the country are also achieving success in the fight against crime and we should all congratulate the police on the progress that they are making.

Mr. Alton: Recognising that the Merseyside police force has also made progress in the fight against crime and achieved a reduction in crime figures, does the Home Secretary agree that it is bound to lead to a loss of morale to publish proposals which the chief constable said could lead to cuts of 500 police officers and 100 civilians? Were that proceeded with, the only people who would benefit would be the criminals.

Mr. Howard: When we publish our proposals next week, the hon. Gentleman will see that the figures that he cited are wide of the mark.

Jury Service

13. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he plans to make regarding jury service by people on bail.

Mr. Maclean: Section 40 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 excludes people on bail from jury service. This provision will come into force early next year.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that that will be welcomed by many people because many crimes are committed by individuals on bail, which is far too easy to obtain?

Mr. Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for his warm welcome for those sensible provisions in the Criminal Justice Act. People want us to strike a sensible balance between those who can serve on juries and those who, because of their criminal conduct and being charged with an offence, would be inappropriate to serve on a jury. That sensible measure, too, has been welcomed by the police service.

Crime Statistics

14. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish each year the proportions of each age cohort convicted of serious criminal offences for males and females by the ages of 15, 21 and 30 years.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. Future editions of the annual Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales"—our well-known best seller—will include a table showing the results from five-yearly cohort studies giving the proportion convicted of a serious criminal offence by age and gender.

Mr. Bottomley: That is the best answer that I have received to that kind of question in the past five years. Given that some 2,000 serious crimes are committed each week and that 34 per cent. of men aged 30 have already been convicted of a serious criminal offence, does not that closer tracking and monitoring show what methods work? Does he agree that our society can gain by cutting the number of people who become criminals?

Mr. Maclean: I welcome my hon. Friend's support for the answer that I gave. I hope that all my hon. Friends are happy with me, having heard the warm commendation from my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). We look forward to publishing those statistics every year and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pressing me on that point.

Deaths in Custody

15. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to ensure that deaths in custody from unnatural causes are significantly reduced.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am concerned about the matter, and we recently issued revised guidance to governors.

Mr. Sutcliffe: When will the prison service change its procedures to allow the full facts of internal inquiries to be made available to the families of people who have died in prison? Are there any moves to allow that under way?

Mr. Forsyth: I think I know which case is concerning the hon. Gentleman. His distinguished predecessor, the late Bob Cryer, raised the matter with the Prison Service. Difficulties are involved in making internal inquiry reports publicly available because of security and other considerations. In view of the hon. Gentleman's further representations, however, I will discuss the matter with the Director General of the Prison Service. I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as I have done so.

Dame Jill Knight: Are not many people in custody drug addicts who have already, by their own actions, increased their risk of death or ill health?

Mr. Forsyth: It is certainly true that a number of prisoners have a history of drug abuse; it is also true that some prison suicides have been involved in drug abuse. It is important that we identify those who may be at risk at an early stage, when they are admitted to prison, and ensure that proper procedures are in place to prevent the recurrence of recent tragedies.

Closed Circuit Television

16. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he will use to decide on the funding for closed circuit television in urban areas.

Mr. Howard: The criteria for bids under the CCTV challenge competition which I announced recently were set out in the bidding guidance issued to all local authorities and police forces on 9 November. Priority will be given to smaller centres of population but bids from large urban areas are not excluded.

Ms Jackson: I thank the Home Secretary for his reply. I welcome his somewhat uncharacteristic change of mind in finding Home Office funding for such schemes, but why will they run for only a year—given that they are clearly effective—and why should the obtaining of such limited funds as are available be subject to the winning of a competition?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady must not make the mistake of supposing that such schemes can be introduced only as a

result of Government funding. They are being instituted all over the country as a result of partnership between the private sector, local authorities and, where appropriate, central Government. Whether or not the hon. Lady's constituency succeeds in the challenge competition, I hope that she will encourage those concerned to do what is necessary to install closed circuit television.

Mr. McLoughlin: I welcome the advances that have been made in the provision of closed circuit television in urban areas. Will my right hon. and learned Friend also consider making such schemes available to rural towns, where police forces are not currently readily available for deployment? Closed circuit television could have a significant impact on the reduction of crime in such areas.

Mr. Howard: The criteria make provision for bids from rural towns, and I look forward to receiving very good bids from west Derbyshire.

Community Sentences

17. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the review of community sentences.

Mr. Howard: I shall be publishing revised national standards for the supervision of offenders in the community early next year.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his response. Is he aware that many of my constituents fear that a number of convicted criminals who receive community sentences seem to be getting away with it? Will he give an assurance that, when the new guidelines are published, community sentences will become far stiffer? Currently, they may be seen as an affront to the police who have put so much time into the cases, and also to the victims of crime.

Mr. Howard: I believe that my hon. Friend's views are widely shared. The revised national standards ban holidays abroad and require every probation service in the country to impose tough physical work. I think that that is exactly what my hon. Friend had in mind, and I share his views.

Policing

18. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to estate-based policing in urban areas.

Mr. Maclean: The Government encourage the police service to adopt community policing strategies which involve their local communities. The partnership initiative that we launched this year is aimed at developing projects in partnership between the police and the community to prevent and tackle crime locally.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister accept that one of the most successful ways of policing urban areas, particularly local authority housing estates, is just that partnership between the local police and the local people? When that is successful, private security firms are not needed and can be dispensed with on all council estates. Public policing is what people want, not privatised policing in public areas.

Mr. Maclean: That is why we are delivering public policing through the partnership initiative. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will encourage his constituents, through neighbourhood watch and street watch, and that he will encourage his council to do what Wandsworth is doing in helping the police to recruit more special constables and more neighbourhood constables—people with the full powers and duties of a police officer. It is working, and the hon. Gentleman should support it.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. McKelvey: In the course of his very busy day, will the Prime Minister show some concern for the plight of the disabled, the elderly and the poor in our society who suffer disproportionately because they cannot pay their fuel bills? Will he chuck the intended VAT increase into the dustbin where it belongs and replace it with an adequate cold climate allowance?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman may know, my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will be making a statement on the disabled after Question Time. On fuel and power generally, the VAT compensation package compensates not only poorer pensioners but others for VAT on fuel. The measures are worth about £2.5 billion over three years. From 1996-97 onwards, spending on benefits and pensions will have been increased permanently by £1.25 billion a year. That is an indication of the extent to which we are prepared to make and have made provision to help people on low incomes.

Q2. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gill: Does my right hon. Friend understand that I for one would rather resign the party Whip than vote for a Bill with which dozens of his right hon. and hon. Friends do not agree and for which there is no popular support? Will he recognise the absolute folly of imposing a highly unpopular tax for the purpose of paying the subscription to a highly unpopular and increasingly expensive club?

The Prime Minister: Like me, my hon. Friend has a large rural constituency and I suspect that there are many net gainers in his constituency as a result of our membership of the European Union. On the European Communities (Finance) Bill, as my hon. Friend knows, there was very broad support in the governing party and in other parties for the deal that I reached at Edinburgh in 1992. It has a small additional cost for the United Kingdom—£75 million next year, rising to £250 million in 1999. It preserves the United Kingdom abatement, which is very important and which has saved us £16 billion since 1984. As a result of the agreement that I reached, the United Kingdom's share of the cost falls proportionately by a substantial amount and becomes far less than that of many other member states. As a result of the agreement, we shall be below Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria,

Sweden and Norway in the league table of net contributors. It is an agreement that we can legitimately commend to the House and, on its merits, it merits support.

Mr. Blair: Now that the Cabinet has confirmed that next Monday's vote is indeed a vote of confidence, may I take it that the Prime Minister will be leading for and speaking for the Government in that debate?

The Prime Minister: The vote of confidence relates not just to the vote on Monday but, as I said to the House some time ago, to the passage of the Bill in all its essentials. In those circumstances, the Cabinet considers it right that the Chancellor of the Exchequer should open.

Mr. Blair: I find that extraordinary. Can the Prime Minister understand why people do not feel confident in his Government? Would the following be a fair summary of where he stands this week? The deputy chairman of his party is found to have written a memorandum which admits the total contempt that the British public has for his party. The vice-chairman of his party is forced to resign after remarks about our European partners which beggar belief in an adult politician. The chairman of the Prime Minister's Back-Bench Committee is challenged because he is too loyal to the Prime Minister. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, meanwhile, talks of suicide pacts among Ministers while getting his sums wrong on the European budget. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's Back-Bench Members roll around the television studios in a state of anarchy. After this week, would not any objective, reasonable observer conclude that his party has become an ill-disciplined rabble incapable of governing this country?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman managed to muddle most of his facts as between deputy chairman and vice-chairman, he is certainly wrong on almost every statement that he uttered. If he really wants to know about divisions and rabbles, he might well look at the divisions in his own party, not least below the Gangway. He might well look at divisions between himself and the deputy leader of the Labour party. He might well look at the divisions in his own position on Europe. It was the right hon. Gentleman who said some years ago—*[Interruption.]* I know that the Opposition do not like it, but perhaps they should hear it. It was the right hon. Gentleman who said:

"We'll negotiate a withdrawal from the EEC."

It was the right hon. Gentleman who said more recently:

"Well, I wasn't actually opposed to membership of the European Community."

Just a few days ago, it was the right hon. Gentleman who said:

"Under my leadership, I will never allow this country to be isolated and left behind in Europe."

The only thing that moves that fast is a rabbit heading for its burrow.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also agree that, apart from the comprehensive answer that he gave previously, the essential reality for Monday is that the glib repudiation of a solemn treaty, an international agreement and a modest proposal for European Union financing increases would be almost as bad as a shameful attack on our closest foreign allies, which we have heard from other quarters in the past few days?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend touches on an important point that was missed by the Leader of the Opposition. The Government are standing by an agreement that we reached in 1992 with strong support in the House at the time and that we reached with our European partners. The Bill before the House implements an international agreement that was negotiated with full Cabinet backing, accepted by the Cabinet and widely endorsed by the House. It is for that reason that it is inescapably a matter of confidence that the Government should secure the passage of that legislation.

Mr. Ashdown: Whatever the Prime Minister's protestations, does he not realise that it is the view of most people in this country that his Government and their kamikaze Cabinet have now descended into farce and civil war? If, on Monday, they were forced to go, the whole country would cheer and a start could be made on putting our nation's problems right.

The Prime Minister: I sometimes think that the right hon. Gentleman spends all the time between Tuesday and Thursday and between Thursday and Tuesday practising his next sound bite. He certainly gives that impression week after week. I remind him that it is he and his party who claim to be strong Europeans, he and his party who time and again joined in procedural votes to try to wreck the Maastricht treaty, and he and his party who will find an excuse next Monday to vote against the Government. Their commitment to Europe is skin deep when it comes to essentials.

Mr. Ottaway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Cairo conference on population and development in September was a landmark in dealing with world population growth in that it produced a global action plan agreed by almost every country? Does he agree, in particular, that the best way to implement such a plan would be for other countries to follow the Government's example and announce a similar huge increase in funding of 60 per cent. such as he announced in July?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is a very serious international problem and I think that the international conference which took place was an extremely useful and worthwhile event. As my hon. Friend indicated, we made a substantial contribution—I think, from memory, that the commitment was around £100 million over the next two or three years—and we played a very positive part in that conference. It is a matter of importance and one to which we shall give continuing interest in the future.

Q3. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ainsworth: Following today's astonishing revelations of a massive security breach by an employee on a short-term contract at British Telecom, will the Prime Minister be ordering an inquiry? If so, will it cover the huge increase in agency and casual labour since privatisation?

The Prime Minister: I have seen the report in *The Independent* this morning to which I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring. I understand from inquiries made this morning that BT has carried out an investigation and

tells us that it is satisfied that there has been no hacking of the system, nor any evidence that confidential information referred to in the article has ever been available on Internet.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has my right hon. Friend heard of the presumptuous attempt by the town of Preston to usurp the place of the city of Lancaster as the county town of Lancashire? Will he put every possible obstacle in the way of that outrageous presumption?

The Prime Minister: I see that my hon. Friend has the cross-party support of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). As a southerner unfamiliar with this particular matter, I think that it would be unwise for me to commit myself, but, naturally, as my hon. Friend raises the matter, I shall look at it very carefully.

Q4. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hall: Is the Prime Minister aware that the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), yesterday told the House that he was disgusted with the Maples proposals for inter-party warfare, yobbos and trying to trick people into positions? He said that they were completely unjustifiable and called on the Prime Minister to repudiate them immediately. Will the Prime Minister do that this afternoon—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned that any of my hon. Friends would be nasty to the right hon. Gentleman, I give him my assurance that my hon. Friends will be very gentle with him.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this country's international reputation for probity is built on the proposition that contracts are honoured and commitments kept?

The Prime Minister: I agree precisely with that proposition. It is upon that proposition that the Cabinet is determined to honour the agreement that I reached on behalf of the British Government two years ago with our European partners in Edinburgh.

Q5. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gapes: Is the Prime Minister aware of the acute financial crisis facing Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority, which is asking Redbridge health care trust to do 10 per cent. more work for about £2.5 million less next year? Will he express his clear and unambiguous commitment to do everything possible to keep King George's hospital open and stop any closure of its accident and emergency department?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly study the position that exists within that health district and ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to examine it. I do not have the facts in front of me and I do not propose to commit myself until I have looked at them.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As the Leader of the Opposition welcomed the recovery, growth and low inflation in the economy, is there any reason why we should pay any attention whatever to the shadow Chancellor, who is intent on sabotaging those achievements?

The Prime Minister: I would think probably no reason at all. Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman does not do so—and if he does not, I see no reason why we should.

Q6. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Jones: Does the Prime Minister recall that, in an answer to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), he told the House

"No Government have ever been more open than this one and there is no suspicion of sleaze."—[*Official Report*, 26 April 1994; Vol. 242, c. 104.]

Is that still his view, or does he at last realise that he set the standard at the last general election when he accepted money from foreign-based business men in return for continuing tax concessions?

Hon. Members: What about Maxwell?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friends remind me of one person who formerly funded the Labour party. The hon. Lady ought to contemplate that. Perhaps the Labour party should return the money to the Maxwell pensioners which they donated to it some time ago.

Railtrack

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the future of Railtrack, which has been a Government-owned company responsible for rail infrastructure since April this year.

The Government intend to privatise Railtrack within the lifetime of this Parliament. We shall do that using the powers provided by the Railways Act 1993. Although the precise details and timing will be announced later in the light of market conditions, I can confirm that Railtrack will be floated on the stock market and that everyone will have the opportunity to buy shares.

The Government believe that privatisation offers the best future for Railtrack, for passengers and freight and for train operators. It will allow greater use of private sector skills in managing the network, improving Railtrack stations, delivering efficient track maintenance and encouraging investment in the upgrading of railway lines. It will provide even greater scope for private capital to be injected into better facilities. Railtrack will be better able to deliver improvements in the service that it provides to operators and, therefore, to passengers.

Privatisation has been one of the great achievements of this Government since 1979. It has transformed former state-owned industries and brought real improvements for customers and employees alike. It has brought new management techniques and new sources of investment. It has spread ownership throughout society. Indeed, Britain's example has been copied around the world.

The Department of Transport has been at the forefront of that programme. The National Freight Company Ltd., Sealink, National Express Ltd., Associated British Ports, the British Airports Authority and British Airways are all thriving in the private sector. This announcement paves the way for the creation of another important private company.

The privatisation of Railtrack will be the most significant single step in the process of transferring the ownership and operation of Britain's railways to the private sector. The Government have set the target of franchising a majority of train services by April 1996. That target remains. The Franchising Director will shortly start the pre-qualification process for the first franchises. The Government will be selling the rolling stock leasing companies next year. Privatisation of British Rail's infrastructure services units, British Rail Maintenance Ltd. and other businesses is already in progress and the transfer of British Rail's domestic freight services to the private sector should be completed by the end of 1995.

Privatisation will enable Railtrack to provide a better service, bringing substantial benefits to train operators, passengers and other rail users, and to investors. My announcement demonstrates the Government's continuing commitment to privatisation. It demonstrates our continuing commitment to railway privatisation. It demonstrates our continuing commitment to improving rail services. Above all, it demonstrates our continuing commitment to passengers and to our national economy.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): In answer to the statement, I make it clear, without equivocation, that Labour remains wholly committed to a publicly owned rail system because that is what best serves the travelling public, industry and commerce, and the nation at large. This privatisation, if it were to go ahead—and that is a very big "if"—has nothing to do with the dictates of transport policy. It is driven entirely by the Government's desperate desire to make a quick financial killing to finance Tory tax cuts in time for the next election. This is a classic example of the Maples memorandum in action, giving priority to getting a Tory Government re-elected, however much it damages the interests of the nation at large.

Does the Secretary of State for Transport recall that the Minister for Public Transport told the Standing Committee in February last year:

"Railtrack, at least for the foreseeable future, will be in the public sector"?—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 25 February 1993; c. 445.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that until only a few months ago, Tory Ministers constantly repeated that Railtrack was to stay in the public sector while the passenger franchises and freight companies were sold off?

Is not it clear that this privatisation is now being hurriedly brought forward because there is little or no investor interest in the franchises, for the very good reasons that the train operators' profitability will always depend on political decisions about the level of subsidy and that their major fixed costs—rail access charges—will remain outside their control? As much the same objections apply to privatising Railtrack, 90 per cent. of whose income will come from train operators, is not it now also clear that the right hon. Gentleman will be obliged, if he proceeds, to sell it off at any price that removes the risk for investors while still leaving the taxpayer to pick up the bill for that risk?

The right hon. Gentleman will recall that his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated in his leaked letter to the Prime Minister of 15 November that the privatisation of Railtrack was now

"integral to the Budget arithmetic."

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that Railtrack assets had been valued at about £6.5 billion and that a sale at any lesser price would be ripping off a unique national asset simply because of the Government's manic desire to fund tax cuts at any cost before the next election?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that while the Tory party is looking to its interests in the matter, the country and the travelling public will pay in the future? Does he acknowledge that Railtrack's pushing up rail access charges is bound to be passed on in higher passenger fares? Does he recognise that there will be nothing to stop a privatised Railtrack engaging in an orgy of asset-stripping of real estate? Does he accept that a privatised Railtrack undermines the whole regulatory and safety framework of the railways? Does he admit that the mass of leases and contracts that will be required will generate a further mountain of bureaucracy?

This privatisation, if it were to happen, would be deeply damaging to the long-term interests of the nation and the travelling public. We shall fight tooth and nail to stop it happening.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in just about everything that he says, but that does not come as a surprise to Conservative Members. To try to suggest that this privatisation has only just occurred to the Government is to ignore the hours and hours that right

hon. and hon. Members spent in the House on the Railways Bill, which culminated in the Railways Act 1993, during which it was made clear repeatedly that we would move British Rail into the private sector. That is what we shall do today.

The hon. Gentleman quoted my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), the then Minister for Public Transport. Let me add two other quotations to those cited by the hon. Gentleman, which he—selectively—forgot to mention. The first is by my noble Friend Lord Caithness, the then Minister of State, who said on 15 July 1993:

"We have made it clear that Railtrack's existence as a Government-owned company will last only until it is feasible to transfer it to the private sector."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 July 1993; Vol. 548, c. 354.]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering said in Committee on 16 March 1993:

"Railtrack will initially be in the public sector, supported by the Government . . . through revenue charges. We hope that ultimately the infrastructure itself can be transferred to the private sector, but I cannot forecast when that will be."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 16 March 1994; c. 783.]

I can tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that today I can forecast when that will be. It will be during the lifetime of this Parliament. I recognise from the hon. Gentleman's quotation in today's edition of *The Times* that he understands that this will be a popular move with the public. What he needs to understand is that the Government have a commitment to the taxpayer and to the investor and they will make judgments in terms of selling in the light of market conditions at the time. I shall not be drawn beyond that.

As for the hon. Gentleman's point about access charges, he clearly does not understand the system. He needs to understand that access charges will be negotiated between Railtrack and those who are operating on the rails and that those charges must be covered by the regulator. He has forgotten to mention that point. As for safety, perhaps he will be encouraged to know that the Health and Safety Commission is fully satisfied with the proposals before the House.

Finally, I must say to my right hon. and hon. Friends that I hope that they will notice where the hon. Gentleman started. He started by saying that Labour Members were still in favour of the railways being in the public sector. He made no commitment to reverse the privatisation process and the country at large will have taken notice of that omission.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The statement is a welcome step, which follows yesterday's presentation of a Bill to secure one of the most widespread, expensive rail investments—the channel tunnel high-speed link, which will do a great deal to add to the prosperity of the railways, not only to London but up the east coast, where it will knock an hour off the journey. We are told that the assets are £6,000 million. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to achieve higher capital spending, more use of the railways, lower current subsidies and a more competitive option compared with the roads and that we do not need the Opposition's idea of quangos, which would have half of British industry under the appointments that they as politicians would wish to make?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He is very knowledgeable about those matters, so it is entirely understandable that he should be right. He draws attention to the importance of Railtrack being able to have access to greater and freer investment, and that is important. However, he also draws attention to the very important improvements in efficiency, which will come from the proposals and from Railtrack being in the private sector. That has been demonstrable in all the other privatisations and it has been to the benefit of the consumer.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Can the Secretary of State be more forthcoming about the amount that the sale of Railtrack is expected to produce? Is not it true that a large number of book assets such as the Severn tunnel, the Forth bridge, the Tamar bridge and viaducts in more remote parts of the country are liabilities in the longer term, so the net proceeds of this exercise, after the costs of privatisation, could be as little as £1.5 billion, which is only a one penny yearly reduction in income tax? Is it worth going through this performance for that result?

Can the Secretary of State give us a cast-iron guarantee that this whole disruptive exercise will retain a national rail network to every part of the United Kingdom, however remote and peripheral?

Dr. Mawhinney: We are seeking to move the railway industry to the private sector for the benefit of the consumer. The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand that. He and his hon. Friends took exactly the same line on every single privatisation brought before the House in the past 15 years. They tried exactly the same arguments, scare stories and smears, aided and abetted by the Labour party. They were proved wrong in every single case, and they will be wrong in this one as well.

As for the assets and their value, the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I will not answer that question, and he knows why I am not in a position to answer it. This is a commercial transaction that will be undertaken in the light of market conditions when the time is right, for the benefit of taxpayers and investors.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. After those original exchanges, I want brisk questions and brisk answers. There are two more statements today and there is a good deal of business to go through. I am asking for short questions and quick responses.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I urge my right hon. Friend to take with a very large pinch of salt the semi-pledge of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) to renationalise British Rail, because we have seen that sort of pledge time and again. When Railtrack is privatised, we shall see what vigorous management and private capital can do to an industry, as has happened with British Airways, British Telecom and a string of other utilities and companies.

Madam Speaker: That was not a question. I have just reminded the House that I want to hear questions. That was a statement and I do not want statements from Back Benchers. I want questions. Very quickly, please, Minister.

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When we both read *Hansard* tomorrow, I think that he

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will find that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made absolutely no pledge to renationalise British Rail.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I speak for consumers when I ask the Minister to cast his mind back to the beginning of the year when Railtrack announced its track access charges. The train operators were astonished that the charges were twice as high as they were under British Rail. Will the Minister tell the House how a private monopoly will provide a better deal for the travelling public than a public service railway?

Dr. Mawhinney: As has happened in every single privatisation, which the hon. Gentleman refused to support and now recognises has been a success, the private sector will bring efficiency gains and market and management skills to the negotiations on access charges, which, as I have already reminded the House, will be subject to approval by the regulator.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, historically, most companies that have been privatised have invested considerably more in infrastructure and in their industries post-privatisation, and that that should lead to an expansion of the railway system? In the meantime, can he assure the House that Railtrack will not be denied much-needed investment while it is in the public sector?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the investment record of companies that have moved from the public sector to the private sector. That is partly the reason why the level, quality and sensitivity of services to consumers have improved in those businesses, and will improve in this industry as well.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Is not it true that, if the Railtrack privatisation goes ahead, charges for passengers will go through the roof, and that the Minister is seeking privatisation because he wants to gratify some of his sleazy friends in the City by allowing them to develop more much-needed car parks and city centre projects? I agree with the Minister: our Front Bench has not said that the railways should be renationalised. But when the truth comes out, does the Minister accept that our Front Bench will then say that we have to bring Railtrack back into the public sector?

Dr. Mawhinney: We shall see. I do not intend to become involved in the private grief of the Labour party, nor will I get into the gutter of the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question. He asked about fares. The Railways Act 1993 gives the Franchising Director the specific duty of ensuring that fares charged by franchisees are reasonable. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be encouraged by that.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. In the light of it, what are the prospects for stations such as Bournemouth Central in my constituency, which has long been covered in scaffolding and needs multi-million pound restoration work that has not been forthcoming under British Rail? Can my constituents look forward to an early restoration of that station as a result of the statement?

Dr. Mawhinney: Clearly, I am not in a position to anticipate Railtrack's decisions. I shall certainly draw my hon. Friend's point to the attention of Railtrack, but I know that he will agree that prospects are improved by my statement.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Given that Railtrack currently operates on an 8 per cent. return on investment, will the Minister assure the House that, post-privatisation, that will prevail as access charges will still need taxpayers' subsidy? As my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said, any such profit should be ploughed back into the rail industry and not into the pockets of the Government's friends in the City.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am announcing the start of a process that will culminate in a prospectus followed by flotation on the stock market. The hon. Lady will have to wait for the prospectus.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): As, predictably, the Opposition are making heavy weather of what is basically an attempt to improve efficiency and the delivery of service in the railway system, can my right hon. Friend assure the House that what he has announced has nothing to do with possible future tax cuts?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is on a good point. We are today carrying forward the consequences of the legislation passed by the House, which made it clear that the Government's view was that British Rail in all its aspects would offer a better service to customers if it was in the private sector than it has offered over the past 40 to 50 years. I pay tribute to the staff and management of British Rail, who over recent years and within the constraints of the system have sought to provide a better service.

My hon. Friend will have noticed that Labour Members are huffing and puffing, but that they have no policy. They will not commit themselves to the maintenance of the nationalised industry, to putting more money into the system or to a privatised industry. They will not commit themselves to anything, and the country will notice that.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Who will have control of the British Transport police following privatisation?

Dr. Mawhinney: I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that there will be no change as a result of my statement.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that stations will be cleaner, that public address systems will be used more to inform passengers of difficulties, and that in every way passengers will have a better service? Does he see the inconsistency of at least some people in the Labour party, who are against clause 4 but who want to keep Railtrack in public ownership?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is on a good point and has given some illustrations of the benefits that are likely to accrue to customers and passengers as a

consequence of the freedom, the extra management skills and the extra investment that are likely to flow from the movement of Railtrack into the private sector.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Now that the Secretary of State has taken this mammoth decision to proceed, can he give me and my constituents in west Cumberland an absolute assurance that the line from Carlisle through west Cumbria to Barrow-in-Furness will survive under privatisation? May we have that assurance because my constituents will be watching us on television this evening?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am pleased to hear that the hon. Gentleman's constituents are so interested in our proceedings. I have made it clear to the Franchising Director that I expect him to present minimum service specifications on broadly the present timetable.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Can my right hon. Friend give an assurance about the scheme that is currently being brought together on the west coast main line for important works south of Crewe? Is he sure that that line, which is important to my constituents and to the whole of the north-west, will not in any way be hindered by the legislation, but that its chances of getting finance from the private sector may be improved?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right to point to the important part that the west coast main line plays within the Railtrack infrastructure. He will know that Railtrack is in the process of reviewing the steps that need to be taken to upgrade the line, and we are looking for private sector partners to be involved in that. None of the process will be damaged; it may be enhanced, but it certainly will not be damaged by what I have said today.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Secretary of State assure us that Railtrack will be sold off as a single unit, and if not, on what criteria will he supervise its disintegration, particularly in respect of signalling, the cost of expensive bridges and tunnels and their replacement and maintenance, and the prevention of small parcels of land in cities for terminal stations and other yards being sold off to speculators? What criteria will he have in all those matters?

Dr. Mawhinney: For the purpose of brevity, let me remind the hon. Gentleman of what I said in my statement. I said:

> "I can confirm that Railtrack will be floated on the stock market and everyone will have the opportunity to buy shares."

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I warmly welcome the legislation. Will my right hon. Friend say, so that I can confirm it to my constituents in Kidderminster—particularly those who use the Kidderminster to Birmingham line—that, as a result of the legislation, as was the case with the privatisation of telecommunications, there will be more investment in their rail lines, more choice and better pricing and that they will get a far better service overall?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend has explained precisely and accurately the benefits that we expect to flow from the announcement that I have just made.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Minister guarantee that, unlike other privatisations, no Tory Minister on leaving the Government will be allowed to serve on the privatised board?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman knows better than most the guidance that covers the behaviour of Ministers and ex-Ministers.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is the Minister aware that many people in British manufacturing industry believe that the only process that his Department has been in the forefront of is the destruction of our engineering base? Is he further aware that if there are no orders for rolling stock, within months Britain will have no rolling stock manufacturing capacity, in just the same way as his Department destroyed the bus and coach industry in Britain?

Dr. Mawhinney: What nonsense. It is true, however, that British Rail is conducting a review of rolling stock. I understand the pressures to which the hon. Gentleman is referring. I know that there is a degree of urgency surrounding the issues and I do not dismiss them lightly, but he knows as well as I do that it is not for me to make those judgments, although I note with care the concern that he expressed.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): After the deregulation of the buses, many parts of Britain were completely isolated and no longer had a bus service. A number of communities rely totally on Railtrack services. Will the Minister give us an assurance that those who have been isolated because of Government deregulation of the buses will have a lifeline to the main centres of their communities?

Dr. Mawhinney: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that those communities have not been isolated because of Government policy, but as a consequence of a number of decisions taken in each locality. I repeat the comment that I made earlier to the House, that the Franchising Director knows that I expect him to bring forward minimum service specifications for the franchises broadly in line with the present timetable.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Given the Secretary of State's enthusiasm for a proper public transport system and his enthusiasm for this measure, can he tell me how it will improve public transport in Greater Manchester before the next general election?

Dr. Mawhinney: The public transport infrastructure in Greater Manchester has already been improved in the past few years, as the hon. Gentleman is well aware. I shall not anticipate any statements that may be made from the Dispatch Box over the next two years, but I am quite clear that the people of Manchester will benefit, as will the rest of the country, from increased investment, increased

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management skills and increased sensitivity to what the customer wants, which are represented by today's statement.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Can the Secretary of State explain how more consumer choice will result from converting a public monopoly into a private monopoly? As he is so proud of the number of privatisations that have been carried out by his Department, when does it intend to reduce the number of Ministers in the Department, given that they have fewer responsibilities?

Dr. Mawhinney: If the hon. Gentleman had been paying attention on 20 July, he would have noticed that the number of Ministers in the Department fell from five to four. I take that as a compliment and, with my colleagues, I shall seek to live up to the work rate that the five previously did.

As for the broader point that the hon. Gentleman makes, he needs to understand that the movement of Railtrack is but one part, although a significant part, of the movement of British Rail into the private sector. I am absolutely clear in my mind that when the railways are subject to the market, to competition and to the efficiency gains that will flow from the management and the investment that will be brought to bear in the private sector, the same result will accrue as has previously accrued with other transport industries. The result will be that passengers, those who wish to move freight and other train operators will see benefit for their customers.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I point out to the Minister that rail safety looms large in the minds of my constituents following the tragic deaths of two young men in a rail accident caused by a mindless act of vandalism? Will he retract what he said about the Health and Safety Executive giving the privatisation a clean bill of health? Did not the HSE point to 28 areas of public and safety concern, which may well be exacerbated by this appalling decision?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the particular concern that the hon. Gentleman has for safety in the light of the experience to which he has just referred. I assure him, as I have done on other transport matters in the four months during which I have had this responsibility, that I yield to no one in my commitment to ensure that every aspect of transport in Britain is as safe as possible. The Health and Safety Commission has examined in detail every aspect of safety in relation to the new railway and is fully satisfied with the arrangements.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Minister is aware of the difficulties that many of the privatised companies that were formerly British Rail Engineering Ltd. are in as a result of the shortfall in rolling stock orders due directly to privatisation. Is not it necessary for him to give some idea in the prospectus of the Government's plans for rail in the next 10 years? Surely the likely profits for investors will depend directly on Government policy.

Dr. Mawhinney: The decisions about investment in rolling stock are for those who have the responsibility of managing the system. As for giving an idea of the prospects for the railway industry in the next 10 years, I should have thought that that was precisely what I was doing today. I have done it precisely because I have confidence that the decisions that we have just announced are likely to lead to an improvement in the service; in the quality of the service and—it is my personal belief—also in the extent of the service.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Is it logical to privatise Railtrack because it is impossible for the Government to privatise the Post Office?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that we are talking about Railtrack today and that it is perfectly possible to do that, having announced that we intended to do it. The actions that will ensue will be the best possible answer to his question.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Has not the Secretary of State in his statement today turned the whole of the Government's privatisation case on its head by putting the sale of Railtrack before the franchising of rolling stock? Does not that confirm that this is a panic statement, created by the gap in the Government's finances following their humiliating backdown over Post Office privatisation?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman was not listening. I said that Railtrack would be moving into the private sector by way of a stock market flotation during the lifetime of this Parliament. I also said:

"The Government have set the target of franchising a majority of train services by April 1996. . . . The Government will be selling the rolling stock leasing companies next year. Privatisation of British Rail's infrastructure services units"—

Mr. Hain: We know all that.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman does not know it. He clearly was not listening because he asked the question that he did. We shall see. The hon. Gentleman and I will judge the actions, not his rhetoric. But let me finish. Privatisation of British Rail Maintenance Ltd. and other businesses is already in progress and the transfer of British Rail's domestic freight services should be completed by the end of 1995. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that that is part of a package approach, and all of it stems from the legislation to which, no doubt, he objected, although he has nothing to put in its place.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Secretary of State has just said that after privatisation the ownership of the British Transport police would remain unchanged. As the ownership of the police is currently vested in Railtrack, does that mean that the BTP will be privatised? Does the right hon. Gentleman have any particular contributor to Tory party funds in mind?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman knows the status of the independent transport police, answerable to Her Majesty's inspector, and I have no change to announce.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Secretary of State now give a straight answer to the question that he has been dodging with some pre-arranged gobbledegook? If the privatisation goes ahead, precisely how will he guarantee the continuation of the whole rail network, including lines that are important to Scottish tourism, such as the highland line, and vital links to Northern Ireland, such

as the Stranraer line? How can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that such lines will continue if his privatisation goes ahead?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to say yet again that the Franchising Director has responsibility to produce minimum service specifications. He is instructed by me to do so broadly on the present timetable, and that is the sort of assurance that any honourable and reasonable Member of the House would be happy to accept.

Disabled People (Discrimination)

4.6 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

Earlier this year, the Government published a wide range of proposals in a consultation document. I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), not only for his work on the proposals, but for his tireless efforts over seven years as Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. We have received a large number of responses to the consultation document and I am grateful to all those who have commented.

As promised, we considered the responses carefully. The result is a package that goes substantially wider and deeper than the proposals that we put forward in the summer. As we develop the detail of our proposals in the coming months, I want to continue to work closely with disabled people and others so that the result is a package that meets the wishes of disabled people, and the legitimate interests of businesses.

Over the past 15 years, the Government have taken a series of measures to help disabled people live with dignity and independence. We have trebled the amount spent on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people and introduced new benefits, such as the disability working allowance; the recent reform of community care has given local authorities additional resources of £1.25 billion in 1994-95; the new access to work programme enables more disabled people to take up employment; the introduction of part M of the building regulations will ensure access for disabled people to public buildings; the new Education Act 1993 improves schools' provision in meeting special educational needs; and there has been action to build on widespread achievements in the field of transport.

Those initiatives, combined with the efforts of local government, the voluntary sector, the private sector and disabled people themselves, have led to major advances in the opportunities open to disabled people and the attitude towards them of the rest of the community.

A process of change has been taking place. It must continue. An aging population will bring an increasing number of people with some form of disability. It is wrong and it is wasteful for many of them to be restricted or excluded from many aspects of life. One way or another, our society must meet the aspirations of disabled people by ensuring that they are included on an equal basis in our work, travel, study and leisure.

Our objective is clear: to eliminate discrimination against disabled people so that they can take a full part in society. But changes cannot happen overnight, as disabled people themselves recognise. It is vital that the action that we take has a realistic timetable, is practical and takes account of the impact on service providers.

I am therefore announcing today a series of measures and legislative proposals that have been conceived in conjunction with my colleagues in the Departments of Health, Transport, Education and Employment, and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, and my right hon. and learned Friend the

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Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Taken together, they will represent the greatest advance for disabled people in the history of this country.

We shall shortly publish a Bill that will deal with employment, rights of access and the establishment of a national disability council. Similar legislation is proposed for Northern Ireland. We shall also take new action on education and transport.

Greater employment opportunities are at the heart of enabling disabled people to be fully active and independent members of society. Some employers have done much in recent years to improve matters, but there is evidence that discrimination persists. It is clear that the current quota system is unworkable and fails to meet the needs of disabled people. We therefore propose to repeal it.

We propose to introduce a statutory right of non-discrimination against disabled people. It will be unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person less favourably than he would treat others, unless there are justifiable reasons. In combination with that, employers will be required to make a reasonable adjustment where that would help overcome the practical effects of disability.

The new access to work scheme can provide a wide range of practical help to disabled people and to their employers of up to £21,000 over five years. The new employment right will be a major step forward in improving the employment prospects of disabled people. Disabled people who suffer discrimination will be able to complain to industrial tribunals, where the remedies available will be the same as those under other discrimination legislation.

There will be a power to make regulations to ensure that adjustments do not involve excessive costs. The duties will apply to employers with 20 or more employees. Employers will continue to be able to recruit the best person for the job.

A code of practice and guidance will be produced to promote clear understanding and reduce the likelihood of disputes arising. Should recourse to an industrial tribunal be necessary, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service would be able to offer the services of its conciliation officers.

The Government's consultation document was aimed at ensuring that service providers did not deny access to disabled people because of prejudice or ignorance. In the light of responses to the consultation document, the Government believe that that proposal does not go far enough. Where practical, we also need to remove physical and communication barriers that prevent the access to goods and services that most of us are lucky enough to take for granted.

The new right of access will require service providers to make their premises and services accessible to disabled people as long as that is "readily achievable". It is vital that the new right is framed in such a way as to lead to genuine and lasting progress. We shall therefore give businesses the option of providing their services by alternative means, and will require modifications only to the extent that they are readily achievable and subject to a financial limit. We shall also ensure that there is a proper phasing-in period.

We shall consult on the length of the phasing-in period, the financial limit and the possibility of other exemptions from the right—for example, older or listed buildings. We shall arrange to provide advice and conciliation with respect to the new right, and we are considering measures to ensure that where legal action does take place, redress can be obtained without undue difficulty or expense.

Those provisions will ensure that every business and service provider takes action to meet the needs of disabled people. They will leave no one in any doubt that the fair treatment of disabled people is a responsibility placed on us all.

In addition, within the next few weeks my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be issuing his own consultation document on making new domestic properties more accessible. The consultation document made clear the Government's intention to exclude financial services from any right of equal access, but as a result of responses received, I propose to include financial services in the new statutory right. We shall look closely, in consultation with the insurance industry, at how legislation could be best framed to prevent discrimination while recognising the legitimate need for insurance companies to distinguish between any customers on the basis of likely costs entailed in meeting their insurance claims.

All those new rights will apply to all persons with a physical or mental impairment that is long term or recurring. The impairment would have to have a substantial effect on the person's ability to carry out normal activities.

The Bill will also establish a national disability council—an independent body to advise the Government on how existing and new measures to help disabled people are working, and to recommend further measures where necessary. It will be a powerful new voice for disabled people in the decision-making process. It will present an annual report on its activities and findings, so that we can continue to make progress, and that report will be laid before Parliament.

The consultation document was limited to the employment right, the right of access and the establishment of the national disability council. But we now propose to go further—by bringing forward proposals on education and transport.

The more that disabled children can be educated with their able-bodied peers, the less we shall see adults avoiding, ignoring or feeling embarrassed by disabled people. We must ensure that that new approach is not frustrated by the physical inaccessibility of mainstream schools.

The Education Act 1993 was a major advance in meeting special educational needs. It re-enacts the requirement for local education authorities to find a suitable place for every child with a disability and enhances parents' rights of school preference and appeals against decisions. Next year, the Department for Education will conduct an audit of accessibility of all schools. Once its results are available, local education authorities and the Funding Agency for Schools will have an up-to-date picture of facilities, helping to inform their work on the supply of suitable places.

Linking with that programme of improvement, we want to take new steps to encourage schools to make themselves more accessible to pupils with disabilities. We

shall bring forward proposals under which funds will be made available to providers of education to carry out imaginative and cost-effective projects aimed at improving accessibility. We envisage that the new scheme will encourage voluntary involvement by the local community. We shall consult on the details of the scheme.

In addition, the Department for Education will shortly consult on the revision of its constructional standards to bring them into line with those set out in the current building regulations. That means that all new schools and extensions would be fully accessible to disabled people.

Scotland has its own extensive provisions in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 for pupils with special educational needs. The Scottish Office will consider further ways of encouraging authorities and schools to improve access for pupils with disabilities through the normal capital allocation arrangements. In Scotland, schools are already subject to the relevant requirements of the building regulations.

All those measures will consolidate the improvements for children with special educational needs set out in the 1993 Act. They represent the Government's firm commitment to ensuring that every child with a disability gets full education opportunities and to steadily improving access in schools.

Transport is another crucial area for disabled people. The new right of access will cover transport infrastructure, for example, railway stations and bus terminals, but will not apply to transport vehicles. The sensible way to improve accessibility must be to do it when new vehicles are purchased. Huge progress has already been made in that way, for example, by improving the accessibility of inter-city services, airports and London taxis. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is anxious to ensure that progress continues. In addition, he will strengthen the guidance issued to local authorities in preparing their annual transport policies and programmes to give greater weight to the needs of people with disabilities.

It is vital that we take further steps towards making fully accessible the most commonly used form of public transport—the bus. The Government intend to ensure that all new buses will be of low-floor construction, as far as technically feasible. The effect will be that, over an agreed time frame, an increasing proportion of buses will be fully accessible to wheelchair users as well as more readily accessible to all other passengers with mobility problems. We shall, of course, need to take full account of European legislation. A draft directive on bus construction is already under discussion and we shall make our case vigorously.

The objective of our package is to give disabled people more power over their own lives. So I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will announce today that we intend to take a new power for social services authorities and, in Scotland, social work departments, to make cash payments to disabled people who request them in lieu of community care services. I believe that this new departure will be widely welcomed. It will enable disabled people to control far more actively how and by whom the care that they need is delivered.

Further details of all our proposals will be included in a detailed policy statement to be published, in addition to a Bill, in the near future.

In presenting this package, the Government are building on an already impressive record of helping disabled people. The steps that I have announced today will involve millions of people in taking positive action to tackle the frustration that disabled people encounter in attempting to do the things that many of us take for granted.

We are guided by one overriding belief: that it is the duty of society as a whole to enable disabled people to play a full part in national life, and to help them and us to make the best use of their talents. Recognition of that makes good sense for disabled people, good sense for our economy and good sense for the nation.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I thank the Minister for his statement, long awaited as it was. After such a road-to-Damascus conversion, was not it ungenerous of the Prime Minister on Wednesday last week, and the Secretary of State for Social Security on Tuesday, to say not a word about the hugely important role played first by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and most recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry)?

Will the Minister take this opportunity to thank the many individuals, groups and organisations that took part in the consultation? Given the distance moved by the Government since the shameful episode during the previous Session, which the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) will no doubt recall, does the Minister agree that those who took part in the public campaign can rightly be proud of all their achievements?

So, where is the Bill and what does it contain? The Minister has just confirmed that it will be published in the not too distant future, and that it will tackle the gross unfairness of the discrimination endured by disabled people in Britain today; indeed, he keeps reminding us that it will be the greatest-ever piece of legislation of its kind. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) views the Minister's position with some envy: his own private views were probably much more progressive than any that we shall hear from the Government today or later.

I do not know about the Minister, but I have seen the sort of Bill that I believe the House and the country want; indeed, I have it in my hand. It is entitled the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Hon. Members may remember it. I am willing to hand it over: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe would not mind. I hope that the Minister intends something along those lines. Every clause of that Bill was supported by a majority of right hon. and hon. Members; it had wide cross-party support. Comprehensive civil rights for all members of society represent the only solution. That is the only legislation that disabled people will want.

Does the Minister appreciate that the House is entitled to be cynical, given that the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986—with which I had something to do—has not yet been fully implemented? At least Lady Thatcher went some way towards that by implementing half the Bill. The present Prime Minister, himself a former Minister for the disabled, has not so much as lifted a finger to introduce one line of that 1986 Act.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

Can we trust the Government to deliver now, regardless of the fine words that we have just heard? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] I think that the nation will require something much more credible than the response that I have just received. They may wonder whether the Government will even be in office after Monday, let alone give positive replies today.

What is not good enough, and is not wanted, is a half-hearted approach—recognising the problems, sympathising with those who are discriminated against, but lacking the vision to do anything about it. What we are asking for—and we know that we have the support of organisations of and for disabled people—is a comprehensive civil rights Bill, enforceable with legal remedies. Will the Minister tell us today whether he agrees with that objective?

The Minister mentioned employment. Does he agree that disabled people need the full protection that can be provided only by a commission with enforceable legal powers to investigate cases of discrimination? Does the Minister appreciate that we will not support the scrapping of the quota system against the wishes of disabled people unless there are adequate safeguards in place such as legal aid on this and other matters, so that disabled people can pursue their rights through the courts? Can the Minister give us the Government's view on access to the courts? Can he expand on what he said about education, transport and health? Those are vital issues to people with disabilities and their carers.

Since the Government are now, belatedly, addressing themselves to community care, does the Minister accept that the chaos that Sir Roy Griffiths identified is now all the greater? Can he tell us how the Government are planning to respond to that growing problem, which is rooted in poverty and in the absence of resources?

Does the Minister accept that there must be a commission—not a well-intentioned talking shop with no legal powers of enforcement—to endorse the rights of people with disabilities? Disabled people deserve nothing less than a full disabled rights commission with the same powers as the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Anything less would merely sustain the present second-class treatment. Does he agree that such a commission is crucial if legislation is not to be ignored in the same way as the 1986 Act was ignored, although it was so crucial to advocacy, representation and consultation? Does he further agree that that is necessary in any reasonable approach to community care?

A climbdown on this and a U-turn on that is no way to forge progressive and substantive policy in this area. Surely the Minister appreciates that, above all, disabled people can desire only to have the statutory right to be treated as full members of the community and to be given the opportunity to participate in and, most importantly, to contribute to national life. Therefore, does he agree that only comprehensive civil rights legislation can achieve that aim? Is he encouraged by the simple fact, which was shown in Scope's excellent report—the Minister was at its presentation the other day—that the objectives are shared fully by an overwhelming majority in the House?

Mr. Hague: I accept the hon. Gentleman's words of welcome, where there were words of welcome, for what we have done. When the Opposition begin by trying to share out the credit and talk about the distance that the Government have moved, we know that there is not a lot to criticise in what the Government have announced. The hon. Gentleman then went on as if the statement had not been delivered. He called for anti-discrimination legislation on a wide scale. This is anti-discrimination legislation. What I have announced is the Government's intention to produce anti-discrimination legislation, which will range across employment in all sectors of our economy and which will bring rights of access to goods and services in most areas of our national life, with the one or two exceptions that I have outlined.

This is comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, because in the areas that are missed out we are taking alternative action, often through legislation or other regulations as in education and transport. The hon. Gentleman asked whether we would deliver. Yes, we certainly shall. There will be a Bill within the next few weeks, as well as a further detailed, written policy statement that will clarify any remaining issues.

I was concerned about the one point in our proposals that the hon. Gentleman found to criticise; it arose when he called for the establishment of a commission. Of course, the Government want legislation to be observed and redress to be easily available. We intend to achieve that without creating an expensive bureaucracy. That is why we intend to have conciliation services and readily available means of redress without setting up another bureaucracy to preside over the whole operation.

The hon. Gentleman talked about community care and the resources that are devoted to it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has presided over a vast increase in resources devoted to community care, which puts local authorities in a good position to introduce the provisions on direct payment that I outlined. He ended his remarks by quoting the Scope report, in which, I must remind him, 75 per cent. of Members of Parliament said that they backed an approach that combined education, persuasion and legislation. That is the Government's approach.

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): Does my hon. Friend accept our ungrudging congratulations on introducing a set of measures that are far wider than the original proposals published earlier this year in the consultation document? Will he reassure disabled people that the Government will ensure that the legislation will reach the statute book and become law during this parliamentary Session?

Mr. Hague: I am most grateful for my hon. Friend's words of welcome. I assure him and disabled people throughout the country that the Government intend to produce a Bill shortly and to take it through to the statute book.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I welcome a number of points in the statement, particularly the assurance that the Secretary of State for Health will bring in direct payments for disabled people so that they can purchase their own care. Is the Minister seriously suggesting, however, that he will receive wholehearted support from disabled people across the country, because the Bill does not outlaw discrimination in all its aspects? In particular, the body that will be set up to monitor the new legislation will be toothless. It will not have the same teeth as the

Commission for Racial Equality. Will the Minister guarantee that the transport and education Bills that will be introduced will contain guaranteed rights of access? Will he give an assurance that the statement is not a cynical attempt to prevent true legislation on civil rights for disabled persons being introduced in a private Member's Bill?

Mr. Hague: Again, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her words of welcome. The package of measures deserves the wholehearted support of disabled people throughout the country as well as of the House, because it tackles discrimination problems across the board with a mixture of legislation and other measures. I believe that those measures should have an extremely wide welcome.

Again, on the point about a commission, the Government believe that it should be possible to enforce legislation without setting up an expensive bureaucracy to police it. In the coming years, however, we shall want to ensure that that legislation is properly enforced and that people have an adequate means of redress. I take the hon. Lady's words of welcome. More specific details about right of access will be available in our detailed policy document. As I explained in my statement, the right of access that we propose will be just that, provided the physical alterations required are readily achievable and do not create undue hardship to bring them about.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. As with the earlier statement, I make a plea for hon. Members to ask one brisk question and for answers to be equally brisk.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): May I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend on his statement? Will he confirm that the proposals that he has announced go considerably further than those contained in the Government's consultation document, especially those on transport and education and the statutory right against discrimination in the workplace?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. These proposals go significantly further than anything that we have had before. In putting together the proposals, we responded to many of the responses to our consultation document. We listened carefully to everyone with an interest in the needs of disabled people and that led us to announce this package today.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) for recalling the origins of this change of Government policy in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill that I drafted three years ago. Is the Minister aware that if he is right in claiming that this is the biggest ever advance for disabled people, it could have been made in 1991 when I first promoted that Bill? Is he further aware that disabled people and their organisations have today already condemned the scrapping of the employment 3 per cent. quota and that they will resist any proposals that offer them less than the provisions of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? He must have made an estimate of the cost of his proposals—what is it?

Mr. Hague: When the Bill is published, we shall of course publish with it a compliance cost assessment setting out the estimated costs of the provisions. However, many matters that will affect the cost are open to further consultation, especially things to which I have already referred such as the financial limit on the cost of physical alterations to premises and the length of time over which the proposals will be phased in. There will, therefore, be quite a range of possible costings and they will be published with the Bill as soon as it is available.

Mr. Nicholas Scott (Chelsea): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on this package of measures, especially those involving education and employment, which will ensure a much greater part in our national life for disabled people. Will he ensure that when he comes to set up the disability council and to decide the pattern of cash payments, which is an immensely important step in the right direction, he will involve the organisations of and for disabled people, because even those who may have been critical of the Government in recent years have a great deal to contribute to his plans in the future?

Mr. Hague: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support. I certainly propose to involve organisations of and for disabled people in consultation on every aspect of the proposals that I have listed where further consultation is necessary. Those organisations have played an important part in shaping the Government's thinking and I hope that they will continue to do so.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I note the significant change in the Government's position since they blocked the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and I cannot wait to read the compliance cost assessment. Does the Minister recognise that his proposals are still significantly different from those made by disabled people themselves? Why is it that we have an Equal Opportunities Commission and a Commission for Racial Equality to deal with discrimination on grounds of gender and race and that those organisations have investigative and enforcement powers that the Government are not prepared to provide for disabled people? Why should not disabled people receive the same treatment as women and black people in respect of discrimination?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman could have managed a bit more of a welcome for many of the things for which he has campaigned for a long time. On his specific question, I have already said that we want legislation to be observed and redress to be easily available, and we believe that that can be achieved without an expensive bureaucracy. Legislation in this sphere is far more complex than it was in matters of sex and race. Many people and businesses will be involved in positive action and expenditure in a way that they are not when dealing with discrimination on the grounds of sex and race. It is a complex comparison; we cannot simply draw an analogy between those issues. We believe that we can make the proposals work as I have outlined, and we are determined that they shall work.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I congratulate my hon. Friend most warmly on producing a real landmark, which goes much further than many people thought possible in providing real opportunities for the disabled. Does he agree that, by scrapping the old quota system, he will encourage much more enlightened

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

employment practices and more job opportunities? Will he do all in his power to ensure that the public sector plays its full part?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. The public sector already has a better record of employing disabled people than the private sector, and the civil service is adopting a programme of action to bolster that record further. He is right about the quota—it is unworkable. It has not worked at all well. History shows that attempts to enforce it have tended to lead to more disabled people in work registering, so that employers can get nearer to meeting the quota, rather than to more disabled people being brought into work. This will be a new approach, which will be much more effective in securing employment for disabled people.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): It would be churlish not to welcome the proposed legislation as a significant step forward. The fact that the Government have changed their policy is a tribute to all those, on both sides of the House, who campaigned. We shall doubtless have to campaign a lot more to finish the job.

The Minister stated that a

"statutory right to non-discrimination will be applied in the context of employment."

The phrase was used only in that context. Does that imply that there is no statutory right to non-discrimination anywhere outside employment? What would be the position in a place of leisure, such as a cinema, where access was possible but there was discrimination against the disabled on the pretext of, for example, fire controls? Will that be covered in the legislation?

Mr. Hague: I think that I can put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest. I did not use the phrase about rights of access, but we intend to make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people when providing goods and services. That would be subject to the various provisions that I outlined, such as the changes being readily achievable, not causing undue hardship and being subject to a financial limit and a phasing-in period. The legislation is certainly anti-discriminatory in the way that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I thank the Minister for his personal determination to end the injustice, indignity and waste that discrimination causes and congratulate him on the important progress that he has announced, which builds on the work of his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott). Will he confirm that it is the Government's policy to ensure that disabled people do not experience unjustified discrimination in any sector?

Does he accept that disabled people—even more than other people—may find it difficult to sustain their legal rights without a powerful organisation to champion them? May I add my request for him to consider further the case for a disability rights commission, with powers not only to advise, but to investigate, conciliate and, from time to time where necessary, to enforce?

Mr. Hague: I am glad to have my hon. Friend's words of welcome. I can confirm that it is our objective to eliminate discrimination across the board and to do so sensibly and practically. I ask him not to underrate the role that we envisage for the national disability council, which ought to be a powerful voice on such issues and will be able to report to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People about discrimination and to recommend further courses of action. It will be the powerful voice that he is seeking.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Following the Minister's answer to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), will he clarify exactly whether the Government have really had a change of heart? Do the Government now believe that disabled people have a basic and fundamental right to be full and equal citizens? If so, why was his statement peppered with so many conditions and qualifications?

Mr. Hague: It is extremely clear from my statement that the Government want to eliminate discrimination against disabled people and want disabled people to be able to play a full part in every aspect of our national life—whether in work, study, travel or leisure. We have to secure that objective in a practical and sensible way—a way that takes other people along with it rather than causing a backlash and a way that is affordable for everyone else in our national economy. That is why I stipulated some of the provisions that I outlined.

The Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, which is often held up as an example of successful legislation on these matters, also uses the terms "readily achievable", "reasonable accommodation" and "undue hardship". Those terms are no strangers to anti-discrimination legislation throughout the world.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): While the Bill has yet to be published, it certainly appears that my hon. Friend has made a detailed and comprehensive statement on Government policy for the disabled and on disabled person's rights. I congratulate the Government on that. The lifts at Macclesfield station have broken down and been out of order for more than two years. Will the legislation set out in his statement enable me to approach Railtrack and demand that it repair or replace those lifts without delay?

Mr. Hague: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome. I would be surprised if the legislation did not assist him in that regard, although he might want to sort out the problem before the it reaches the statute book. I am sure that he will be extremely effective in doing so.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the decided improvement in the Government's position, but as the legislation deals with discrimination and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was consulted, why is a Bill being introduced for the rest of the nation, but legislation is only being proposed for Northern Ireland? Time and again, such legislation has come to Northern Ireland years afterwards. Is it the luddite minority in the Northern Ireland civil service, or the Maryfield mafia, which is preventing the House from granting full rights to the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hague: Again, I readily accept the hon. Gentleman's welcome. He may be reading more into the distinction that I made about Northern Ireland than he should. There is no wish to delay similar legislation for Northern Ireland. The Bill will include a clause to provide for such legislation there and I will communicate to my

right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the hon. Gentleman said about urgency.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): On behalf of disabled people in Norwich, and all those organisations in Norwich and the surrounding area that help and support them, may I join the general welcome for the announcement? May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Remploy factories and their successes? I hope that, after conversations with his colleagues at the Department of Employment, he will soon be able to explain the implications of his new policies, set out in the announcement, for those factories and the excellent support that they give disabled people in Norwich and elsewhere.

Mr. Hague: My package does not specifically affect Remploy factories, where excellent work is done, as my hon. Friend said. The Government hope that that excellent work will continue. My right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Employment have worked hard in recent months to ensure that opportunities are available to Remploy. In the near future, they will produce proposals for a replacement for the priority suppliers scheme as well.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the progress that the proposed legislation represents, but the campaign will continue until we are all satisfied that no disabled person is discriminated against in any way. Does the Minister envisage a phasing-in period that will cover all aspects of the legislation, or will it vary according to the aspects that he delineated?

Mr. Hague: I agree with the hon. Lady that we must all work hard until discrimination against disabled people is completely eliminated. That is the intention of the Government as well as the intention of the Opposition.

The phasing-in periods will be set out as a range of options for consultation when we produce our more detailed written policy statement. That will refer especially to the rights of access to goods and services. Some of the other things that I have mentioned may have a different phasing-in period—for example, we envisage the introduction of low-floor buses which will be accessible to wheelchair users being done on a replacement basis. When a new bus is purchased, it will meet the new specifications. That phasing-in period may be determined by the purchasing patterns of bus service providers rather than by any legislative cut-off.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I welcome what the Minister has said today. Let me take him back to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). Will this legislation proceed in Northern Ireland by means of a Bill or will there simply be an Order in Council? If the latter is the way in which legislation on such an important subject will be treated in Northern Ireland, I trust that the Minister and the Government will have second thoughts.

Mr. Hague: I take full note of the hon. Gentleman's comments. I will, of course, discuss the position with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I welcome the right of redress in employment cases, but does the Minister accept that the best way to combat discrimination in employment is by the development of equal opportunity practices and procedures? Is he aware that, under the privatisation process, it would be unlawful for central Government and local government, under the Local Government Act 1988 and European directives, to place those requirements in the contracting procedures? Will the Minister now consider a clause, similar to that in section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976, which would place on central Government and local government a statutory duty in carrying out those procedures?

Mr. Hague: It is intended that the employment rights will extend across the economy to everyone except employers with fewer than 20 employees. I am not sure that the difficulty the hon. Gentleman mentions will arise. I shall look at the matter further as we produce our detailed policy statement.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I welcome my hon. Friend's determination—indeed, enthusiasm—to tackle the difficult issue of discrimination against disabled people and I especially welcome the fact that we are to have a Government Bill rather than a private Member's Bill in this Session. Can my hon. Friend assure me that, if there is a conflict with other laws passed in this House, the rights of disabled people will be paramount? In terms of access to cinemas, for example, disabled people are often turned away simply because there are already two other people in wheelchairs present. Such a situation is particularly offensive. Does my hon. Friend believe that the proposed legislation will deal with that situation effectively?

Mr. Hague: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for the proposals. It certainly is not the Government's intention that the proposals I have set out today should be frustrated by other provisions. When we come to the Bill, we shall obviously have to resolve what happens when there is a conflict between the need to comply with it and the need to comply with existing statutory provisions. We shall certainly seek to ensure that the provisions that I have set out today come into effect and are effective across the board.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that it has not gone unnoticed by disabled people and others that in his statement today, he said that the legislation would include phraseology such as "readily achievable" and "technically feasible"—God knows how many "ifs" and "buts"—which well-paid lawyers representing big business will use to drive a coach and horses through the legislation? Why does not the Minister do the decent thing? If he wants to do an about-face, he should pick up the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and carry that into law.

Mr. Hague: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that phrases such as "readily achievable" and "undue hardship" have been included in legislation in the United States. I utter phrases such as "where it is technically feasible" because one of the disturbing aspects of the legislation in the United States was that, where it had been imposed as blanket legislation on bus transport, without regard to it being technically feasible, it had resulted in the loss of services altogether in rural areas. That was of no use to anyone. It is obvious that, in sectors such as public transport, one has to do things as they are

[Mr. Hague]

technically feasible otherwise one gets into a terrible mess. That is the position in which the hon. Gentleman would normally leave us.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend on this detailed and complex proposed legislation. On the education front, I welcome the proposal to give education providers an incentive to improve accessibility. Can my hon. Friend help the House by confirming that the proposed accessibility audit for schools will start shortly?

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Department for Education will start the audit of accessibility of schools within the next few months. It aims to complete it during next year and we shall then be in a much better position to judge how much further action is needed.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The Minister set out his plans to introduce what he described as comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation under which disabled people who face discrimination would have the same remedies that other groups have under existing legislation. Does he accept that the bulk of the criticism that has come from those who have tried to work the existing anti-discrimination legislation has been about the derisory level of legal redress and compensation and of the punitive penalties—the things that are supposed to deter those who conduct acts of wilful discrimination? Will he go back and look at those three issues to ensure that disabled people can expect something that breaks free from the derisory and in many ways still discriminatory elements built into the present legislation?

Mr. Hague: My intention is to frame the legislation and its accompanying arrangements in such a way that litigation will not become necessary, in so far as that is possible. We shall create conciliation services, which will avoid litigation in the majority of disputes, and we shall ensure that the means of redress, when it comes to litigation, are available without recourse, in the majority of cases, to expensive litigation or to the use of legal advice. That will be our objective. We are determined to ensure that the legislation works in practice.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Does my hon. Friend agree that not the least important part of the proposed legislation, which I also warmly welcome, is that it can help to change public attitudes towards disabled people so that they can play their full part in society and make a contribution to the community? I and many others believe that, in due course, that will outweigh the costs entailed by the legislation.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The fact that all service providers will have to think about disabled people and will have to address the question of a right of access to goods and services will, in itself, do a great deal to change attitudes towards disabled people. We must remember that legislation is not the whole answer to the question. We must change attitudes quite apart from legislation. Therefore, in the coming weeks, the Government will launch a national awareness campaign on the particular problems and needs of disabled people, and on the obstacles that they can face in their daily lives.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I have been lucky enough to finish fifth in the private Members' ballot. I am minded to introduce the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill back into the House. One thing that would prevent that would be someone who came before me in the ballot choosing that Bill. Otherwise, it is really up to the Minister to tell me now why the legislation that he is propounding is adequate to meet the proposals in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Are not his proposals limited and qualified, welcome though they are? Does not the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill go far beyond them? That Bill should be introduced again, not least to continue to push the Government a bit further along the track they have entered.

Mr. Hague: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his good fortune. The objective of the proposals that I have outlined today is exactly the same as the objective of those who have campaigned for legislation on the matter in the past. That objective is to eliminate discrimination against disabled people throughout our society. The legislation that I have proposed is broad. I hope that hon. Gentlemen will look carefully at the legislation when it is produced, because it will assure them—

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): And hon. Ladies.

Mr. Hague: And hon. Ladies. It will assure them of the breadth of what is intended. The Government believe that, in some sectors, it is more sensible and practical to proceed in a different way, but those sectors are quite limited in scope. The measures in this package, taken together, will bring an end to discrimination against disabled people. The House should make no mistake about the purpose of this package.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate my hon. Friend on a truly comprehensive package. I know that it will be very much appreciated—certainly by the Sutton Alliance of Disabled People, and indeed, by the vast majority of those who supported the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. In particular, they will appreciate his proposals to bring in the low-level platforms on buses. However, does he agree that some issues can be tackled by using plain common sense rather than blanket legislation?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. Plain common sense is exactly what is called for in this case and plain common sense characterises the proposals that I have put before the House today. We need legislation to tackle discrimination against disabled people, but we need to bring it into force in a sensible and practical way. In other sectors, such as public transport, which I have already mentioned, it is plain common sense that the best way in which to tackle the problems is on a replacement basis as new rolling stock or new vehicles are purchased. Common sense is exactly what is called for, and it runs throughout these proposals.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the Minister join me in congratulating disabled people and their organisations on the political pressure that they have exerted since I introduced the first comprehensive anti-discrimination Bill in this House

exactly 11 years ago this month? The Leader of the House—who is present—told us while in a previous post that education and persuasion were all that was required. I am pleased to see at least a partial result of the campaign by those disabled people, which shows that political pressure sometimes works, even with a very slow-moving Government. Will the Minister confirm that the Bill will cover places of entertainment and public resort and that it will give a service to blind people with guide dogs?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman asked about the role of education and persuasion. A mixture of education, persuasion and legislation has always been, and remains, the Government's approach. We are, of course, proposing more legislation today than we have proposed in the past. I have no wish to hog the credit for that. Conservative Members would be happy to share it with Opposition Members and with many people outside the House who have raised the issue of disabled people. I can confirm that the right of access for goods and services will be intended to apply to places of public entertainment and the other places that he mentioned. Of course, within the definition of disabled people, the Bill will also apply to people with guide dogs.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Will the Minister explain why he has chosen to exclude firms which employ fewer than 20 people, given that they account for 96 out of every 100 firms in the country and that they employee 37 in every 100 people? As for the enforcement of anti-discrimination rights, will he extend legal aid to disabled people on low incomes? Otherwise, those rights will remain illusory. Will he ensure that, in the proposed Bill, the onus of industrial tribunals will be on an employer or service provider showing that discrimination did not take place, rather than on the disabled applicant showing that it did? Will he ensure that the Bill also tackles indirect discrimination, such as employers asking job applicants for driving licences when no such skill is needed in the job for which they are applying?

Mr. Hague: I can confirm that it is our intention to tackle instances of indirect discrimination, although we may need to structure the Bill in such a way as to include a power to regulate for specific instances of indirect discrimination so that there is no doubt what we are talking about. The hon. Gentleman asked about the provision for fewer than 20 employees. More than 80 per cent. of the employees in the country work for firms with more than 20 employees. Other legislation in the rest of the world includes provisions for minimum numbers of people. Employment provisions in the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 do not apply to firms with fewer than 15 employees. The reason is that many small firms do not have the personnel functions or specialist advice to enable them to cope easily with such provisions. We do not wish to add to the burdens on small businesses, while still providing for the vast majority in employment.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about means of redress. We have no plans to change the general rules on provision of legal aid, but I reiterate that we intend to provide conciliation services and effective means of redress for all the rights that I have outlined today. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman could not have given a better welcome to the proposals. I know that he is enthusiastic for anti-discrimination legislation. That is what the Government are now bringing forward and it deserves the whole-hearted support of the House.

Business of the House

5.7 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Madam Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement about the business for next week. The business for next week will be as follows.

MONDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

Motion to take note of documents relating to the 1995 budget of the European communities. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

TUESDAY 29 NOVEMBER—My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 30 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

THURSDAY 1 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 2 DECEMBER—There will be a debate on policing of London on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 5 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate which will be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 6 December.

[*Monday 28 November:*

European Communities (Finance) Bill—Relevant European Community documents: 1. European Communities Act 1972 (as amended) 2. 1994 Own Resources Decision 3. 1988 Own Resources Decision 4. 1985 Own Resources Decision 5. 1992 Edinburgh European Council Conclusions 6. 1993 Inter-Institutional Agreement 7. 1994 Budget Discipline Decision 8. 1994 Council Regulation No 2728/94 establishing a Guarantee Fund for external actions 9. 1994 Council Regulation No 2729/94 amending Regulation No 1552/89 10. 1994 Council Regulation No 2730/94 amending the Financial Regulation 11. 1993 Structural Fund Regulation 12. 1993 Cohesion Fund Regulation 13. 1994 Working Methods Paper on the UK Abatement 14. Executive Summary of the European Court of Auditors report on implementation of the 1993 EC Budget.

Floor of the House—Relevant European Community documents: a) COM(94)400 1995 Budget, b) 8782/94 1995 Budget, c) 9943/94 Adjustment of the financial perspective with a view to enlargement of the European Union, d) Unnumbered Document-European Parliament Minutes for the Sitting of the 27 October 1994 relating to the Draft General Budget for the European Union for the financial year 1995, e) Unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum-Council Decisions on the European Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the Draft General Budget of the European Community for the financial year 1995; relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: a) HC 48-xxiii (1993-94), b) HC 48-xxvi (1993-94), c) No report, d) No report, e) No report.

Tuesday 29 November:

Chancellor of the Exchequer—Budget statement: The following documents are relevant to the Budget debate: Unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 22 September 1994 relating to the Commission opinion on the existence of an excessive deficit in the United Kingdom and recommendation for a Council decision, drawn up in accordance with Article 104c.5 and Article 104c.6 of the Treaty establishing the European Community; Unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 14 October 1994 relating to the Council recommendations to the United Kingdom with a view to bringing an end to the situation of an excessive Government deficit, prepared by the Commission in acceptance with Article 104c.7 of the Treaty establishing the European Community.]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. On Monday, in the event of the Leader of the House being successful in brow-beating Conservative Members into the Lobby and, as usual, a rebellion petering out, and the European Communities (Finance) Bill receiving a Second Reading, will it be committed to a Committee of the whole House as befits a measure of such importance as—I think—the House would wish?

If the Leader of the House remains in office after Monday's vote, will he find time, as a matter of urgency, to debate the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report and its recommendation of a code of conduct, which would be very useful as a buffer against ministerial party political excesses? It would be of great advantage to everyone to have an early debate on that issue.

Will the Leader of the House also tell us when he expects to find time to debate the Jopling report and the proposals to which he referred in his speech last night?

Mr. Newton: Let me take the latter two questions first. The hon. Lady well knows my desire to find time to debate the proposals that she and I have been able to agree—I think that is now the right word—for the Jopling report. However, she will equally understand that, with the business immediately facing the House and with five days—which, I may say, responds to the wishes of the Opposition—being allocated to debate the Budget, it would be difficult for me to make a promise of a debate before the week after next—at the earliest—on either of the matters that she has raised. I cannot give a commitment even on that at this stage.

The hon. Lady's first question is, of course, a matter for the House, but it is a matter of record that, normally, the practice for such Bills has been to discuss them in a Committee of the whole House.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): One of the most important measures announced in the Queen's Speech was the Pensions Bill to protect the interests of occupational pensioners. When will that be introduced? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it will start its progress in this House?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend, above all, knows that the Bill will be long and complex. Its preparation is not yet completed and, at this stage, I cannot give a definite date for its expected introduction. We are still considering, in various parts of the legislative programme, precisely how the balance as to where Bills should originate will fall between the two Houses.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Leader of the House acknowledge that it has been a long time since the House debated agriculture in Government time? Is he aware that hon. Members on both

sides of the House have hill livestock farmers in their constituencies who are under some pressure? The new budgetary format means that hill livestock compensatory allowance payments will be made in the aftermath of the Budget statement. It would be helpful if the Leader of the House could give us some idea of when an agriculture debate will take place and when the announcements about HLCA payments will be made.

Mr. Newton: Again, I cannot be as specific as the hon. Gentleman would evidently like me to be. However, I do not think that his questions will go unanswered for very long.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay) *rose—*

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate about unregulated DSS hostels and houses in multiple occupation, which continue to have a thoroughly damaging effect on the quality of life and the economy of many seaside resorts throughout the country? Is he aware that this week the Government issued a consultation paper about a potential licensing system for houses in multiple occupation? Does he understand that many of my constituents want to see a self-financing licensing system for all existing hostels introduced as soon as possible?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will know that I am aware of the consultation paper. For reasons that I have already touched on, I cannot promise an early debate. However, I note that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be in the House to answer questions next Wednesday, which may give my hon. Friend an opportunity to underline his concern.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland next week about his outrageous proposal to publish death rate league tables for Scottish hospitals? Bearing in mind that a spokesperson for the Secretary of State for Health is quoted as saying that she has no intention of following the Scottish example because she has no enthusiasm for "counting dead bodies", why on earth is the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuing such a ghoulish policy?

Mr. Newton: I understand that the clinical outcome indicators report, which I think underlines what the hon. Gentleman referred to, has been prepared by a working group of health professionals, public health doctors and NHS managers. While I understand why the hon. Gentleman used his phrase, the proper way to describe the process is "clinical outcomes", and of course a large number of outcomes are highly successful. .

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Could we have an early debate on the subject of social services, bearing in mind that certain shire counties, including Gloucestershire, have been badly served by a change in the funding formula? It is rather difficult to explain to our constituents why help is being withdrawn at a time when we are about to devote billions, seemingly uncounted, to extend Italian motorway systems.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has commented about social services in recent times— most recently in the debate on the Queen's Speech, which we concluded yesterday. The hon. Gentleman will know that substantial additional sums of money have been allocated in connection with the development of community care policy.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister will remember that I asked last week for a statement about sudden infant deaths. The Minister had an opportunity to make some reference to the subject this week, but did not do so. I press the Minister to give the House an opportunity to explore the matter.

Mr. Newton: I think that the hon. Gentleman, rather uncharacteristically, is being a little unfair. That is clearly a matter which requires careful professional advice. He will know that last Friday the chief medical officer convened an expert working group to consider what had been said on the "The Cook Report". It has advised that the programme provided nothing to invalidate earlier reports, but raised questions which need proper investigation, and further work is progressing urgently. I think that that is probably the right way to approach this difficult matter.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Given that we are debating European Community finances on Monday, can the Minister and his Cabinet colleagues give serious consideration to how the House, the Parliament, and indeed the United Kingdom, can contribute to monitoring and examining the colossal fraud that is perpetrated throughout the European Community? Would not Monday's debate provide an opportunity to suggest some positive ways to deal with the problem?

Mr. Newton: From the way in which my hon. Friend has phrased his question, I know that he needs no reminder from me that the background of the Court of Auditors report deals in part with the efforts that the Government have made to ensure that the Community tries harder to combat fraud. The British Government need no urging in their attempts to ensure that the Community's efforts are reinforced and supported in every possible way. I have no doubt that it is a matter to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will advert in the debate on Monday.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Taking on board the fact that the House will have the opportunity later tonight to vote on ministerial and other salaries, will the Leader of the House find time next week to debate the level of remuneration for elected local councillors from all political parties who often work long and hard for very little reward?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise to find time for a debate, but I will bring the concern that the hon. Gentleman has raised to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who I think is the appropriate Minister to refer it to, as well as to the attention of the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Are not there two main subjects of discussion in connection with the European finance Bill debate on Monday: first, the question of whether it is a matter of confidence, and all that flows from that; and, secondly, the financial arguments, which could properly be dealt with by the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

Is not it the case that the subject should be dealt with in a two-day debate, and that the first day should begin with the Prime Minister explaining how he regards it as a matter of confidence? Is not it unsatisfactory for this debate to be truncated into one day, which is overshadowed by the Budget, so as to ensure that the constitutional impropriety of the Government is given as little attention as possible?

Mr. Newton: I must make one point to my hon. Friend, in view of the phrasing of his question. The question about whether this is a matter of confidence is not open for discussion: it is, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear, a matter of confidence.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister both explained and made clear the position on who should participate in the debate in his Question Time only a couple of hours ago. Thirdly, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has referred repeatedly to the Bill's financial details in recent days. He has made it quite clear— as no doubt he will on Monday— that the effects of the Bill in implementing the Edinburgh agreement will amount to £75 million next year, rising to £250 million by the end of the century.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that the compensation recovery unit of the DSS is clawing back vast amounts of compensation awarded for ill health and injury? For example, a Glasgow man who was awarded £30,000 ended up with £2,000 at a time when he was at his very lowest ebb in financial and health terms. In the interests of justice, will the Minister institute an early debate on a subject which affects a large number of innocent individuals and groups throughout the country?

Mr. Newton: As a former DSS Minister, I know that the principle of compensation recovery is a long-established one. I do not think that anyone looking at it would argue seriously that state benefits should replace permanently compensation due from a party found guilty of negligence. The current scheme ensures that the cost of compensation falls where it should: on the person who has been negligent.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): May we have an early debate on the free accommodation provided for Sheffield Labour Members of Parliament and the Sheffield Member of the European Parliament so that we may ascertain whether that practice is widespread or just a local difficulty? The matter was highlighted in yesterday's issue of *The Star* in Sheffield.

Mr. Newton: I shall obviously consider my hon. Friend's point. However, he will have some opportunity to raise the matter next week because, as I have already said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be here to answer questions on Wednesday. I think that we can also anticipate in the latter part of next week the annual revenue support grant statement.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I apologise for trying to butt in at the start of the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson). My right hon. Friend will be aware that, this afternoon, the Prime Minister said that the leakage of classified information that was reported today in *The Independent* had not originated from British Telecom. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there has been a serious leakage of highly classified information and that if British Telecom denies that it was responsible for that leak, it must be a matter for a statement by the Home Secretary?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will probably understand that I cannot add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said this afternoon, which was clearly based on urgent but careful inquiry. However, I shall bring my hon. Friend's question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will there be a debate at any time next week on "The Health of the Nation" statement, which was made by the Secretary of State for Health? A debate is especially important in view of the dangerous development of suicide squads—these religious cults—which seems to have spread to six Cabinet members. Is the Leader of the House one of the six? I can tell him that if they intend to start blowing people up, we are not going with them.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman were going with us, it might tempt some of us. Beyond that, I cannot add to what has been said.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Given that, after the debate on Monday, the Whip may well be withdrawn from a score or so of my right hon. Friend's hon. Friends, would that score or so constitute a political party and would it be entitled to facilities in the House and to public money?

Madam Speaker: Order. Those are internal matters.

Mr. Marlow: If, at a later stage, the Government were to table an amendment and the new, improved Conservative party opposed it, would the doctrine of collegiate, corporate Cabinet Götterdämmerung still apply?

Mr. Newton: I shall probably be pulled up for saying that I did not hear a request for a debate, Madam Speaker. If there had been such a request, I would have said that I could not find time for it.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): During this spell of mild weather, the Leader of the House might be forgiven for forgetting about the poor, the disabled and the elderly who will suffer during the winter. Is not it time that we had a debate on that matter so that we can discuss legislation to put in place a properly constituted and adequate cold climate payment?

Mr. Newton: I have been familiar with those matters for many years because of my time as a social security Minister. In a brief answer, I shall not attempt to rehearse all the difficulties. However, I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to what has been said.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Given what the Lord President said yesterday evening about the Jopling report and the progress that he hopes to make on it, and bearing in mind that yesterday evening he told us

when he expected the Easter recess to start, is he aware that Christmas comes before Easter? Can he give us any information about when that recess will start?

Mr. Newton: I am aware that Christmas comes before Easter and I wondered last night whether I might do a little better on that front. The best that I can do at the moment is to say that I expect the Christmas recess to start in the week before Christmas and to include Christmas day. I shall give further and better particulars when the scene becomes clearer. As I said last night, many hon. Members have spotted that Easter is about as late as it can get and thought that the recess would probably come before Easter. That was why I sought to make the matter clear but I am bound to say that my phrasing allowed for not having an Easter recess at all.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Would my right hon. Friend consider a debate to mark next week's visit to this country by the Speaker of the Kuwaiti Parliament and seven of its Members? It would be an opportunity for the House to share its concern with them over the plight of 625 missing prisoners of war and detainees held in Iraq. These are crucial days and we hope that talks between Kuwait and Iraq are about to begin. It is important for the Iraqis to see that this country supports the allies in making sure that the Iraqis comply with UN resolutions and to realise that sanctions will not be lifted until all those issues are resolved.

Mr. Newton: Even without a debate—we recently had a full day on foreign affairs during the debate on the Address—I assure my hon. Friend that, on the matters that she mentions, as on others, the Government remain concerned to ensure compliance with all United Nations resolutions.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on NHS hospital trusts, thus giving the Labour party an opportunity to comment on an outburst by a leading light in my local Labour party who appeared to be claiming that his application to join a local NHS trust board was rejected because of his party's hostility to sensible Government reforms of the NHS?

Mr. Newton: If I were to provide time for debate on every unreasonable outburst by local Labour supporters, we should be debating nothing else.

BILL PRESENTED

Children (Scotland)

Mr. Secretary Lang, supported by Mrs. Secretary Bottomley, Sir George Young and Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, presented a Bill to reform the law of Scotland relating to children, to the adoption of children, and to young persons who as children have been looked after by local authorities; to make new provision as respects the relationship between parent and child and guardian and child in the law of Scotland; to make provision as respects residential establishments for children and as respects certain other residential establishments; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 4].

Deregulation (Procedure)

Madam Speaker: All the matters that are covered in the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) will of course be in order during the debate on the Government motion so that we may debate them. If the House wishes to allow Divisions at the conclusion of proceedings, I propose to allow them on amendments (a) and (b).

5.26 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That Standing Orders A and B below shall have effect and Standing Orders No. 14 (Exempted business), No. 124 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) and No. 130 (Select committees related to government departments) shall be amended as set out below.

A. Deregulation Committee

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Deregulation Committee, to examine every document containing proposals laid before the House under section 3, and every draft order proposed to be made under section 1, of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

(2) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every document containing proposals laid before the House under the said section 3, either—

(a) that a draft order in the same terms as the proposals should be laid before the House; or

(b) that the proposals should be amended before a draft order is laid before the House; or

(c) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of the proposals.

(3) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every draft order laid before the House under the said section 1, its recommendation whether the draft order should be approved.

(4) The committee may report to the House on any matter arising from consideration of the said proposals or draft orders. (5)(A) In its consideration of proposals the committee shall consider in each case whether the proposals—

(a) appear to make an inappropriate use of delegated legislation;

(b) remove or reduce a burden or the authorisation or requirement of a burden;

(c) continue any necessary protection;

(d) have been the subject of, and take appropriate account of, adequate consultation;

(e) impose a charge on the public revenues or contain provisions requiring payments to be made to the Exchequer or any government department or to any local or public authority in consideration of any licence or consent or of any services to be rendered, or prescribe the amount of any such charge or payment;

(f) purport to have retrospective effect;

(g) give rise to doubts whether they are intra vires;

(h) require elucidation or appear to be defectively drafted;

(i) appear to be incompatible with any obligation resulting from membership of the European Union. (B) In its consideration of draft orders, the committee shall consider in each case all the matters set out in sub-paragraph (A) above and the extent to which the Minister concerned has had regard to any resolution or report of the Committee or to any other representations made during the period for parliamentary consideration. (6) The committee shall consist of sixteen members. (7) The quorum of the committee shall be five. (8) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament. (9) The committee shall have power—

[Mr. Tony Newton]

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom, and to report from time to time;

(b) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference;

(c) to appoint a sub-committee, of which the quorum shall be two, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom;

(d) to communicate its evidence and any other documents relating to matters of common interest to any committee appointed by this House and to any committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation proposals and draft orders. (10) The committee and the sub-committee shall have leave to meet concurrently with any select committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation proposals and draft orders and any sub-committee thereof. (11) The committee and the sub-committee shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker and, if their Lordships think fit, the Counsel to the Lord Chairman of Committees. (12) The committee and the sub-committee shall have power to invite Members of the House who are not members of the committee to attend meetings at which witnesses are being examined and such Members may, at the discretion of the chairman, ask questions of those witnesses; but no Member not being of the committee shall otherwise take part in the proceedings of the committee or sub-committee, or be counted in the quorum. (13) It shall be an instruction to the committee that before reporting either—

(i) that any proposal should be amended before a draft order is laid before the House, or

(ii) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of any proposal, or

(iii) that any draft order should not be approved, it shall afford to any government department concerned an opportunity of furnishing orally or in writing to it or to the sub-committee appointed by it such explanations as the department think fit. (14) It shall be an instruction to the committee that it report on every draft order not more than fifteen sitting days after the draft order was laid before the House, indicating in the case of draft orders which it recommends should be approved whether its recommendation was agreed without a division. B. Consideration of draft deregulation orders (1) If the Deregulation Committee has reported under paragraph (3) of Standing Order A (Deregulation Committee) that a draft order laid before the House under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 should be approved and a motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to that effect, the question thereon shall—

(a) if the committee's recommendation was agreed without a division, be put forthwith;

(b) if the committee's recommendation was agreed after a division, be put not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion. (2) If the committee has reported that a draft order should not be approved, no motion to approve the draft order shall be made unless the House has previously resolved to disagree with the committee's report; the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion for such a resolution to disagree shall be put not later than three hours after their commencement; and the question shall be put forthwith on any motion thereafter made by a Minster of the Crown that such a draft order be approved.(3) Motions to which this order applies may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.

Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business)

Line 14, after 'procedure))', insert 'or Standing Order B (Consideration of draft deregulation orders)'.

Standing Order No. 124 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee))

Line 22, at end insert 'and any draft order proposed to be made under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994'.

Standing Order No. 130 (Select committees related to government departments)

Line 101, after 'Accounts', insert 'and to the Deregulation Committee'.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, which received Royal Assent on 3 November, contains a new power enabling Ministers to make orders to amend or repeal primary legislation that imposes a burden, provided that necessary protection is not removed. The Act provides that each deregulation proposal should be open to parliamentary scrutiny for a period of 60 days, and that subsequent draft deregulation orders require the approval of both Houses of Parliament.

I am pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee in his place, because he and his Committee carried out much diligent work on this matter. The Procedure Committee has already conducted an inquiry into the parliamentary procedure that should apply to deregulation orders and has made recommendations on how the House should make use of the opportunity for scrutiny that the Act provides. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and to his colleagues for the speed and thoroughness of their inquiry and for the recommendations that they made. I think my right hon. Friend will agree that the Government have accepted the great majority of those recommendations.The Committee's report and the Government's response were debated in the House on 11 May.

The purpose of the motion is to give effect to the undertakings that the Government have given and to incorporate the new scrutiny procedure in Standing Orders. The new Standing Order A establishes the new scrutiny committee, the Deregulation Committee, with power to report to the House both on the initial deregulation proposals laid before Parliament and on the draft orders introduced for affirmative resolution after the initial scrutiny process. The Committee will also have power to report on any matter arising from its consideration of deregulation proposals or orders.

When considering deregulation proposals, the Committee will be asked to consider, under paragraph (5) of the draft Standing Order, whether the use of delegated rather than primary legislation is appropriate in the circumstances; whether the proposal actually removes or reduces a burden; whether necessary protection is continued; whether adequate consultation has taken place; and whether the proposal takes appropriate account of that consultation. The Committee will also apply the criteria used by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and ask, for example, whether the proposal is ultra vires or defectively drafted. In addition, it will consider whether it infringes any EC obligations.

Under the terms of the Act, about which, hon. Members will remember, there was a good deal of discussion, the Committee will have 60 days, excluding recesses, in which to carry out whatever inquiries it considers necessary and to report to the House whether the proposals should be proceeded with in the same terms, in an amended form or not at all. If the Deregulation Committee were to report that a proposal should not be proceeded with, in normal circumstances, as the

Government have made clear on a number of occasions, we would expect to submit a revised proposal or to withdraw the proposal altogether.

When the proposal is brought back in its final form as a draft order subject to affirmative resolution, the Deregulation Committee will reconsider it, employing the same criteria as before, and consider the extent to which the Minister has taken account of the Committee's report on the first version of the proposal and of any other representations that may have been made. The Committee will then report within 15 sitting days on whether the House should approve the draft order.

The remaining provisions of the draft Standing Order deal with the Committee's powers. The Committee will have 16 members nominated for the duration of a Parliament and a quorum of five. It will have the usual powers of a Select Committee, including the powers to take evidence, to travel within the United Kingdom and to appoint specialist advisers.

In common with other Select Committees, it will not have the power to summon Ministers before it, but I am happy to repeat the assurance that the Government have already given the Procedure Committee: that Ministers with responsibility for a deregulation proposal will be anxious to assist the Deregulation Committee with its work. Frankly, I cannot envisage a time when a Minister would refuse to attend as a witness if his or her attendance were requested.

In addition to the usual powers, the Committee will have powers to appoint a sub-committee to communicate evidence to other Select Committees and to the equivalent Committee in another place and—something to which both Houses attach importance—to hold concurrent meetings with the Lords Committee. That seems a sensible way of avoiding two Committees covering the same ground with the same witnesses. It will also have the benefit of expert legal advice.

Following the Procedure Committee's recommendations, the draft Standing Order makes provision for hon. Members who are not members of the Deregulation Committee to take part in its questioning of witnesses. The Committee and its sub-Committee will have power to invite other hon. Members to attend evidence sessions, and those invited hon. Members will be able to put questions to witnesses if they succeed in catching the Chairman's eye.

I am sure that the Committee will be able to devise appropriate ways of ensuring that hon. Members who express an interest in a particular deregulation proposal receive a invitation to attend relevant evidence sessions so that they can take advantage of the opportunities that the new procedure affords. Hon. Members will, of course, be able to give written evidence to the Committee and oral evidence if the Committee invites them to appear before it.

The final paragraphs of Standing Order A require the Deregulation Committee to take evidence from the Department concerned before making an adverse report and to report on each draft order not more than 15 sitting days after it was laid before the House.

The new Standing Order B governs proceedings in the House on draft deregulation orders after the Committee's consideration has finished. The procedure to be followed in relation to particular orders will depend on the nature of the Deregulation Committee's report. If the Committee has approved a draft order unanimously, the motion to approve it will be decided forthwith in line with the recommendations of the Procedure Committee. Hon. Members will already have had a chance to express their views at an earlier stage, not least through the procedures that I have just outlined, which allow them a role in the Deregulation Committee's evidence-taking. A measure that has received the unanimous approval of a relatively large all-party committee after a thorough process of scrutiny is surely one that need not detain the House.

If the Committee approves a draft order, but its decision was not unanimous, there will be a debate of one and a half hours, which is, of course, what the Standing Orders provide for affirmative instruments generally.

If the Committee has recommended that a draft order should not be approved, the motion to approve it will not be able to be moved unless the House has resolved to disagree with the Committee's report. That would require a three-hour debate on an amendable motion—a significantly new feature of these arrangements.

Only in the most exceptional circumstances would the Government contemplate asking the House to set aside the Committee's recommendations in that way and it would certainly be appropriate to have a rather longer than usual debate under those circumstances, as was suggested by the Procedure Committee and as we readily accepted.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has tabled five amendments, to which he will no doubt speak. I would not seek to prevent him from doing so even if I could. His proposed amendments to Standing Order A would fix the size of the Deregulation Committee at 15 rather than 16, as the Procedure Committee proposed.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): It was amendment (aa).

Mr. Newton: I was referring to the amendment to Standing Order A that would fix the size of the Deregulation Committee at 15 and give it an extra week—20 days instead of 15—in which to report to the House on the final version of the draft order. The hon. Gentleman's proposed amendments to Standing Order B would provide for longer debates in the House on draft deregulation orders.

I believe that the Government's proposals on these points are entirely reasonable. Moreover, as I have now said several times, they precisely follow the recommendations of the Procedure Committee. The motion also makes minor or consequential amendments to three existing Standing Orders.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way and I apologise if I may have missed some reference to this point in his original remarks. I ran as fast as I could to come and hear him, but he was on his feet quicker than I had expected.

I am concerned about the credibility and reputation of the Committee, which, to a large extent, will depend on its chairmanship. The Leader of the House will be aware that in many submissions to the Procedure Committee—and among its membership—a strong view was expressed that the precedent established in other Committees of having an Opposition Member as Chairman of the Committee could well be followed in this case. I appreciate that it is not appropriate for the order, but I wonder whether the Leader of the House could give a

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

assurance that he and his colleagues believe that, in normal circumstances, it would be appropriate for an Opposition Member to chair the Committee, if for no other reason than that the size of the Government these days might give him a larger pool of talent to call upon.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging that the chairmanship is not appropriate for the order before the House. I have to say—disappointingly for him—that his question is not really one for me; it is, as with the chairmanship of other Committees, normally a matter for discussion through the usual channels and it is appropriate in respect of this Committee.

A motion to nominate the new Deregulation Committee will be introduced as soon as possible following the customary consultations through the self-same usual channels. The Government have undertaken that no deregulation proposal will be laid before Parliament under the new procedure until four sitting weeks after the Committee has been nominated, which should give the Committee adequate time to sort out how it wants to work before it is asked to undertake any inquiries.

The proposals, which are based on the substantial work of the Procedure Committee and a good deal of early debate in the House and the other place, will provide a sensible and flexible way of ensuring that deregulation proposals are subjected—as they quite properly should be—to full and effective parliamentary scrutiny and I commend them to the House.

5.38 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am grateful for the way in which the Leader of the House explained the motion. I should like to make a couple of preliminary points before coming to the main issues.

It is remarkable that we are entering an innovative parliamentary procedure with this Committee which is quite different from the history of how the House has operated. It is based on a Standing Order published less than a week ago. We are debating it today, yet we have not had the opportunity to debate the really effective changes that could occur in the Jopling report, which was published two years ago.

I make the contrast between the two if only to say to the Leader of the House that there is a case for that procedure simply on the grounds that, if the Government follow their programme on deregulation, there will be a considerable amount of work for the Select Committee, which may lead to many more orders reaching the Floor of the House.

Under the Jopling proposals, most of those orders could be considered in Committee rather than on the Floor of the House. The idea is to stop clogging up the Floor of the House with matters of substantial detail. The two sets of proposals go hand in hand. It would be more effective to operate the new Select Committee, with its unique powers of scrutiny, once the Jopling proposals were implemented, even on an experimental basis.

Although there is some implied criticism in what I have said, it is no criticism of the discussions that the Leader of the House has had with my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). The sooner that we get on with implementing Jopling the better. It will make the Deregulation Select Committee operate much more efficiently.

I have read a little of the background to the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 and to the proposals that we are discussing. It appears from my reading of the position that membership of the Deregulation Committee will be almost tantamount to membership of the Public Accounts Committee. I was a member of the PAC for two years. It is a full-time job to fulfil the functions and duties in the required detail.

There are some unwritten conventions in the House about who can and who cannot be a member of a Select Committee. There is a strong case for not following those conventions rigidly when the membership of the Deregulation Committee is considered. That is obviously a matter for discussion between the Government, the Opposition and the minor parties. Many hon. Members, particularly Opposition Members, are precluded from serving on any Select Committee because they hold other positions. There is a strong case for changing that convention for the new Committee.

Mr. Spearing: I hope to catch your eye in a few moments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Does my hon. Friend accept that the distinction that he makes is even greater than he perhaps realises? While the Public Accounts Committee has many similarities with the Deregulation Committee, its powers are entirely retrospective in matters of finance. The role of the Deregulation Committee will be prospective in terms of legislation that will be equally, if not more, important than financial legislation.

Mr. Rooker: I agree with that. I do not want to get into a debate on the distinction between the two Committees. The PAC does not deal with policy. It never has Ministers before it in any event. It calls only the accounting officers of the Department or agency. Having said that, serving on the Public Accounts Committee, which has two separate sittings and reports each week on different subjects, is a full-time job for its members. There is no room for lots of outside interests. So the Deregulation Committee, which will run along similar lines as the PAC, will be extremely important. The membership and the care with which the Committee exercises its duties will have to be watched carefully by the House.

Another point about the process of the Committee is that the Government will decide to make a deregulation order—in the machinery of Government; we will never know about it. They will then consult outside interests before laying a proposal before the House. Again, under the normal process, we will not know about it. "Interests" is a strange word to use. When the Government have decided to make an order, they should tell the world. It should be a matter of public knowledge.

The House has an interest in knowing who the Government consulted as outside interests before they laid the draft order. We should like to see a list of the outside interests that the Government consulted. The work of the Committee will be absolutely crucial in the sense that it will take evidence from people who may have been deprived of the opportunity to be consulted as an outside interest before the order was laid before the House. So we should know whom the Government consulted.

There is no doubt that in the past 15 years power has shifted from Westminster to Whitehall on a grand scale. The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act and the operation of the Committee will transfers powers to Whitehall even further. There will be a free vote on the motion tonight. Indeed, I suspect that there will not be any votes. We want to make the system work, regardless of whether we disagree or agree with the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act. However, it has to be said that England is the last one-party state in western Europe. The Conservatives have ruled Britain more this century than the Communist party ruled the Soviet Union. The changes brought about in the past 15 years sometimes appeared to be made on the basis that the Conservative party thought that it would continue to rule for ever.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act transfers another tranche of powers from the House to the Executive. Sometimes other parties will have use of the powers that the Government have left in Whitehall. We must make sure that those parties operate them democratically, openly and in the interests of our fellow citizens. I remind the Leader of the House and his colleagues that that will come as a shock to Conservative Members who have never been in opposition. Of course, that applies to most of the Cabinet. I exclude the present Leader of the House, who was so helpful as a member of the Opposition in enabling me to carry through certain changes in the Finance Act 1977.

There are many other Acts that other parties in government might wish to change. They may not wish to go through the laborious processes of scrutiny and primary legislation to which we are accustomed in the House. The powers in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act and the changes to the Standing Orders do not require much modification to be used for other purposes.

I am not interested in cutting corners. I hope that the Leader of the House is not interested in cutting corners. I do not wish to debate the effects of the deregulation legislation. One of the matters that the Deregulation Committee will scrutinise in deciding whether to take evidence and how to judge a deregulation order will be, as paragraph A(5)(A)(c) says:

"whether the proposals . . . continue any necessary protection."

Such protection could be on matters of health and safety, protection at work, and employment protection. Those matters go to the bare bones of the rights of our fellow citizens. So we are not interested in any corners being cut by either this or any future Government.

The Government have played with fire on the issue of procedure. I set that as a warning for the future. It is a warning as much to the Leader of the House as to anyone who occupies his position in the future. Nothing illustrates how the Government have played with fire with our procedure more than the Tory domination of the Deregulation Committee. The Conservatives will insist on the usual procedure. They will want an overall Conservative majority on the Committee, as there is on every Select Committee, whoever the Chair may be. I shall come to that in a moment.

As I understand the order, even if, by chance, the governing majority in the Deregulation Committee did not get their way, the Government could bring the order back to the Floor of the House so that their majority could push it through. That shows a supreme lack of confidence. We know what other Select Committees and Standing Committees are like. There are 651 very busy people in the House. We may criticise each other on a party, performance or competence basis, but we are all busy people. Occasionally, hon. Members come through the doors to vote at 10 o'clock knowing nothing of the detail of what they will vote on.

We are setting up a high-powered Committee, membership of which will be virtually a full-time occupation. Like other Select Committees, but unlike Standing Committees, it will take evidence. It will use advisers and it will have the assistance of legal counsel. I hope that legal counsel will be fully independent and will have as much to do with the Government as I have. It must be as independent as possible.

The Committee will take considerable time to scrutinise the proposed changes. It will deliberate. If it comes to a considered view after mature inquiry and consideration that it does not agree with the deregulation order in question, the matter will come to the Floor of the House, the Government will put on a three-line Whip, 651 people will troop through the doors and bingo.

If the Government were confident of their proposal to short-cut our usual scrutiny procedures by avoiding primary legislation, they would not seek to dominate the Committee as I suspect they will. The Government should not seek the chairmanship. I have not read all the details, but I understand that the decision on that required the casting vote of the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, from whom I hope that we will hear an abject apology shortly.

I hope that the Leader of the House will say that this is not an example of the Government seeking to dominate. I accept that, unlike the Public Accounts Committee, this Committee will deal with an element of legislation. It is a different legislative, procedural and scrutinising animal, unlike anything previously known in the House. That being so, I ask the Government to have confidence in their own legislation and procedures. They should be confident that this is a matter that they can get right.

Where the Government have a majority, they are entitled to get their legislation. Nevertheless, I hope that they will say that they do not want to take short cuts or be seen to cheat on the Opposition and that Labour can have the Chair of the Committee. If they did that, they would engender confidence in the House in the functions of the Committee.

If the Government seek to overturn a decision of the Deregulation Committee, if, in their wisdom, they decide not to approve deregulation, the interested and informed parts of the public who were concerned with that element of deregulation will hold the House further in contempt. That is crucial.

The Labour party will co-operate with the Committee. It is in everyone's interests that it should do so and it would be irresponsible not to do so. But we will not co-operate quietly. The Opposition will scrutinise the operation of the Deregulation Committee from day one. We will watch and monitor its procedure. We will watch and monitor the interests involved, both those of the Members and those who appear before it. We will ruthlessly expose any corruption of our democratic procedures. The Government are taking a short cut with our procedures and, if we feel that it has the potential to cause problems for our constituents and fellow citizens, we need to expose that.

[Mr. Rooker]

I have made it clear that the Labour party will not disrupt the Committee in any way. We shall operate it responsibly, but we do not agree with it. We say in a spirit of good will to the Leader of the House, who has introduced the proposal so speedily—less than a week after publication—that we hope that there will be no dragooning of the membership. That must be a matter for mature discussion between the parties and possibly, as I have already said, a breaching of one of the conventions of the House.

That said, the Committee has a serious job to do. It is the long-stop against the deregulation measures that we think the Government will introduce, which will be so damaging to life in Britain.

5.52 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I am delighted to follow the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who has obviously given considerable consideration to this measure. He emphasised, as I wish to do, the great importance of the Committee. Later in my speech I intend to say that this will become one of the most important Committees in the House. Therefore, I reinforce what the hon. Gentleman said on that.

First, I thank the Government for carrying forward the recommendations of the Procedure Committee nearly to the letter. That is a fairly unusual experience for the Procedure Committee. The Government have been willing to accept the Committee's recommendations almost in their entirety. This Committee, when in action, will, I believe, come to be perhaps the most important and significant modernisation of House of Commons procedure since the introduction of the departmental Select Committees 14 years ago.

The Committee is significant because the Standing Order, once approved, will provide a unique means of amending primary legislation, and it is the amending of primary legislation which is important. That is why the Procedure Committee spent much time and gave considerable thought and care to framing its regulations and recommendations. Once we were charged by the House to consider the best way for the House to discuss deregulation orders, the principle behind our recommendations was the realisation that the deregulation order was, or was at least the alternative of, primary legislation. This is the first time that it will be possible to alter primary legislation without a Bill being brought before the House.

In an Adjournment debate on the subject, I said that we believed that a deregulation order should not—I repeat not—be considered to be just another statutory instrument. That follows very much what the hon. Gentleman was saying. After all, a statutory instrument is secondary legislation. It is part of a Bill that we have already passed and those powers are allowed.

A deregulation order is an entirely different instrument and must be considered as such by the House, by the Clerks and by lawyers outside. It is, in effect, primary legislation inasmuch as it alters an Act of Parliament. It is therefore a substitute for another part of primary legislation. That is its unique nature, which the hon. Gentleman outlined.

The hon. Gentleman expressed concern about the use of the legislation for purposes other than deregulation. I would ask him to look carefully at the Standing Order, which makes it clear that the basic consideration of the Committee must be that its proposals should

"remove or reduce a burden or the authorisation or requirement of a burden".

That refers to a reduction in the burden of legislation, not an alteration for the sake of it; an alteration that is necessary because there is a burden on our constituents, on industry, trade unions or whatever. I shall return to that in a moment.

It is worth underlining, because it complies with something that the hon. Gentleman said, that paragraph 16 of the fourth report of the Select Committee, 1993-94, says:

"In our recommendations we have sought to ensure that no Act of Parliament is repealed or amended under this new power without examination at least as thorough as if the change had been made by a Bill passing through the House."

We want to ensure a full examination by the House.

The new Deregulation Committee will become, as I have already said, one of the most senior Committees of the House. I am particularly concerned that the Government have been willing, in paragraph A(2) of the motion, to set out the three approaches that the Committee must make. It says:

"(a) that a draft order in the same terms as the proposals should be laid before the House; or

(b) that the proposals should be amended before a draft order is laid before the House;"—

if that had been a recommendation of the Committee—

"(c) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of the proposals"—

other than those that have been laid by the House.

Paragraph (5) makes it clear that the Committee must consider whether the draft deregulation order appears to make any inappropriate use of delegated legislation. If it does, that is the first thing that the Committee should consider and reject. I hope that answers the point made by the hon. Member for Perry Barr about powers being extended.

The Committee will consider also the continuation of any necessary protection that the legislation may have given. The hon. Member for Perry Barr said that it is essential to ensure that protection is reviewed. That is stated in the Committee's recommendation and endorsed by the Government.

The measure introduces two provisions that were not part of the Procedure Committee's recommendations, but I am sure that it would have been happy to consider them. One is that the Deregulation Committee must consider whether the deregulation order has any retrospective effect. The Government were right to make that addition. The other is that the Committee should consider whether an order appears to be incompatible with any obligation resulting from membership of the European Union. Again, that addition is to be applauded rather than rejected.

I will be interested to hear the arguments of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) for reducing the membership of the Deregulation Committee from 16 to 15. We felt that it needs to be that size to ensure that different parties and parts of the country could be represented on the Committee. We went to a lot of trouble before arriving at 16, which emphasises the importance that should be attached to the Deregulation Committee.

I am glad that the Government have, almost without exception, accepted our recommendations concerning the Committee's powers—that it can adjourn from place to place, report from time to time, have specialist advisers, appoint a sub-committee, sit during recesses, sit in other places in the United Kingdom, and communicate with other Committees and the House of Lords.

If the same deregulation order were being considered by both Houses, it would be nonsense to ask a Minister or other witnesses to appear twice. We should be able to arrange for evidence to be taken together, so that witnesses would have to appear only once.

The sub-committee's powers have also been defined and seem appropriate. There is, of course, the power to send for persons and papers. The Government have not accepted the recommendation that the Deregulation Committee should be able to summon Ministers. The Government argue, with considerable persuasiveness, that a Minister who wants to see his deregulation order approved would be unlikely to refuse the Committee's request to appear before it. Any Minister who rejected such an invitation would be likely to find that the Committee looked carefully and with a critical eye at the order. It would want to know why the devil the Minister would not attend to answer questions.

Mr. Spearing: Paragraph (9) states that the Committee shall have the power

"to send for persons, papers and records".

I may not have compared that properly with other Select Committee terms of reference, but I assume that it includes the power to send for Ministers. Do other Select Committees have different terms of reference?

Sir Peter Emery: Those powers are the same as for other departmental Select Committees, which do not have the power to summon Ministers. That can be done only by a request from the House, passed by the House. Similarly, a Select Committee cannot enforce the attendance of a Member of Parliament.

The Government could also argue, although they have not done so, that if they gave the Deregulation Committee—even though it may be one of the most important Committees—the power to call Ministers, that could be the thin end of the wedge and other Committees might demand a similar power. I am willing to accept the assurance given by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council that a Minister would want to attend if requested.

The Deregulation Committee will adopt a new and unique procedure that I term the fast track. Where a provision is obviously a burden on business or the public, and is unanimously viewed by everyone on the Committee as something that should be done away with, deregulation can—after consideration by the Government—come before the House immediately and be put forthwith.

If only one member of the Committee objected, that would halt the fast track procedure. The proposal would be considered by the whole Committee, calling witnesses if necessary. If the Committee wanted to recommend approval of the deregulation order, it would come before the House—which would make sure that it was the same as the draft order and that the Government had not, by sleight of hand, altered it. The House could then debate it for one and a half hours.

If the Deregulation Committee believed that the draft order should not go forward, it could not be put to the House without a three-hour debate. Also unique is that instead of the order coming before the House because it is unamendable, the Procedure Committee has devised a device whereby an amendment to the draft order could be publicised and voted on by the House, because the House must approve or disapprove the Deregulation Committee's recommendation.

Therefore, for the Government to overcome the recommendation for an order not to be proceeded with, the matter must come to the House and the House must vote to disagree with one of its own Committees, which has recommended that the order should not be proceeded with. If the Committee contains a majority of members from the Government's party, it will be difficult for the Government to take that step. But if they do, they must first table an amendable motion whereby the Committee can make it clear why it is not willing to accept the deregulation order. The Procedure Committee thought that that new procedure would safeguard the rights of Members of the House to ensure that their views were properly expressed and not overridden or simply stamped on by a Government.

The Committee's recommendations are fairly definite: fast track; to the Floor of the House; and put forthwith. After debate and agreement by the Committee, the matter will be put to the House with the possibility of an hour and a half's debate. If matters are not agreed by the Committee, they will come to the Floor of the House for a three-hour debate—again, that is new—on an adjournable motion.

The amendments would alter that procedure so that there would be no fast track. But if members of the Committee are unanimous, a matter can still have an hour and a half's debate. The overall effect of the three amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Newham, South would be that the hour and a half's debate for the second stage would be shunted to two and a half hours, and the three-hour debate would be shunted to four hours.

Mr. Spearing: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that removing the fast track gives greater protection to the House, Back-Bench Members and the public? Is not the fast track that he commends advantageous to Her Majesty's Government, whichever party is in power?

Sir Peter Emery: It is advantageous to the removal of a burden as quickly as possible. If 16 members from both sides of a Committee are unanimous in the view that it would remove a burden, that should be proceeded with as quickly as possible.

Mr. Spearing: So does it stay an hour and a half?

Sir Peter Emery: Well, it saves it having to be debated on the Floor of the House. But yes, it stays an hour and a half. Those differences do not amount to much. Without wishing to be unfair to the hon. Gentleman, the amendments involve a shunting from nothing, an hour and a half and three hours to an hour and a half, two and a half hours and four hours. The amendments are unnecessary and the Committee, which has considered the matter fully, supports the Government's recommendations.

I have been speaking for too long and should come to a conclusion. Basically, I repeat what I said before: this is a unique and new procedure which I hope will be

[Sir Peter Emery]

established. It may act as an illustration later when we consider how we may streamline procedures in the House generally. It is unique because of the variations, but I have made it crystal clear that, as the hon. Member for Perry Barr said, the Committee will have a great deal of work and will take up a great deal of Members' time, as it rightly should, because it deals with primary legislation.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Lord President for his kind words about me and the Committee. We are delighted that we can respond by approving the Government's recommendations, which will probably portend this evening.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) to speak, I remind the House of Madam Speaker's ruling that it will be in order for the hon. Member to deal with any matter covered by his amendments. If he wishes to press either amendment (a) or (b) to a vote, he should move them formally at the conclusion of the whole debate.

6.15 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful for your reminder, Madam Deputy Speaker, of that ruling. I tabled the amendments to enable them to be discussed. I may decide to move amendments (a) and (b), but I understand that they could be negatived on the voice even if they are moved. In that event, we shall see what happens.

I pay tribute to the Chairman of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), for his clear exposition of why the Committee produced the basis for the new standing orders. As the House will have gathered from our exchanges, I take an opposite view about both the desirability of the Act and the effectiveness of the procedures. As we all know, standing orders are the ball bearings of democracy. They are the inner hub of the democratic wheel. Unfortunately, these standing orders break new constitutional ground—we agree on that. I also agree that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) made clear, they will entail a lot of work by Committee members, comparable with the work done by the Public Accounts Committee.

Sir Peter Emery *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spearing: I see the Committee Chairman nodding.

The standing orders add another architectural wing to the procedural building of this House. I know that that is a mixed metaphor, but everyone understands what I mean. They will entail more effort and work by more hon. Members. But it will not be the normal work of most Select Committees, since Select Committees are generally considered to be good for democracy because they penetrate, expose—at least, they have the potential to do so—require evidence, test arguments, enlighten, produce reports and recommend. By making the Executive accountable, they add to the sum total of democracy. That is a fair assumption about Select Committees, but only if their functions match other functions of the House, and are in a particular context.

We can judge the proposed Committee's work, and the quality of its proposed standing orders, only by looking at their function. It is not to penetrate, expose and do all sorts of things to the Executive; rather, it is a reaction to a vast new power which legislation has already given the Executive. The right hon. Member for Honiton freely admits that. There is a fast track not just in terms of the Select Committee's work coming back to the Floor of the House—the subject of our earlier exchange—but in terms of new legislation itself.

The proposals in the Act are for legislation allowing statutory instruments to amend pretty well any Act at all. Indeed, although there is no limit on the Act, other than the Government's wish, the proposals would allow a single statutory instrument to amend an unknown number of Acts in an unknown number of ways.

If I am wrong about that, I am sure that the Leader of the House will tell me so—as will the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. But the document that the Government must present to the House under, I believe, section 3 of the Act, need not be one document per proposed amendment; it can be one document per statutory instrument. Presumably, given a schedule, there can be any number of amendments to any number of Acts: no limit is imposed by either the Act or the Standing Orders.

Let us imagine, to use a crude analogy, that a huge new powerful motor car driving from Whitehall to Westminster is to be equipped with brakes. What we are discussing tonight, as we have in previous debates, is the nature of those brakes. I contend that whatever we manage to cobble together tonight in regard to Standing Orders will not be appropriate, because many of us do not think that the motor car should exist in the first place.

It is not just a question of party politics; it is a question of whether any Government should have this power. The ability to amend any number of Acts of Parliament by means of a single statutory instrument, whatever the scrutiny procedure, is a considerable power for any Executive. As my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr pointed out, section 3 enables the Minister to construct his motor car—or bulldozer: many metaphors could be used—by consulting such organisations

"as appear to him to be representative",

and such persons

"as he considers appropriate"

and to

"undertake such further consultation with respect to the variations as appears to him to be appropriate."

Only at the conclusion of that will the Minister lay the document, if that is considered appropriate.

As we know from current proceedings in the House—from what will happen on Monday, for instance, and from the discussions that took place over the weekend—if a Minister has already said that he will do this and lays the appropriate paper before the House, he and his supporters are to an extent committed. He and the Government will decide what is to be done, not in the Queen's Speech but in secret consultation, according to statute. Even before we start, we are faced with a pretty formidable machine. My amendments suggest, in a modest way, how the brakes can be made a little more efficient—although I do not think they would be very efficient even if the amendments were accepted.

Before I discuss the amendments, however, let me say something about the associated topic of related committees. My hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr suggested that this new Committee might, in a way, be analogous to the Public Accounts Committee, and I agree that in some administrative senses that will be true. The Committee will be given a good deal of evidence by a number of people. It will, however, be prospective in legislative terms, rather than retrospective in terms of policing and money. A big difference is involved in that.

One similarity will lie in the fact that many people will be involved, absorbing the Committee's time and effort. It may also generate considerable controversy. As has been suggested, there are also similarities with the Select Committee on European Legislation. As the right hon. Member for Honiton knows, I was able to give his Committee some evidence when I chaired the European Committee, as I did for nine years.

In my view, however, while there are several similarities, in regard to administration and in regard to at least some of the clerking skills. This Committee, however, will not fulfil the same constitutional role. While the European Committee suggests that debates should take place and presents an objective report on what is at issue, it does not deal with merit. The purpose of this Committee, however, is almost wholly related to merit. It must judge—first on the evidence that the Minister provides and then on evidence that may come from elsewhere, within tight time limits—the balance between protection and burden.

The right hon. Gentleman has constantly said that the Act is there to reduce burdens, and I do not blame him; that, after all, is the purpose of the Act. But—to misquote Harold Wilson—one person's burden is another's protection. In the history of the House of Commons, most Members of Parliament have a duty here to achieve a balance between the two. We are dealing not just with any old amendments to Acts, but with what I would describe as the heart of one of the functions of the House of Commons and Acts of Parliament: balancing burdens and benefits. The biggest balance of the lot is that between taxation and how the money is spent. The Committee is important, in that it lies at the heart of a great deal of what the House is elected to do in any event.

The right hon. Member for Honiton said a good deal about fast tracks, and his Committee has provided a diagram illustrating what will happen. I do not think that its proposals will all be adopted, but a diagram is certainly needed to explain the position properly. The right hon. Gentleman did explain, as did the Leader of the House, in terms of the different procedures. No fewer than 110 lines explain how the Committee should be established and how it should work. Much of the content replicates what other Select Committee have produced, but much does not. I refer to the double blocking procedure.

My amendment (b) deals with the limit of one and a half hours debate on the Floor of the House. At present the House devotes that time to dealing with a single statutory instrument; until just after the war, the debate was open ended. If only five people are present in the relevant quorum when the proposal reaches its final stages in the Committee—perhaps only two Opposition Members—it is possible that, if three or five of them agree we shall end up with a large number of amendments to Acts, which will then come to the House and be taken forthwith. In fact, I believe that there must be a minimum of five people, and in some cases they may all be non-Opposition Members. Can any hon. Member deny that that is a possible scenario? The right hon. Member for Honiton nods.

Sir Peter Emery: It is a possibility.

Mr. Spearing: I thank the hon. Member for confirming my suggestion. Why are we passing Standing Orders that will allow an unknown number of Acts to be amended in an unknown number of ways, forthwith, on the Floor of the House?

Sir Peter Emery: Let me try to clear up a point that the hon. Gentleman raised, which created a doubt in my mind. He suggested that a single order might involve a host of matters affecting different pieces of legislation. Section 1 of the Act refers consistently to a single order concerned with a certain burden. It is possible that that burden would be covered by more than one Act, but it is a single burden and not a series of burdens concerning a series of different Acts. Certainly, the Government never suggested, and the Select Committee never considered—on the evidence that it received—that serialisation under a single Act could be implemented under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act in its ultimate form.

I thought it important to straighten that out; it should relieve the hon. Gentleman's worries.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful for that intervention because it shows that sometimes useful exchanges occur when there are only a few hon. Members in the House. Less light is often shed on matters when there is a maximum number of hon. Members present. This is a classic example of the former situation.

The comments of the right hon. Member for Honiton may be correct by the implicit wording of the Act, but until now that has not been made clear. I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman for making the point clear. He is saying that a single statutory instrument deals with a particular burden which may involve the amendment of part of an Act or a number of Acts, which may relieve or change the balance of the burden. It means also that we will not have a series of decisions made forthwith or any debates on anything other than a single burden to be removed. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Honiton for proving that because it removes at least some of my objection to the procedure. Nevertheless, the essentials remain.

I am thinking aloud now, but that is what we do here sometimes. The question is what we mean by "burden". It could be a collective burden on a number of matters relating to machinery, safety at work or anything. We have to define what "the burden" is. I can see that a single statutory instrument might encompass a wide range of burdens.

The right hon. Member for Honiton referred to the possibility of a division. If there is a division within the Committee, there has to be a debate of an hour and a half. I hope that that is so, because the statutory instruments are important enough to deserve at least that. My amendment (c), which is not being called, asks for a debate of two hours. After the Minister has opened the debate and the Opposition Front Bench Member has spoken, if we are to leave time for winding up, we

[Mr. Spearing]

discover that one and a half hours is not very long. Although my amendment is not being called, it is something that we may wish to consider.

My amendment (aa) has not been called, but it has been referred to by the right hon. Member for Honiton in relation to the chairmanship of the Committee. I recognise that it might be inadvisable to put, in broad terms in standing orders, whether the chairmanship of particular Committees should be held by Opposition or Government Members. I do not think that that occurs in Standing Orders now. However, there is a convention on these matters, and one which reflects the quality of the House. There is nothing to prevent a Select Committee from underlining that convention with a recommendation. That would be acceptable.

I have many connections with colleagues from other European Parliaments. When I told them that I was the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation not because of my views but simply because I was a member of the Opposition, they said, "Quel magnifique—does that mean that the Chairman is always appointed from the Opposition?" When I said that that was so, they said, "That is marvellous. Your House of Commons is so marvellous. I wish we did that." The Public Accounts Committee, the Statutory Instruments Committee and the Select Committee on European Legislation follow that convention and it is agreed. I am not saying that it should be in Standing Orders.

The singular voting event referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr was unfortunate. On reflection, the Chairman of the Committee, despite his hard work on this, might have done something different. The Select Committee report—HC238 from the parliamentary Session 1993-94—says in paragraph 96:

"We recommend that the Deregulation Committee should be chaired by a member from an Opposition party."

There is nothing wrong with that recommendation as such. That was in the Chairman's draft report and I thought that the hon. Member for Honiton was following the convention. When they voted on that recommendation, there were six ayes and six noes. The Chairman then declared himself with the noes. That was against convention because the status quo was the Chairman's report under discussion.

That is unfortunate and I hope that the hon. Member for Honiton will reconsider and recommend to the Leader of the House that, by convention, if not by recommendation, the new Select Committee should be added to the list of Committees following the convention. Chairmen have responsibilities and, if the Committee is not added to that list, the enormous powers will be allied with the interests of Her Majesty's Government and not with the interests of the House and proper scrutiny. It would not be in the interests of the Government of the day, whoever that may be, or in the interests of those concerned or the public if that convention were not continued. My amendment asks that the membership of the Committee be changed from 16 to 15. That alters the mathematics. With 15 and a Government Chairman, the Government majority would be marginally reduced. It was tabled in order to bring the matter into the ambit of debate and for no other reason.

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman raised my name as Chairman of the Committee and spoke about the way I cast my vote. It is only fair that I should explain, as I explained to the Committee, that the chairmanship of any new Committee established by the House has always been negotiated through the usual channels. There has never been a recommendation from a Select Committee about the chairmanship. There is no doubt that the usual channels will have seen what was in the draft report. When the Committee is established, the usual channels will decide. I believe that that was the right way to behave and that is why I voted as I did.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful for that explanation and I am glad to have been able to give the right hon. Gentleman the opportunity of making it. We all understand that negotiations between the usual channels have to take place, although we accept that it is a bit of a compromise. However, the convention of the House that certain sorts of Committee always have an Opposition Chairman is a slightly different matter. I do not think that we have had a new Select Committee of this sort since the formation of the Select Committee on European Legislation in 1974 when the late John Davies, whom many of us recall, went straight from the Cabinet to be Chairman of that Committee in Opposition. I understand the explanation of the right hon. Member for Honiton, but I suggest that the precedent for new Committees is on my side of the argument rather than his.

I shall conclude with a quotation from those days. It is from the Select Committee on Procedure appointed in 1976 which reported in the Session 1977-78. Paragraph 1.5 of that report—HC588—said:

"We agree that the relationship between the executive and the legislature is the crucial feature of the functioning of our institutions of government, and we are conscious of the widespread concern in the country about the present nature of that relationship . . . The essence of the problem . . . is that the balance of advantage between Parliament and Government in the day to day working of the Constitution is now weighted in favour of the Government to a degree which arouses widespread anxiety and is inimical to the proper working of our parliamentary democracy."

That was the view of the Select Committee which made recommendations for the setting up of the departmental Select Committees. It was followed up by Lord Pym and Lord St John of Fawsley respectively, as shadow Leader and Leader of the House. That view was expressed unanimously by the members of that Committee who were elected on 15 June 1976. The record states that the Committee consisted of:

"Mr. Kenneth Baker, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. George Cunningham, Mr. Michael English, Mr. John Garrett, Mr. Norman Lamont, Mr. Richard Luce, Mr. David Marquand, Mr. John Peyton, Mr. J. Enoch Powell, Mr. Giles Radice, Sir David Renton, Miss Jo Richardson, Mr. Nicholas Ridley, Mr. Nigel Spearing and Sir Thomas Williams."

I believe that the Act on the basis of which the Standing Orders will come into being will do what was then feared. It will give greater power to the Executive and less power to the House. Whatever the degree of the changes that we may make and whatever the complications involving the Standing Orders, they will go in the opposite direction to that epoch-making Select Committee report nearly 20 years ago.

6.39 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I understand that we have only a few minutes left in the debate. I rise to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, who steered the ship through some troubled waters, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House,who, when giving evidence, made so many matters clear.

I suppose that all hon. Members are sorry that Ministers will not be able to come to the new Select Committee but, after a while, there may be a change of heart because, obviously, Ministers will know most about any deregulation. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that many of the deregulations would be "tiddlers". He said that 55 possible deregulations were waiting in the corridor. I am sure that they will be phased through. Some regulations will be so ancient that we shall be able to dismiss them in a few minutes.

I have looked at our list of recommendations. Apart from the recommendation on a Minister of the Crown, I think that the Leader of the House has given way on practically everything else. Perhaps the only possible vacuum involves the fact that we wanted to exchange evidence with other House of Commons Committees. That may be a bit laborious.

We have heard a great deal from the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation. There is no doubt that the Joint Committee containing hon. Members from this place and the other place will provide great expertise. I was pleased that I was assured when hearing evidence that hon. Members with specialist knowledge would be able to attend and speak in the Committee. It is a good idea to allow everyone who has expertise on a Bill to give their view.

I hear much twittering of papers, so I had better not delay the House any longer. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker for calling me, and I fully support the new Committee.

6.42 pm

Mr. Newton: In recent moments, there appears to have been a slight shift in the atmosphere in the House, which may have affected hon. Members' views on how much time I should take for my speech, but it would be appropriate to comment on a number of points that have been raised.

Among the pleasures of the debate, which, I must admit, have so far been few, is the fact that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is performing for the first time in his new role. This is the first time that he and I have faced each other across the Dispatch Box, as distinct from facing each other in other ways.

In my early period as Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, a position that I filled from about 1982 to 1984, the hon. Member for Perry Barr was my Opposition opposite number, so to speak. I remember some entertaining exchanges at DHSS Questions, as they were then known, between Conservative Members and Opposition Members. He sat on the Government Benches in 1974 to 1979, when I sat on the Opposition Benches. During that time, I served on every one of the innumerable Committees that considered the Finance Bill and I think that he sat on many of them too.

Mr. Rooker: I sat on only one.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman certainly made his mark on that one. I served on every one of the two-yearly Committees considering the Finance Bill from 1974 to 1979. One Committee sticks in the mind. Perhaps it was not widely noticed by people outside. As the hon. Gentleman said, the amendments that were tabled in that Committee became known as the Rooker-Wise amendments, but they should have been called either the Rooker-Wise-Lawson amendments or the Rooker-Wise-Newton-Lawson amendments. At that stage, however, I was not prepared to own up. They were entertaining and interesting times, even if much of our business was done at unusual times of the night.

The people whose business it is to ensure that the House's affairs run smoothly have improved their performance in recent moments. That may ease the pressure on me as I rapidly start to comment on the points that have been raised.

I must enter some reservation about the criticism, as I suppose one must call it, from Front-Bench and Back-Bench Opposition Members over the speed with which the Orders have allegedly been introduced. I accept that the detail of the fairly complex changes to the Standing Orders—such things nearly always end up being fairly complex—has been around for only a week or so. However, the shape and nature of the proposals, including those to which the hon. Member for Perry Barr objects, were made clear in a full Government statement months ago, before the House even completed its consideration of the proposals.

The notion, therefore, that the hon. Members for Perry Barr and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) have had only one week to find out what all this is about is far fetched. I see from the expression of the face of hon. Member for Perry Barr that he thinks that I have a point.

One of the things about the hon. Member for Perry Barr is that he sometimes manages to end a speech at the Dispatch Box in the manner of a militant, but I have always known that under it lie the mind and heart of a moderate.

Sir Peter Emery: And an honest man.

Mr. Newton: I take that for granted, as I do for all our colleagues in the House, not least the hon. Member for Newham, South, who I suspect may be seeking to stop this badinage and to get me to say something about the Standing Orders.

Mr. Spearing: Of course, I accept that the proposal's general outline has been known for a long time. The limitation of time, however, involves formal exposure of the proposals to hon. Members. Effectively, the proposals have been on the Order Paper for three days. I think that that is accurate. That is the issue.

Mr. Newton: I do not want to make a meal of this, but I resist that conclusion. This happened months ago, so I may have the sequence slightly out of order, but, either before Report or certainly before Third Reading, I made sure that a full paper setting out the Government's

[Mr. Newton]

proposals was exposed to anyone who cared to look at it. The proposed arrangements were fully explained in the House. This, therefore, is not a bounce.

Sir Peter Emery: We had an Adjournment debate on the matter.

Mr. Newton: We did indeed and the issues were considered in that debate.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr made some reasonable points. I cannot respond to all of them; I shall reflect on some of them and draw them to the attention of those people in the usual channels who will have to consider the membership of the Committee. They can consider some of the points that he raised in talking about the usual conventions.

It is often assumed that there are Select Committees on which Front-Bench spokesmen do not serve, but a significant number of Select Committees include Front-Bench spokesmen, including the domestic Committees dealing with broadcasting and House matters. The Select Committee on Members' Interests has Front-Bench spokesmen from both sides of the House. It is clearly not ruled out in principle. If it seems sensible that they should sit on the Committee, the matter could be considered.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr said that who had been consulted should be made clear. The intention is to say what consultations have taken place, unless the people involved specifically request confidentiality. Such information would, therefore, normally be available to the Committee. There is no attempt to cover up or prevent the Committee from having the information that it should have.

The requirement for the ministerial document to be laid specifically includes the consultation undertaken and any representations received, subject to the usual condition of confidentiality if requested. The hon. Member for Perry Barr said that that would be laborious and time-consuming work, but the Government are conscious of the need not to swamp the new process. Depending on how many proposals the Committee might want to inquire into in more detail, we would have to judge the number that could be considered at any one time. As I said, we intend to set up a special mechanism in Whitehall to ensure that there is a sensible flow of business to the Committee.

Mr. Rooker: The right hon. Gentleman again makes an analogy with the Public Accounts Committee, which deals with between 30 and 45 reports a year. Its programme of work comes from the National Audit Office more or less on a two-year basis. Not everything comes to fruition, but it has had good advance notice so that it can programme the timetable for membership and publication of any reports. I am not suggesting that there should be a requirement for two years' notice, but I believe that the new Committee should have decent up-front knowledge rather than three or four months.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman and I have been doing business together for 20 years so he should know me well enough to accept that, if someone makes a reasonable point, I try to respond reasonably. His point certainly sounds reasonable and I shall ensure that it is examined.

Sir Peter Emery: The Government have assured the Committee that they would consult on such matters.

Mr. Newton: I come rapidly to my response to what I take to be the main thrust of the criticisms and concerns expressed by the hon. Members for Perry Barr and for Newham, South and, in passing, pick up on a particular point made by the former. I believe that I can quote almost the exact words used by the hon. Member for Perry Barr, who said that he wanted the legal adviser to the Committee to have as much to do with the Government as he did. In fact, the intention is that the Deregulation Committee will be given legal advice by the Counsel to the Speaker, not by Government lawyers. I think that the House authorities will confirm that the Counsel to the Speaker has precisely as much to do with the Government as the hon. Gentleman has and is entirely independent of the Government.

The notion that we are seeking to take powers away from the House is far-fetched. Under a different range of mechanisms, every proposal—whatever the Committee says—comes to the House, often for further discussion if the House so wishes, but always for a decision. That is an important and basic point. The hon. Member for Newham, South and, indeed, the hon. Member for Perry Barr, seemed to suggest that the Government would drop the vehicle licensing system or the health and safety at work system under the new legislation, but that is a ridiculous notion.

Mr. Spearing: I did not mention it.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps not, but that was the flavour of what the hon. Gentleman said. The implication was that the Government would charge around, overturning important Acts of Parliament at the drop of a hat and without a vote. That is far-fetched. The White Paper contains 55 examples and I accept that the one that I always choose is the most extreme. One of the proposals is to ensure that the Patent Office can accept documents in forms other than on paper, such as electronic filing. The Government believe that it does not make sense in this day and age to have to pass an Act to allow the Patent Office to accept documents in forms other than on paper. It is an extreme example but a good one; it threatens no one and is simply common sense. It is daft to have to go through the three or four stages of an Act in two Houses of Parliament to allow that to happen. We are devising a procedure to allow it to happen more simply and sensibly. I commend that and the Orders to the House.

Amendment proposed: (a), in Standing Order A, paragraph (14), leave out 'fifteen' and insert 'twenty'.—*[Mr. Spearing.]*

Question, That the amendment be made, *put and negatived.*

Amendment proposed: (b), in Standing Order B, paragraph (1)(a), leave out 'forthwith' and insert

'not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion'.—*[Mr. Spearing.]*

Question, That the amendment be made, *put and negatived.*

Main Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That Standing Orders A and B below shall have effect and Standing Orders No. 14 (Exempted business), No. 124 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) and No. 130 (Select committees related to government departments) shall be amended as set out below.

A. Deregulation Committee

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Deregulation Committee, to examine every document containing proposals laid before the House under section 3, and every draft order proposed to be made under section 1, of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

(2) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every document containing proposals laid before the House under the said section 3, either—

(a) that a draft order in the same terms as the proposals should be laid before the House; or

(b) that the proposals should be amended before a draft order is laid before the House; or

(c) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of the proposals.

(3) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every draft order laid before the House under the said section 1, its recommendation whether the draft order should be approved.

(4) The committee may report to the House on any matter arising from consideration of the said proposals or draft orders.

(5)(A) In its consideration of proposals the committee shall consider in each case whether the proposals—

(a) appear to make an inappropriate use of delegated legislation;

(b) remove or reduce a burden or the authorisation or requirement of a burden;

(c) continue any necessary protection;

(d) have been the subject of, and take appropriate account of, adequate consultation;

(e) impose a charge on the public revenues or contain provisions requiring payments to be made to the Exchequer or any government department or to any local or public authority in consideration of any licence or consent or of any services to be rendered, or prescribe the amount of any such charge or payment;

(f) purport to have retrospective effect;

(g) give rise to doubts whether they are intra vires;

(h) require elucidation or appear to be defectively drafted;

(i) appear to be incompatible with any obligation resulting from membership of the European Union.

(B) In its consideration of draft orders, the committee shall consider in each case all the matters set out in sub-paragraph (A) above and the extent to which the Minister concerned has had regard to any resolution or report of the Committee or to any other representations made during the period for parliamentary consideration.

(6) The committee shall consist of sixteen members.

(7) The quorum of the committee shall be five.

(8) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(9) The committee shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom, and to report from time to time;

(b) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference;

(c) to appoint a sub-committee, of which the quorum shall be two, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom;

(d) to communicate its evidence and any other documents relating to matters of common interest to any committee appointed by this House and to any committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation proposals and draft orders.

(10) The committee and the sub-committee shall have leave to meet concurrently with any select committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation proposals and draft orders and any sub-committee thereof.

(11) The committee and the sub-committee shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker and, if their Lordships think fit, the Counsel to the Lord Chairman of Committees.

(12) The committee and the sub-committee shall have power to invite Members of the House who are not members of the committee to attend meetings at which witnesses are being examined and such Members may, at the discretion of the chairman, ask questions of those witnesses; but no Member not being of the committee shall otherwise take part in the proceedings of the committee or sub-committee, or be counted in the quorum.

(13) It shall be an instruction to the committee that before reporting either—

(i) that any proposal should be amended before a draft order is laid before the House, or

(ii) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of any proposal, or

(iii) that any draft order should not be approved,

it shall afford to any government department concerned an opportunity of furnishing orally or in writing to it or to the sub-committee appointed by it such explanations as the department think fit.

(14) It shall be an instruction to the committee that it report on every draft order not more than fifteen sitting days after the draft order was laid before the House, indicating in the case of draft orders which it recommends should be approved whether its recommendation was agreed without a division.

B. Consideration of draft deregulation orders

(1) If the Deregulation Committee has reported under paragraph (3) of Standing Order A (Deregulation Committee) that a draft order laid before the House under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 should be approved and a motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to that effect, the question thereon shall—

(a) if the committee's recommendation was agreed without a division, be put forthwith;

(b) if the committee's recommendation was agreed after a division, be put not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion.

(2) If the committee has reported that a draft order should not be approved, no motion to approve the draft order shall be made unless the House has previously resolved to disagree with the committee's report; the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion for such a resolution to disagree shall be put not later than three hours after their commencement; and the question shall be put forthwith on any motion thereafter made by a Minster of the Crown that such a draft order be approved.

(3) Motions to which this order applies may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.

Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business)

[Mr. Newton]

Line 14, after 'procedure))', insert 'or Standing Order B (Consideration of draft deregulation orders)'.

Standing Order No. 124 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee))

Line 22, at end insert 'and any draft order proposed to be made under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994'.

Standing Order No. 130 (Select committees related to government departments)

Line 101, after 'Accounts', insert 'and to the Deregulation Committee'.

European Community Type-Approval of Motor Cycles

6.55 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 10904/93, 8037/94 and 8618/94 relating to European Community type-approval of motorcycles; supports the principle of a single market in motorcycles which such a process is designed to achieve; shares the Government's view that amendments must be sought to Document No. 10904/93 if it is not to impact adversely and unnecessarily on motorcyclists and the motorcycle industry; supports the European Parliament's amendments set out in Document No. 8037/94 on the deletion of a motorcycle power limit; but opposes the European Parliament's amendment in that Document seeking a role for it in 'comitology'.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to listen to the Lord President's speech. I enjoyed it hugely and was able to regain my breath. I gather that my right hon. Friend was worried that I might have missed his pearls of wisdom, which would have been a shame. It was clearly a stimulating debate, but I must make progress.

This debate provides a welcome opportunity for us to comment on the recent developments in the Community's formation of a single market in motor cycles and, in particular, on the draft multi-purpose and power directives and their place in it.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I am puzzled by the motion and wonder whether my query could be dealt with before we move on. What does "comitology" mean? I have not been able to find it and gather that it has not been used in the House before. I should be grateful for an explanation.

Mr. Norris: There is to be no conferring on this. Would my hon. Friend like the short or long explanation? I have a 45-minute monograph on the subject because, perhaps not surprisingly, the first question to my excellent officials was, "What does 'comitology' mean?" As with most other "ologies"—as it was once remarked in a famous advertisement—it is the science of committee working. It refers to the rather arcane procedure by which the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) is taking this on board; no doubt she will correct me if I get it wrong. Perhaps she would like to explain it to my hon. Friend—or perhaps not.

The essence of the science is that a process was agreed at Maastricht whereby the European Parliament eventually had the power of veto over proposals made in the form of directives by the Council of Ministers and the Commission. Under the present arrangements, the comitology procedure means that minor detail, not of itself considered to be of sufficient importance to be in the main text of a directive, could be altered simply by, in essence, a committee arrangement.

The European Parliament latched on to the idea that, if it had the power of veto over main directives but did not have the power to deal with the detail, it would leave them with an imperfect power. The current debate about comitology is whether we should extend to the European Parliament the right of veto not only in respect of—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is following this

because it is good stuff. The current debate is whether we should extend the right of veto to the minor detail of directives as well as to the directives themselves.

I hope that I can usefully summarise the Government view now—that was the short version. We believe that it would be more appropriate to deal with those matters at the intergovernmental conference that is due to be held in 1996. In all seriousness, that is my explanation and I hope that it will satisfy my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd). It is a fairly arcane subject, but the principle is pretty clear in this case.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I am most grateful.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): What does the Minister mean by a minor detail?

Mr. Norris: That is not a trick question—nor is it a difficult one. The answer is those details that would have been contained in the subsidiary regulations that follow on and support Council directives. Under the post-Maastricht arrangement, the directive would eventually be the subject of a veto exercised by the European Parliament and all sorts of ramifications would follow. Under the existing, pre-Maastricht arrangement the detail, which could have been altered by committee within the Community, clearly escapes the new veto power.

The question is the extent to which the European Parliament should be permitted to accrete that new power, which would go significantly beyond what was agreed at Maastricht.

I fear that the Parliament has used motor cycle power limits to extend a concept that is not directly related to that measure but has wider political implications. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government view is that the question should not be debated in this context, but at the intergovernmental conference in 1996.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Perhaps my hon. Friend could answer the question about which one or two of my constituents are most anxious. Is it correct that no decision affecting motor cyclists will be taken by the House this evening? The matter will be decided later, in the manner that he described.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right. No decisions will be taken on the subject tonight. I appreciate that most of my hon. Friends and the Opposition Members present are keener to move on to the next business. I hope that the House will allow me, therefore, to make some rapid progress and to outline the measure in front of us.

Ms Walley: May I press the Minister? What does he mean by a detail of that kind? Could not technical issues, which could have a great bearing on legislation in one way or another, be involved? Can he give us an example?

Mr. Norris: I do not think that it would be especially helpful for us to go into such detail. That is asking for the 45-minute précis, which I hope that the hon. Lady is not keen to hear. My hon. Friends are not keen to hear it either. They have obviously heard me before. Perhaps I may leave the hon. Lady with this thought. She is right. Is it not often said of legislation—as much in this House as elsewhere—that the devil is in the detail? Detailed matters are immensely technical, but they are also capable of making vast differences to the impact of legislation. To that extent, the proposition that the European Parliament advances is perfectly serious. The Government's position, which will find favour on both sides of the House, is that we should consider comitology in the context of the 1996 IGC, rather than in relation to the legislation under consideration tonight.

We are considering the issues that flow from the type-approval arrangements for motor cycles throughout member states. That process is intended to establish a single Community-wide market in motor cycles as the market is very fragmented.

Type approval involves the approval of pre-production models or components by European Community certification agencies and checking the conformity of production in accordance with those types. Many of the measures are already in place, but there are two outstanding before the package can be completed and they are quite controversial.

The first is the draft directive on maximum power, maximum design speed and maximum torque. As hon. Members will know, it is proposed that a limit of 74 kw—100 brake horse power—should be set. That is roughly equivalent to a modern 750 cc machine. That proposal found favour with all the other member states apart from the United Kingdom as our excellent manufacturer, Triumph, would be significantly disadvantaged by it.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): As someone who has held a full motor cycle licence since my 16th birthday, and had the great pleasure of riding a Triumph 900 cc bike for a few days at Easter, I find the proposal perturbing. That motor cycle had well over 100 brake horse power, but was the safest, as well as the most powerful, machine that I had ridden in a moderately long career of riding and falling off motor cycles.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The history of the hon. Gentleman's motor cycling abilities is interesting, but interventions are supposed to be short and to the point.

Mr. Butler: Indeed, it is shortening and becoming more pointed by the moment. The Triumph company said that three of its models will have to come out of production if the 100 brake horsepower limit is imposed. I urge my hon. Friend to do all that he can to prevent that from happening.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend was merely seeking to condense, in the pithy way of which he is so capable, an entire speech into one intervention.

Mr. Butler: I have got more.

Mr. Norris: I withdraw that remark. Apparently, my hon. Friend has more to say. His intervention was absolutely to the point. So that we are in no doubt, virtually all Triumph's models would fall foul of the proposed restriction and it would certainly have a very adverse effect on the company's production, which is increasing by leaps and bounds. All of us with any interest in the industry are delighted at that increase.

To put it simply and quickly, the United Kingdom alone among European Community countries objected to the limit. It found an ally in the European Parliament, which saw the logic of the UK proposals, to the extent that in May the Parliament voted for nine amendments on Second Reading, which deleted all references to the power limit and substituted a Commission study into the possibility of a link between power and accidents. That

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is the crucial ground. The amendments together with the comitology amendment are the documents to which the motion refers.

In the light of an adverse opinion from the Commission, it fell to the Council of Ministers to decide whether unanimously to accept all the amendments. In the absence of unanimity, the Council convened a meeting of the conciliation committee—between its representatives and those of the European Parliament—with the object of reaching agreement on a joint text.

At the meeting on 18 October, representatives of the United Kingdom and the European Parliament argued strongly in favour of the power amendments and I am pleased to inform the House that a joint agreement was provisionally reached to proceed on the basis of those amendments.

The whole issue of comitology remained unresolved.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): As my hon. Friend knows, I represent Triumph. My information is that the worst-case effect of the anti-tampering chapter would be that the model range would have to be cut from 10 to one.

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who takes a great interest in those matters because he has represented the company for some time. That information only serves to emphasise the seriousness of the proposal for Triumph, which is not the least of the reasons why we believe that it is wrong.

Our objective in the conciliation process will be to ensure that nothing is agreed which is inconsistent with the present comitology rules or prejudices the separate, wider discussions on comitology that are taking place between the institutions.

Against that background, and having resolutely opposed the power limits and succeeded in our objective, the Government consider that it would be folly if the Council and the European Parliament failed to agree—in the context of the power directive—what to do about comitology. I do not want to prejudge the outcome of conciliation on that. However, there is every hope that common sense will prevail.

The other chapters of the measure that are controversial, or that have excited interest, are the proposals on noise and emissions. They need to be seen against the backdrop of a policy by the UK and its EC partners to try to limit noise and emissions as far as practicable in line with technological developments. I assure the House that motor cycles are not being singled out in that respect. We simply aim, in practice, to apply sensible restrictions on motor cycles which are consistent with those that have applied to the heaviest goods vehicles over the past decade.

Let me make clear the extent of the reductions in pollution levels. They have now reached the point at which the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, which reported fairly recently, has said there is now

"only limited scope for further modifications to vehicles . . . to make them quieter".

That underlines how far we have moved. Stricter noise limits are to be introduced for all classes of four-wheeled vehicles from October 1996, resulting in a maximum level of 80 decibels, which is the same as that proposed for the largest motor cycles.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Is my hon. Friend aware that if one listens to a BMW or a Yamaha FJ1200, one realises that if they are properly tuned they purr very quietly? They are very pleasant—

Mr. Butler: They are quieter than my hon. Friend's Lotus.

Mr. Fabricant: As my hon. Friend says, they are considerably quieter than my Lotus. Does my hon. Friend the Minister accept, however, that part of the problem is that the current laws are not being enforced by European countries? Surely that point should be addressed before we even attempt to achieve a 37 per cent. drop in noise level, which is what is being asked for in the EU document.

Mr. Norris: I note what my hon. Friend says. He will forgive me if I do not accept his invitation to speculate on what should be the practice in other countries because we are, of course, concerned with the implications of the directives here. My hon. Friend was, however, right to point out that when motor cycles are properly tuned and properly operated, there is no reason why they should present offensively in terms of noise. Responsible motor cyclists themselves are happy to accede to that. Problems often arise when motor cycles are either inappropriately altered, to which I shall refer in a moment, or simply badly maintained.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) agrees that although there is no case for discriminating against motor cyclists unreasonably—indeed, I have made it clear that I believe that they have an immensely valuable role to play and that, in the urban context, two wheels will generally consume far less space than four—there is no principle on which one could justify offering preferential arrangements concerning noise and emissions to motor cyclists as against the arrangements that are offered to motor cars.

A series of directives in recent years will result, with the introduction of the latest directive, in passenger car emissions having been reduced, in the space of only six years, by about 90 per cent. in respect of hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxide, by 60 per cent. in respect of carbon monoxide and by 70 per cent. in respect of particulates. Similar reductions with respect to heavy diesel-engined vehicles, including buses and lorries, will have been achieved when the second stage of the directive comes into effect in October 1996.

Consequently, when we support the Commission's proposals, far from discriminating against motor cycles, we are applying an even-handed policy which reflects an increasing concern by the public at large for improvements in the environment. Against that background, we think that it would be wrong for motor cycles to receive preferential treatment. I shall not go into a great deal of detail on the proposals because the House would not greatly welcome that. Suffice it to say that I think that there is a reasonable level of agreement among the manufacturers and the representatives of the industry that the proposals are reasonable.

It may be worth pointing out that there are, of course, differences between the engines used in motor cycles and those used in cars. There is the issue of the catalytic converter which, since 1 January 1993, has been the basis for securing the large reductions of emissions in modern motor vehicles. The general presumption is that it would be desirable not to move to that—this is certainly the British view—in relation to motor cycles unless it proved absolutely necessary. The Germans take a slightly different view. We believe, however, that we can make a great deal of progress on that position simply by refining the current engineering techniques available to us.

The Government support the new proposals in both areas. We think that they are achievable within the time scale and that the economic cost is sensible. We do not believe that they will be to the detriment of motor cycle performance. The industry has advised the Department that the proposals can be met either by existing technology or by engine modifications. After-treatment systems, such as catalytic converters, will not be necessary. We are not entirely convinced that even more stringent exhaust measures can be justified in view of the low number of motor cycles in the UK in relation to the number of other vehicles. That underlines how we believe that conventional technology can solve the problem.

The remaining controversial chapter concerns anti-tampering. The principle there is fairly straightforward. We all understand why small motor cycles need to be protected from tampering. If they are not, people who are not allowed to ride large motor cycles because they do not have the appropriate licence simply tweak the motor cycles they have, which is dangerous for them and dangerous for other road users. We take the view, however, that anti-tampering is not an appropriate subject for the large motor cycle; that is not where the problem is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) knows perfectly well that interchangeability in this area is the key to the way in which the industry is developing. It would be futile to insist on anti-tampering measures in respect of larger machines when it is not clear what the objective of such legislation would be.

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): It would help the House and the Department's position if my hon. Friend would tell us where we have got on the Motor Cycle Noise Act 1987, which was introduced as a private Member's Bill by the late Robert Adley, the former hon. Member for Christchurch. That bans and causes penalties for fitting illegal exhausts. I do not think that the Act is yet fully operative and I do not know of any prosecutions under it. The Act seems to be totally in line with everything that my hon. Friend is saying, provided that we can bring it into operation.

Mr. Norris: I fear that I cannot advise my hon. Friend precisely on the status of the Adley Act; I am aware of it. *[Interruption.]* I may, indeed, be able to tell my hon. Friend. The message is, however, so opaque that I will not convey it to him now for fear of misleading him. I will, of course, write to him.

The Act addresses exactly the issue, which is that there is a tendency with motor cycles for people to want to meddle with the standard equipment. There is, however, a much more important issue in relation to small motor cycles. Riders in certain categories are allowed to use only motor cycles up to a certain output limit. Tampering with that output would allow them to ride motor cycles for which they are not qualified. It would, however, be almost impossible to detect such tampering because, to the naked eye, the model would look perfectly standard. That is why at the lower end of the power range, anti-tampering makes reasonable sense. What does not make sense—this is the position that we have wanted to take—is to extend that principle right through the power range. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth knows, the effect there is quite counter-productive.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will my hon. Friend keep fighting for motor cycles in this country? I am sure that he has demonstrated tonight his mastery of the detail which contains the devil, as he has illustrated. When I was doing my hon. Friend's job, I learned that there was no substitute for meeting the kind and generous people who make up the Motorcycle Action Group and who educated me about motor cycling. Let us suppose that I were to ask them to arrange for my hon. Friend to ride pillion on a motor cycle from his constituency to his office. Would he accept?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend tempts me with that offer. I should probably need to qualify who the rider of the machine was. My experience of motor cycles came to a somewhat abrupt end around 1960 when Aigburth road, Liverpool and I had a rather closer acquaintance than I intended, since when I have stuck to four wheels. My hon. Friend is a persuasive advocate and, if I may say so in passing, he was also an excellent representative of the industry in the negotiations that he carried out which preceded our present position. On that basis, subject to all the usual warranties, with a substantial independent insurance and, indeed, the obtaining of whatever last rites are suitable in the circumstances, I shall consider my hon. Friend's request favourably. That is about as diplomatic as I can be at this time of night.

In summary, the current EC discussion by officials preceding the Council negotiations has shown that only some progress is being made towards easing the restrictions on anti-tampering. There is no great indication of support for the UK's position. However, the rapporteur to the European Parliament committee which deals with economic and monetary affairs and industrial policy has recently expressed support for our view and has also proposed excluding category B and C machines. Obviously, I am normally referring to category D machines. We intend to support his proposal. We think that he is on exactly the right lines. There is also the issue, which I shall not discuss in great detail, of the chapter on electro-magnetic compatibility. That subject has largely eluded me due to its massive technical significance, nor is it a subject on which there is any great disagreement in the Community.

Overall, I hope that the House will agree that we should press ahead to secure EC type approval—if necessary by accepting those chapters which are not contentious and leaving to one side the chapters on power limits, noise and emissions, which may be contentious. That is in the best interests of Triumph and in the best interests of the Community as a whole. I must make it clear to the House—I know that this is what several of my hon. Friends want to hear—that we are not prepared to arrive at unanimity at any price. We shall continue to ensure that

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the particular needs of the UK industry and of British motor cyclists are strongly represented and, indeed, are met. On that basis, I commend the motion to the House.

7.20 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am not sure of the circumstances under which I would ride pillion in the way in which the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) just suggested. However, it would certainly not be when the Minister was driving.

Labour Members welcome the bulk of the proposals and support the attempts that have been made to safeguard the interests of motor cyclists and the motor cycle industry. It is unfortunate that that entire complex, technical and drawn-out debate—we can see how technical it is if we look at the great weight of volumes in front of us—about how we seek to harmonise type approval of motor cycles throughout the European Union has become completely entangled with a much wider political debate on Europe after Maastricht. The debate tonight, which should have been solely about transport regulations, has become one that carries us to the heart of the argument about democracy. I am thankful, however, that it has not been hijacked—as I thought it may have been at the start of our deliberations.

Mr. Butler: Does the hon. Lady accept that only one member state currently legally forbids tampering and powerful motor cycles, such as those in excess of 100 bhp: France? Surely to seek to enforce harmonisation with only one country out of the whole of the European Union cannot be a proper way forward. I should appreciate her support for that view.

Ms Walley: If the hon. Gentleman will wait to hear what I have to say on this matter, the Labour party's position will become abundantly clear. Our view has much regard to the motor bike industry in this country, especially the super-bikes and the position of Triumph.

The Government's proposals in respect of European Union directives 10904/93, 8037/94 and 8618/94 are none the less welcome and I say that categorically. I doubt that we should have wanted to have changed them. We support the single market and we want to apply and set standards. But we do not want to set standards in such a way that we price motor bikes out of the market. We recognise that it is not a single-sector market and we want to maintain the use that is currently made of motor cycles in rural as well as in urban areas. We recognise the important part that motor-bikes, motor cycles and three-wheel vehicles play in the entire integrated transport policy that we want to see. Now that a framework directive has been agreed, the 100-dollar question is, of course, how the Council of Ministers steers its way to seeking agreement on the many technical regulations which Europe needs to approve and which would need to be incorporated in UK law through the adoption of specific regulations.

Like the Minister, we have no problem at all with nine out of the 12 chapters in the proposal: those relating to tyres, lighting, external protectors, mirrors, fuel tanks, safety belts and so on. But we question the current proposals in respect of noise, anti-tampering and emissions. We accept that noise is a problem, especially when the motor bike is driven or maintained irresponsibly. We need to look carefully at what is feasible in the long term. We should support research that addressed the contribution that all variables could make to reducing noise. We also want to see an immediate reduction of decibel levels. I was pleased that the Minister referred to that in his introductory comments.

Anti-tampering is, of course, related to power restriction. There is no doubt that the powerful motor cycle lobby deserves to be congratulated on the campaign that it has waged to secure a future for the super-bike and for British manufacturing.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Lady take it from me, as someone who has had a Yamaha throbbing between my legs while driving through the streets of Turkey, that, in fact, extra power and extra acceleration get one out of difficulty and not into it? I appreciate the value that she places on it.

Ms Walley: I think that the House will note what the hon. Gentleman says.

I also very much welcome the voluntary agreement that has been made in conjunction with the International Motorcycle Manufacturers Association, which looks at the relevance of the proposals for smaller vehicles, but which recognises that the manufacturing processes of the super-bike can survive. That is important. I am not so sure about similar compromise over emissions. I am very concerned that we ensure that we follow through the recommendations of the 18th report of the Royal Commission on transport and the environment. That is our most recent reminder that industry has to find a way in which to reduce emissions and that our perpetual objective has to be the production of even cleaner vehicles backed up by proper use.

Whether the proposals from Brussels are achievable by 1997 with those issues is a matter, therefore, for urgent and careful consideration. We must reduce emissions in the shortest possible time scale. We need targets and they need to be agreed across the Community. But, by the same token, those targets have to be realistic in quality and time. Equally, however stringent the controls applying to the motor cycle industry, which results in a small but none the less significant amount of carbon monoxide and other damaging pollutants, the same requirements must be levelled at other vehicles, and, indeed, other industrial processes.

I expect the Minister to set out how he expects to balance the interests of the industry with the equally compelling demands for environmental protection. I suspect that we shall return to that issue time and again. The problem is that all the modifications that we want to see to proposals from Brussels are part and parcel, as we have already heard, of the whole discussion about comitology and democracy.

Is not it ironic, therefore, that this debate is taking place not only as the Government's weakness and disunity over Europe is exposed, but after the previous debate on setting up a Deregulation Committee, which will be the basis of getting rid of regulations in future? Despite all our criticisms, and whatever we may say from the Labour Benches, at least Parliament, through its elected representatives, will have some say, however limited. I suspect that the Government will allow Labour Members nothing more than the opportunity to say that we disapprove of the rubber-stamping that they will give to

wiping regulations off the statute book. I refer to the debate that we have just had about setting up a special Committee.

Although those who are elected to the European Parliament have a proper part to play in the process of making primary legislation, the same cannot be said of their accountability to the people who elect them in respect of subsequent technical amendments to that legislation. I was interested to hear that the Minister could not define what the technical issues might be. I could give him many definitions.

Mr. Norris: May I say in my own defence that it is not that I could not give the hon. Lady such definitions, but that many of my hon. Friends advised me in the strongest terms that I should resist the temptation to do so?

Ms Walley: Obviously, the Minister has to make up his own mind about to whom he listens and to whom he is accountable. Technical amendments could easily follow primary legislation from the European Union and have all sorts of unforeseen consequences. That could make life very difficult for many manufacturers in this country.

The right of elected Members to have a say and to be consulted about future amendments, regardless of how technical the changes may or may not be, is fundamental to our democracy. That problem was not resolved by the Maastricht treaty, but the issue has surfaced and become central to this evening's debate about two or three-wheel vehicles.

We cannot support the last part of the motion. We believe that whatever is agreed must satisfy the principles of democracy and accountability. Parliamentarians, whether in this Parliament or in the European Parliament, cannot be denied the right to represent the people who elect them.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way on that point. Is not it excellent that my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who has a Toyota factory in her constituency, drives a Toyota? Does the hon. Lady agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown), who is the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household, should drive a Reliant Robin three-wheeler, which is made in Tamworth?

Ms Walley: I think that the hon. Gentleman has managed to confuse the issue even further. In view of the number of hon. Members who wish to speak in the debate, particularly those who ride motor bikes—my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) wishes to make a contribution—I do not wish to confuse the issue.

I should expect the Government— who have given us the "quango state" where Ministers are no longer accountable to anyone, even when they are found by the High Court to be in breach of their own law on compensation to victims of crime, and who have entrusted their massive deregulation programme to a committee of their own appointees and so-called "technical experts" who sat on the deregulation task force— to argue against the European Parliament having its say at each and every opportunity. It is entirely consistent with the Government's stance on accountability.

The Minister may ask what that has to do with the debate, but it has everything to do with it because the debate is about accountability. Fortunately, on this occasion what is written on the Order Paper has been overtaken by events. We cannot support the Government's position on comitology, but as that proposal has now been superseded by conciliation talks between the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the Community, we have no difficulty supporting the main part of the motion.

Whether the whole motor cycle package falls or proceeds will depend very much upon whether the European Union supports the principle of democracy at all levels—local, national and international. We want to ensure that there is further parliamentary scrutiny of the three controversial parts of the legislation. For those reasons, we shall not oppose the proposals.

7.34 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I am grateful to be called to speak in the debate. I am very proud to represent the new British motor cycle industry: the Triumph plant at Hinckley. I begin by congratulating the management and workers at the Triumph factory on their great achievements over the past few years. I also congratulate Conservative-controlled Hinckley and Bosworth borough council on making it possible for the factory to move to Hinckley and have such great success.

Nothing better illustrates the failure of socialist policies and the success of Conservative policies than the history of Triumph. The House may recall that the now right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) spent £4.2 million of public money on the Meriden motor cycle co-operative, which tried unsuccessfully to revive the old Triumph firm. From the start, the operation was plagued by inefficiency and union demarcation until its eventual collapse in 1983. It is remarkable that Triumph, like the phoenix, should have risen from the ashes. Garry McDonnell, a fitter at the new Triumph plant, has said:

"We don't need unions . . . I worked at Meriden and what a mess that was. Nobody seemed to know what was going on".

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited the plant, and he found— his findings are relevant to the motion— a factory which is ready to expand to a capacity of 30,000 machines a year and which is expected to bring 400 new jobs to the area. However, the Liberal councillors of Hinckley and Bosworth borough council opposed the company's expansion in Hinckley and, as a consequence, I believe that Triumph almost moved its entire works away from the area. I hope that the electorate will remember that in the local elections.

Triumph intends to build more than 12,000 vehicles world wide for the 1995 model year. Some 80 per cent. will be exported to 28 markets around the world. The number of employees at the factory has doubled in the past year from 160 to 330. Whereas in 1991 the factory produced only two models, in the three-year period since then, it has produced 10.

I pointed out to my hon. Friend the Minister the problems that the proposed European legislation could create for the factory. From conception to production, Triumph is now capable of creating a new motor cycle machine in 18 months—the fastest development rate in the world. The company has subsidiaries in Germany, France and America, and it has now started exporting to America. Triumph is now planning for an expansion into

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a second state-of-the-art facility in the immediate future, and on 24 July this year the new Triumph motor cycles raced at Donnington for the first time.

The proposed multi-directive for motor cycle whole vehicle-type approval would have three serious consequences. My hon. Friend the Minister has addressed some of those consequences, and I shall expand on them a little more.

In its present form, the anti-tampering chapter would destroy the modular manufacturing process—a Lego process devised by Triumph—by disallowing the use of certain interchangeable parts in the engine. The industry has proposed that that chapter be restricted to small motor cycles and mopeds, as my hon. Friend knows. Triumph would like to see support for that proposal.

On the noise issue, Triumph believes that motor cycles of 175 cc or greater that achieve 82 or 80 decibels (A) are sufficiently quiet. Motor cycle noise pollution is an issue that involves not only the original equipment supplied by the manufacturer, but environmental conditions and individual driving styles. Because of that, it is impossible to determine what the effects of further proposed reductions will be.

In Triumph's opinion, after-market replacement silencers are making a large contribution to motor cycle noise problems. In many instances, the manufacturer's silencer is replaced by one that does not provide equivalent noise protection. That area requires greater control. Triumph believes that further research should be conducted before more severe noise level reductions are considered. The company has made a substantial contribution of time and money to research and my hon. Friend the Minister might like to follow that example.

Pollution has been mentioned. The majority of motor cycles are small two-stroke vehicles which are used because they consume little fuel and are inexpensive compared with larger machines. Making those vehicles comply with the noise limitations will increase their price by 25 per cent. because additional equipment will be required. That will destroy the market for an inexpensive, low-fuel consuming vehicle.

The British motor cycle industry has been reborn in the form of Triumph, and this is a crucial time for its development because it is the first year during which it will export vehicles to America. Triumph believes that the proposed chapters would seriously damage its hopes for continued growth and success. My hon. Friend the Minister should consider the harm that that would cause not only to manufacturers but to users.

Triumph now has a range of 10 machines based on its modular construction, which is as simple as a system of child's building blocks. It gives the company the ability to develop quickly new models that are in line with the requirements of the market. That principle is threatened with extinction by the anti-tampering chapter. It is in the interests of Britain for this measure to be examined in the most sympathetic light by the Minister. On behalf of all my constituents and those who work at and manage Triumph I hope that he will do so.

7.41 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that many motor cycle users, including members of the Motor Cycle Action Group and others who have been mentioned, have expressed a great deal of anxiety about the implications of these European Union documents. The detail and extent of the proposed restrictions could lead one to conclude that the European Commission is seeking to become the designer of motor cycles.

It appears from the detail of the proposals that there is a clear strategy to reinforce the policy of limiting the power of motor cycles to 74 kw. That strategy is built on a range of subtle, minor but critical restrictions on engine design. For example, it is proposed that manufacturers should be prohibited from designing motor cycles that are able to accommodate a range of interchangeable parts. That restriction would apply if such interchangeability allowed the power of a particular model to be enhanced by more than 10 per cent.

We know that there is no evidence linking motor cycle power to accidents, and that on a number of occasions the European Parliament rejected the proposed power limit. Clearly, this new proposal to restrict interchangeability is designed to support such a power limit through the prevention of the interchangeability of parts. It seems to be a back-door attempt to avoid the opposition of the European Parliament to the imposition of the 74 kw limit, and it should be resisted.

Interchangeability of parts is a key factor for manufacturers who produce a range of motor cycles. Triumph's product range, costs and manufacturing efficiency depend on the modular design concept, and the foundation of that company's success has been the interchangeability of parts in the modular design process.

I am advised that since the new Triumph factory was established about three years ago, sales of motor cycles have been a great success and are predicted to pass 20,000 machines by the end of this year. The combined effect of the type-approval motor cycle proposals could be to eliminate some highly successful models from the company's range. It would reduce the sales volume by more than a third and the consequent loss of revenue could approach £20 million, to which must be added the loss of business to the numerous suppliers and sub-contractors who provide components to the main company.

The loss of business and jobs that the proposed restrictions on interchangeability would create, if implemented, is clearly unacceptable. The House would wish to be advised that Ministers have been able to assure the motor cycle industry and users that those concerns have been addressed and resolved.

7.44 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I am delighted that the Government have taken a robust line on the proposals in the multidirective from the Commission. I welcome the fact that the European Parliament has reinforced its reputation by acting as a brake on the untrammelled ambitions of the Commission to extend its role and intrude unnecessarily into this area. I am glad that in their approach to motor cycling in recent years the Government have done a great deal to improve safety, especially on training.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), I pay tribute to the Motor Cycle Action Group, as well as to the British Motorcyclists Federation. I have certainly always found their representatives to be highly responsible and well-informed proponents of their case.

I should like to deal with the proposals that are objectionable. It is difficult to justify the proposal on tampering, even if it did not hit particularly at British manufacturers. It would certainly prevent riders from even legally upgrading their machines, thus reducing their freedom. It can reasonably be said that freedom is an intrinsic part of motor cycling, and many motor cyclists like to work on their machines and modify them. Sometimes that has regrettable effects, especially when people fit unacceptable silencers, about which I shall speak later. The freedom of motor cycle users to modify their machines should not be unnecessarily attacked in this way—provided the modifications remain always within the law.

Forbidding the interchangeability of parts would certainly affect Triumph in particular, but that approach would also be detrimental to many small United Kingdom manufacturers. This proposal could appropriately be applied to small motor cycles, especially restricted machines such as mopeds, but it is difficult to see how its extension to larger machines could be justified in any way.

There is no scientific evidence that the proposed power limit that the Commission seeks to introduce will increase safety. I am glad that that proposal seems to have been put off, at least until further investigations have been conducted.

I appreciate the perception of many people that motor cycles, as manufactured, can be noisy. Anybody who has attended the demonstrations by the industry will be aware that nearly all noisy machines are those that have been illegally modified by the fitting of after-market, unacceptable exhaust systems. If we enforced the existing law properly, we would eliminate nearly all the nuisance to which people refer. It is notable that in many countries that support these proposals nobody has even begun to seek to enforce the law as it stands.

All the evidence shows that motor cycles contribute only a tiny proportion of vehicle emissions. A figure of 3 per cent. has been quoted. I do not believe that it is necessary to adopt exaggerated means of limiting emissions. I note the view of the British Motorcyclists Federation that the proposed emission limits could not be achieved without the incorporation of catalytic converters. There are clear differences of view between the Department and that organisation on this matter, and I hope that they can be explored further.

In conclusion, the motor cycle is the means of personal powered transport that does the least damage to the environment. As my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out, it certainly takes up very little space.

The motor cycle is the means to jobs—running into seven figures—and enjoyment for many people in Britain . I believe that the multi-directive is wrong to seek in effect to discourage the use of motor cycles by pushing up the price beyond the reach of many people.

7.50 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): As a practising motor cyclist who has ridden motor cycles ranging from a Corgi 50 cc to my current 1,000 cc, I shall say just a few words as a member of the all-party motor cycling group.

Our position on tampering is exactly right. Anti-tampering regulations should apply at the lower end of the range where people are learning and there is a risk of accident and death. Provided that problem is dealt with, there is no case whatever for regulations to apply to motor cycles of more than 125 cc. If people want power, they will buy it. There is a huge range available from 125 cc to 1,200 cc bikes. If people want it, they will get it and tampering is irrelevant.

The second issue is noise. I see no point in intensifying regulations on noise. We have to enforce the existing legislation. Noise mostly comes from smaller bikes. Many towns on the Mediterranean sound as if they are occupied from 5 o'clock in the morning to 4 o'clock the following morning by giant bumble bees and wasps as people ride up and down on small motor cycles and mopeds that have been adapted not to achieve as much speed as possible but to create as much noise as possible. We have to concentrate not on intensifying present limits, as most motor bikes do not create noise problems, but on enforcing existing regulations.

In respect of emission and noise control, the Minister should remember, first, that if regulations are applied too intensely they will damage a valuable and growing British industry.

Secondly, perhaps the motor cycle should possess some small advantage against the motor car, if it is not to the detriment of the community generally. Motor cycles occupy very little space, they consume much less fuel and they are much more efficient in terms of their use of the roads. If regulations push up the cost of manufacture and purchase, instead of buying motor cycles people will be shifted into buying cheaper old bangers that are much less environmentally friendly, consume more fuel and take up more road space.

The Minister has to have in mind, first, protecting British industry, and secondly, ensuring that the proper balance is struck between vehicles that take up very little space and are pretty efficient.

7.53 pm

Mr. Norris: We have had a good short debate. I know that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) wishes to give uncritical support to extensions of European powers against those of the European Parliament and I am sure that remark will be noted outside the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) made some sensible points on behalf of Triumph and I hope that he will be assured that, to a large extent, he was pushing at a open door because we understand the position of Triumph and we certainly do not want to do anything to frustrate it.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) was quite right just to mark the card on the extent to which interchangeability and anti-tampering are related and how interchangeability could be a threat to power output. We fully understand that point and will, of course, ensure that it is taken on board in resisting the Commission's proposal.

[Mr. Norris]

I hope that my hon. Friends will forgive me for putting it in this way, but the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) is a well-known motor cyclist and on this occasion he spoke eminent common sense. He was right about anti-tampering and made the point that when one is considering emissions and noise it is sensible to get the issue into proper balance. That is how we have tried to approach the matter—not by insisting on onerous regulations that would put motor cycles at a disadvantage to cars, but simply by recognising that, in general, society is seeking less harmful emission levels from all vehicles and less noisy vehicles. Not many hon. Members will disagree with him about the bumble bee effect, which we all understand.

The summary of our approach, which appears to have found favour with the House, is simply that we will be protecting British interests, particularly those of Triumph. That is not only the right thing to do from our domestic standpoint, but also represents a commonsense approach to issues such as power limits. We shall continue to press for what I believe to be a reasonable position on both noise and emissions—one for which there has been general support this evening—with the qualification that we do not want to be over-zealous.

We have taken a commonsense position on anti-tampering that appears to have found favour. On that basis I am happy to commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 10904/93, 8037/94 and 8618/94 relating to European Community type-approval of motorcycles; supports the principle of a single market in motorcycles which such a process is designed to achieve; shares the Government's view that amendments must be sought to Document No. 10904/93 if it is not to impact adversely and unnecessarily on motorcyclists and the motorcycle industry; supports the European Parliament's amendments set out in Document No. 8037/94 on the deletion of a motorcycle power limit; but opposes the European Parliament's amendment in that Document seeking a role for it in 'comitology'.

Parliament

7.56 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.

As you will appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a sense, the debate is simply consequential on the debate that we had, in November 1993, on the pay of Members of Parliament. It reflects no new decision, no new policy, but simply what was then announced as the basis on which the pay of Minister and others covered by the order would be settled from January 1995 and each year thereafter.

I went over the background in considerable detail last November, and I shall recall it only briefly today. There are three elements in that background. First, hon. Members, and of course Ministers, had accepted a freeze in their pay in January 1993, when they would normally have expected to receive the same 3.9 per cent. as had been agreed for the relevant civil service grades from August 1992.

Secondly, the actual linking mechanism for relating hon. Members' pay to that of civil servants in effect had ceased to be workable because of the move to performance-related pay in the civil service.

Thirdly, in asking hon. Members to accept the 1993 freeze, I had undertaken both to re-establish a workable link and to ensure that Members' pay levels would not be reduced permanently by comparison with those civil service links.

Thus a year ago I proposed, and the House agreed by a large majority, a new resolution which did two things. One was, as promised, to re-establish a workable linkage defined as the average pay increase each year for civil service grades 5 to 7. The other was to ask for yet further restraint. That is an important point as, by then under such a link, hon. Members were due both the 3.9 per cent. civil service increase of August 1992 and the 1.5 per cent. civil service increase of August 1993.

The House was asked, and agreed, to take 2.7 per cent. of those combined amounts in January 1994 and to defer the other 2.7 per cent. to January 1995, at which point hon. Members would also receive whatever increase had been agreed for the civil servants from August 1994, which turned out to be 2 per cent.

The resolution passed in November 1993 to establish those arrangements, which is what will lead to the Members' pay increase of 4.7 per cent. in January 1995, could not in itself provide for Ministers pay as well: that has required this order. The primary legislation does not allow it to be dealt with in that way. It requires this order. I said at the time, and I quote from the *Official Report*, leaving out only a few words for the sake of clarity:

"I should make it clear to the House that the Government think that the right course henceforth is for the salaries of Ministers . . . to be dealt with on exactly the same basis as Members".—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1993; Vol. 231, c. 459.]

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I wonder whether the Leader of the House has had a chance for mature reflection on whether the "benefits" that the gesture brought have turned out to be worth the hassle.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps the cautious thing for me to say is that I shall continue to reflect on that and that I shall be willing to listen to anything that the hon. Gentleman might wish to observe on the point.

The proposal on linkage between Members and civil servants and between Ministers and Members and, therefore, Ministers and civil servants was neither queried nor opposed. It was, I think, regarded as entirely sensible by the great majority of people present or who thought about it. I am grateful to have that confirmed by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) from the Opposition Front Bench. As I have already said, the order now before the House simply implements what I said a year ago.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): One of the things that sticks in the gullet of people outside this place is that since last November the Government decided to tell signal workers in the summer of this year that they could not engage in a catching-up process. Yet that is what the Leader of the House wants to do for Ministers. People cannot stomach the idea that signal workers could not engage in a catching-up process to get more than 5.7 per cent. The Government told British Rail not to pay them. To request a catching-up process for Ministers when others were prevented from engaging in the same process is to have double standards.

Mr. Newton: That is not true, for a reason which I shall come to in a few moments. To describe what we are doing as a catching-up process in the sense that the hon. Gentleman means, certainly under the terms on which the original freeze was accepted, is not accurate.

The points that I was about to come to are also the key points in respect of Members' pay. The key points are the same for both Ministers' and Members' pay because they have been tied together. There are four points. The pay settlement for January 1995 is 2 per cent., reflecting what was agreed for civil servants from August 1994. The other 2.7 per cent. is a delayed payment—some of it delayed from as long ago as January 1993, two years ago, as it were—reflecting earlier civil service settlements.

The next two points are perhaps the key points for the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Over the three years involved, the pay of Members of Parliament and Ministers has been restrained to exactly the same extent as that of civil servants, but—I come to the crunch in relation to the hon. Gentleman's point—because their payments have been delayed, in part by up to two years, Members of Parliament and Ministers have lost, permanently, some £2,000 and £4,000 respectively by comparison with their civil service links. That is a permanent loss. It is not something that has been made up. It is money that has gone for good. The rates are going back to what they would have been by comparison with the civil service, but there has been a substantial, actual, financial loss along the way. That cannot be described as a catching-up process, as the hon. Member for Bolsover has described it.

Mr. Skinner: For three months in the summer of this year, when the Government were holding back their wages and telling British Rail not to pay them, signal workers said that they had lost wages over a considerable period because they had lost money in comparison to other grades in the railway industry and outside. All they were saying is what the Leader of the House is now saying on behalf of Ministers. Signal workers said, "We want the money because otherwise we will lose it for ever." They have not got it.

Mr. Newton: I have already made it clear that there is a significant difference. If I remember rightly—I have not checked the figure—the basic pay award to the signalmen in the settlement was 2.5 per cent., which is rather more than the settlement for this year for Members of Parliament and Ministers.

Before I conclude, I should of course make it clear that, although I have referred to Ministers' pay for reasons of simplicity, the order covers not only Ministers but the Opposition Leaders in both Houses, three Opposition Whips in the Commons, the Opposition Chief Whip in the Lords and Madam Speaker. Ah, Madam Speaker, you are here. I am glad to point out that there is a pay increase here. The same increase is also paid in the Commons to the Chairman of Ways and Means, and to the Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, who has just left the Chair, and to the Chairman and the Principal Deputy Chairmen of Committees in the other place.

The arrangements for those in the other place are, however, slightly different, because they do not receive a reduced parliamentary salary as those of us in the Commons do. They will receive an increase equivalent to the aggregate cash increase received by their Commons counterparts.

Madam Speaker, just as I continue to believe that the arrangements for Members' pay agreed last year were sensible and right, so I believe that this proposal to determine Ministers' pay on exactly the same basis is one which the House should endorse.

8.5 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I have no interest to declare in the order and nothing that I say will affect your position, Madam Speaker, because I think you should be paid more. I think you are so popular outside the House that if there were a referendum you would be elected the nation's first president. That is the nature of the stature that you have gained as our Speaker.

I agreed with virtually everything that the Leader of the House said. We have arrived at a barmy position. We are here debating something that was decided a long time ago. When it was decided then, the Government and, I suppose, the House, got bad publicity. We will get it again for doing the same thing. So we have arrived at an inexcusable position. I do not know why we have not amended the main legislation and done something along the lines that we talked about earlier this evening in respect of the corner-cutting of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 so that we could get rid of this demeaning debate—not bury it. We have dispensed with such debates for many of the general arrangements for

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

Members of Parliament, I do not know. I am surprised that the Leader of the House has not had an opportunity to deal with it.

Mr. Newton: I want to find out whether there is an offer here. It is not that I have legislation in mind, but I should like to know what the position is. If we introduced primary legislation on the matter, would we have the co-operation of the Opposition in putting it through speedily?

Mr. Rooker: We would use our best endeavours to make sensible arrangements for payments to Members of the House, whether they are in Government or on the Back Benches. If the Leader of the House could get Jopling organised well before the House rises for Christmas, we might consider the position. It is not our job to negotiate across the Dispatch Box, but the Leader of the House gets the message.

Matters are made worse for the Government when clearly they plant stories in newspapers, such as that in *The Sunday Times* of 13 November, which had the headline:

"Cabinet split over move to cut large pay rises for ministers."

The only reason why such a headline arrives in a newspaper is that members of the Cabinet have briefed the press. The Government bring it upon themselves. It is not my hon. Friends or anyone else who cause the difficulty. *The Sunday Times* reported something that made me think, "There is no new decision there." The House debated the issue last November, as the Leader of the House rightly said, but members of the Cabinet had obviously been on the telephone causing trouble for someone.

I have been a Member of Parliament for 20 years as both a Government and an Opposition Back Bencher. So I know that it is difficult to write job descriptions for Ministers. I do not know what they do. My constituents often wonder what they do. They see what you do, Madam Speaker, keeping us in order on a daily basis, but they do not know what Ministers do.

A couple of days ago there was an analysis in *The Guardian* of the salaries of people doing different jobs. It listed the job and the age of the person doing it. Ministers are usually middle-aged. It listed the salaries. The ministerial salary is between £19,000 and £55,000. The next point concerned what the job entailed. For Ministers, it is obviously doing what Tory central office says or what the Maples memorandum dictates. Qualifications came next on the list. For Ministers, it is either none or an ability to say yes.

The next point concerns pay rises. I do not want to go into the background dealt with by the Leader of the House. What he said was correct. I did not notice a single person outside the House during the period when we were on a pay freeze saying, "Look what an example Members of Parliament have set," and calling upon his members or employers to do the same. I see no reason why people should, but that does not behove us to say, "Look what we are doing. Follow our example." We know that will not be done. We must have a more mature and civilised way of settling pay in Britain, not just for Members of Parliament, but for health visitors, home helps, gatekeepers, cleaners and managing directors. We need a more civilised arrangement spread, throughout society, than we have. The pecking order fixed at certain levels years ago should not remain immutable forever.

The next thing that *The Guardian* touched on was prospects of poachability. If we have a general election before Christmas, Ministers may be out of office by 22 December, which is the first available working Thursday that can be used if they fail next week. They are all pretty tainted, so I do not give much for their prospects of poachability once they are ex-Ministers.

The final question asked whether employers were worth their pay. For Ministers, I would say on productivity no, on responsibility yes. That is where I draw the distinction. The productivity of Ministers has been pathetic. There are too many of them. They have got rid of much of their responsibility for looking after public money—£46 billion looked after by non-elected quangos. Ministers are no longer responsible for that, they simply pass our letters on to the chief executives of the quangos and we cannot get genuine accountability for the quangos. But, on their ultimate responsibility, the answer must be yes. The Government must have a real problem because they now have to employ part-time dentists as Ministers to make up the numbers.

This is my first day in the House this week, and I make no apology for that. I came here today via my constituency and the remarkable Dudley, West constituency. I have taken some time this week to listen to the good people of Dudley, West. I have talked to them about the business of the House and what has happened in the past 15 years. I have listened to their worries for the future for their families. I told them that, on Thursday, I would be coming to the House for a debate on Ministers' salaries and I asked them what they thought about that.

I offer the Leader of the House a few choice comments from the Tory voters in Dudley, West. They say that Ministers have been in power for too long; they are complacent; they have lost a sense of direction; they have failed to fulfil their promises; they are clumsy at implementing policy; they shoot themselves in the foot. We pay them £19,000 to £55,000 for that. Those are exactly the phrases that John Maples heard from Tory voters, which he published in his memo. They are exactly the kind of things that Tory voters in Dudley, West are saying and something should be done about it.

We could call for fewer Ministers to share out the kitty on a more even basis. We could call for more Ministers to contribute from their salaries, as I call on all Members to do, to the give-as-you-earn charity pay-roll scheme operated by the Fees Office. When I checked two years ago, some 55 Members were contributing, and I declare an interest as one of them. When I checked this week, the figure was only 43 out of 651. I am not saying that the other hon. Members are not giving to charity, but we are trying to encourage millions of people in Britain to give to charity through their employer. The legislation making that possible was agreed on a cross-party basis and Members of the House are setting a pathetic example in respect of that.

I do not say that I do not intend to vote myself if there is a vote, although I see no need for one, but I remind Conservative Members, in case any of them are minded to seek to make divisions on the Opposition Benches, that by and large people of my ilk do not spend their time in industry seeking to remove from other people their existing pay. I can remember during my service in the

House one occasion when Conservative Members of Parliament ganged up and voted to reduce the salary of a Labour Member of Parliament, and they carried the vote. They carried the vote to reduce the salary of Eric Varley by £1,000 in about 1978. Labour Members returned the following day and the matter was redressed. Conservative Members did not waste any time in saying that the salary of a Labour Member of Parliament should be voted down. It is true that he happened to be a member of the Cabinet. He was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It was their attempt to have a go at him, and they used the means of reducing a Member's salary to do so. I hope that Conservative Members will never think of doing that again.

8.15 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): There can be no doubt that this is a sensitive issue, perhaps even more sensitive than that of the pay of Members of Parliament. It is not surprising that that is so because the absolute level of pay in this case seems to many of our constituents, particularly pensioners, to be something of which they could only dream. It follows necessarily that there is never a good moment to increase Ministers' pay. None the less, for reasons that I shall put forward, I believe that it is extremely important that we should do so.

If there is one lesson that we have to learn from recent experience, it is the fact that if Members and Ministers take a pay freeze, it is unlikely to receive a line of publicity in any national paper. The idea that any wage negotiator, trade union or otherwise, will make the slightest difference to their wage claim as a result of that is utterly unrealistic.

However, when the adjustment is made to compensate for the freeze, there will undoubtedly be massive publicity of a kind to which I shall refer in a moment. The effect on pay settlements and on union leaders rushing round saying that they must have a similar increase is great. The whole thing is asymmetrical and the net effect of the freeze and what we are proposing this evening is, if anything, to encourage rather than discourage wage settlements outside. That is the simple point that I want to make. We should resume the link because we must have some way of showing that we wish not to decide our own pay but to relate it to what is happening outside.

I want briefly to say a word or two about the increase in ministerial pay in relation to inflation, civil servants, Members of Parliament and the population as a whole. First, with regard to inflation, headlines last week declared, "Pay increases for Members of Parliament well above the rate of inflation." They compared the increase to which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House referred, part of which is anyway a deferred payment from an earlier period, with the current level of inflation. That is clearly rubbish. It must be compared with the date of the previous increase and, in this case, the date of the pay freeze and allowing for the subsequent staging of the increase. If one does that, far from being well above the level of inflation, it is near enough in line with inflation, but, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, with an important qualification.

That brings me to the question of the pay increase in relation to civil servants and, in particular, those with whom ministerial pay has, in a sense, been compared. If one does that, because of the time lags in the ministerial pay increases compared with those of the civil servants, it is not the case that they have caught up. The reality is, as my right hon. Friend said, that Cabinet Ministers have lost £4,000 in hard cash once and for all. That will never be made up. Therefore, even in that respect the link has not been made.

The pay of Ministers has increased even more slowly than that of ordinary Members of Parliament and the differential has been constantly narrowing. In those terms, the Prime Minister's salary has increased less than that of members of the Cabinet, the Financial Secretary and Under-Secretaries of State.

With respect to the Leader of the Opposition, I regret that he followed the example of the former Prime Minister when she was in office, in not taking the whole increase. That is a bad example to follow. I am glad to note that the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to accept the additional pay that he receives as Leader of the Opposition. However, it seems a subtle distinction to take that increase but not the rise that was anyway deferred from a previous decision.

The squeezing of differentials has seriously affected those further down the scale. It will be increasingly difficult to attract high-quality recruits to ministerial office. The decision of the Leader of the Opposition not to take his increase squeezes the differentials further and provides less headroom. Anyone who has worked in industry, as I have, knows that it is dangerous not to have the headroom to be able to give appropriate increases to people further down the line.

It has been suggested that ministerial pay should be linked with productivity, and a number of my constituents say that the pay of Members of Parliament should relate to inflation. The startling inflation figure of only 7.8 per cent. over the past three years compares with 56 per cent. inflation under three years of Labour Government. The present Government can take credit for that, and might even argue for a reasonable pay increase for reducing inflation to its present level, which is of vital importance to my constituents. In productivity terms, the increase can be justified.

Figures that I received from the Library today take a serious and analytical view of certain statistics. There are some minor footnotes and qualifications, but the figures that I want to quote will not seriously mislead the House. I will, as I did in the debate on the pay of Members of Parliament, compare the position since I entered the House 30 years ago, in 1964, with the present.

Allowing for changes in the retail prices index and at 1994 prices, the real income of the Prime Minister has fallen 59 per cent. The income of Cabinet Ministers has fallen 60 per cent. and that of Under-Secretaries of State, 39 per cent. Members of Parliament are, in real terms, just about back where they were when I entered the House.

Throughout the intervening period, the real pay of Members of Parliament and, to a far greater extent, of Ministers has fallen way below the 1964 figure. In the country as a whole, average real incomes have increased nearly 80 per cent. Over a longer period, which is a reasonable way to view the matter, the income of a Cabinet Minister has fallen 60 per cent. while average real incomes have increased 80 per cent. To take the productivity argument, Ministers of whichever party has been in power—although most improvements have taken

[Sir Terence Higgins]

place under a Conservative Government—could justify an increase in ministerial pay. Differentials have been enormously eroded.

I am seriously concerned about recruitment to the House and to ministerial office. When I entered the House during the Macmillan period, it was generally recognised that no one could afford to become an Under-Secretary of State at the pay rates then prevailing unless he had a substantial income. That precluded a large number of candidates or reduced new Ministers to utter penury. It is important to attract the right people to the House—and to your own office, Madam Speaker. We shall not do so if we continue to take the attitude to pay that we have in the past, particularly under the previous Prime Minister. I remember negotiations between the Prime Minister, Government representatives and Mr. Du Cann—then chairman of the 1922 Committee. Time and time again, we have failed to agree a reasonable level of pay.

The question can become mixed up with the issue of outside interests, and I dare say that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will mention that. To question whether or not a person is a full-time Member of Parliament is grossly misleading. It would not be unreasonable to estimate that a full-time job occupies 40 hours per week. Most hon. Members work far in excess of 40 hours.

It is nonsense also that Ministers do not receive their full parliamentary salary. When I served as Financial Secretary, I did not accomplish my constituency work less well or any better than I do now. I slept rather less than I do now, although I do not sleep that much now. We should question the historical justification, which goes back to Domesday, for Ministers not receiving their full parliamentary salary. The whole issue must be examined, perhaps in the context of the Nolan committee. I am not in favour of hon. Members working full time in the sense that they have no outside interests, but we must review our whole pay structure and at some stage take a brave approach.

I understand the point about railwaymen made earlier by the hon. Member for Bolsover, but I suspect that their pay increases have not, in real terms, been vastly different from those of other workers and that their pay has increased substantially. If one takes a reasonable time scale, Ministers and Members of Parliament have made considerable voluntary decisions that have seriously undermined their real pay position in relation to other employees.

It is not a question of supply and demand—arguing that there are dozens of candidates for every general election and that, as supply exceeds demand, pay should be reduced. Any first year economics student could tell us that supply in relation to quality is what matters.

I support the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council, and I hope that the House will agree to them. I trust that we will give thought also to the long-term strategy that we should adopt with regard to the pay of Members of Parliament. I do not expect to get enthusiastic headlines for my speech, but I have tried to demonstrate the right thing to do.

8.28 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): We would not be having this debate were it not for the stupidity of the Government and their colleagues a little while ago in supporting the moratorium on ministerial pay. I suspect that, privately, the Leader of the House wishes that he could look the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who is notable by his absence tonight, in the eye. I suspect that when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was the principal architect of the embarrassment now faced by the Government. As an Opposition Member, it is not my job to minimise the embarrassment of Ministers on the Treasury Bench, so I shall comment on their stewardship of this matter and say how I think pay for Ministers of the Crown should be guided.

Like other hon. Members, may I say that you, Madam Speaker, your three deputies and the deputy Opposition Chief Whip are exceptions to that rule, as your salaries pale into insignificance when we consider your real worth. Nevertheless, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important to bear in mind the fact that, although the Leader of the House is right to say that that moratorium exists, we must be sensitive to how these matters are seen outside the House, where people legitimately contrast with their own experience the fact that this pay award is way above the rate of inflation. Some people have had no pay award for 12 or 24 months and thousands have had pay cuts. They wonder why Ministers of the Crown should enjoy a catching up when their families and loved ones must tighten their belts. We cannot escape the fact that that is the experience of many of our constituents.

As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said yesterday, it is time that we were more conscious of how we are perceived outside the House. This week we had the backdrop of the Maples memorandum. I do not wish to go into Mr. Maples' analysis of the Government, but his term "yobbo" was important. What does it signal to the public when a vice-chairman of the Conservative party refers to some of his own kith and kin as "yobbos" and, in the same week, an attempt is made to increase the salaries of those whom they support?

Some 24 hours ago, another vice-chairman of the Conservative party spoke in a most unhelpful and unfriendly manner to our European neighbours. His comments were deeply offensive and an awful lot of Conservative supporters feel they were not to be expected from someone who supports and sustains the Government. Inevitably, that rubs off on the Ministers whom he backs.

I am conscious of the fact that our employees in the House are to have a pay award of some 2.2 per cent. this year. Although I do not want to get bogged down in percentages, we must be sensitive to the fact that many servants here work very hard and will inevitably go home to their spouses and discuss the award for Ministers on which we are voting tonight. When they contrast it with their pay award they will not be happy, and rightly so.

If the order goes through tonight, Cabinet Ministers will, from the triggering date of 1 January, enjoy an increase in pay of £3,070 per annum, which is a substantial sum at a time when the Government expect people to restrain their pay claims. The Government try to dodge that matter, but they are showing about the same restraint in terms of salaries of Ministers as are directors

of privatised companies. Contrast that with the actions of Jack Kennedy, who intervened forcefully against the president of United States Steel in one of his most important domestic statements, when he said that those people were selfishly putting their interests first when restraint was being demanded of workers elsewhere. I wish that the Prime Minister would emulate Jack Kennedy in terms of his position on both private pay awards for top directors in industry and Cabinet members.

Some important events happen when we are in recess. One that would have been probed much more had we not been in recess is the permitting—admittedly, under the rules—of a junior Minister of the Environment to continue to some extent his professional practice of dentistry. I cannot understand why the Prime Minister did not say, "Look, you takes your choice. I'd be delighted to have you in my Government but you must give it a full-time commitment."

Mr. Kirkwood: "Get your teeth into it."

Mr. Mackinlay: Indeed. That did not happen and even if the Prime Minister had good reason to allow the hon. Gentleman to continue to be in the Government—I read in the press that it was to keep up his skills—we must all make difficult choices when we enter public office. If one accepts ministerial office, it must be given 100 per cent. commitment and everything must be put aside. I regret that that did not happen in his case.

I was interested in what the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said on this and earlier occasions. However, I disagree with him about the differentials between the pay of Members of Parliament and Ministers. I may be in a minority of one, but I do not believe that Ministers of the Crown, perhaps with the exception of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, should receive more money than ordinary hon. Members. The system whereby Ministers receive a much higher salary means that Back-Bench Members who take seriously their role of checking, probing, cajoling and criticising the Executive are considered less important, less skilled and less diligent than Treasury Ministers.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Is the hon. Gentleman arguing for significant increases in the salaries of Members of Parliament? That would be an interesting point.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am talking in terms of principle. Members' salaries should be harmonised with those of Ministers. I am not discussing the level of salaries. I am content with my salary, but I am not happy with the resources that I receive to fulfil my role as a Member of Parliament. That is another debate and, although I am prepared to go into it, I suspect that I would tax your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman continually demotes me. He is bound to reduce my salary.

Mr. Mackinlay: I apologise, Madam Speaker.

The question of resources will never go away. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House are eating into their salaries to provide a full service to their constituents. It is not a party point. Salaries should be ring fenced and we should have adequate resources, including a constituency office. Many hon. Members currently use the Conservative, Labour or Liberal party offices in their constituencies. Unfortunately, the dear old Thurrock Labour party does not even own a pencil, so I have to rent one, which is eating into the office costs allowance of my salary. If resources for hon. Members were properly ring fenced, my salary would be more than sufficient.

May I return to the thrust of my argument? Ministerial and Members' salaries should be one and the same because the job of probing and criticising the Government is extremely important. Many members of the public would consider my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) good value as he makes at least as important a contribution as the vast majority of Treasury Ministers. I endorse that view. To be generous, I could cite the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) as another example of a Back-Bench Member who gives good combative value for money and who cannot be bought by the system.

We should therefore think in terms of parity of treatment for people who enter public life, which would reduce the desire to be in office in order to be on the pay roll. There is sufficient incentive and desire to be a Minister apart from the salary. If we are honest, we will admit that the vast majority of those who enter the House want to reach ministerial office. That should be sufficient incentive in itself. Perhaps some—such as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover—are an exception to the rule. I feel, however, that there should be no financial incentive.

Mr. Rooker: How does my hon. Friend know that he is right about that?

Mr. Mackinlay: I have a high regard for my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, and I suspect that he would act in the way that I have suggested.

As for the history of ministerial salaries, it was realised early in our political development that Ministers of the Crown had to be employed full time. Salaries and other emoluments were provided accordingly, at a time when it was accepted that ordinary Members of Parliament were part-time workers: the vast majority had other incomes. Even at the time when the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) entered the House, the current extensive Committee structure did not exist. I do not criticise the right hon. Gentleman's contemporaries in any way, but in those days the role of Parliament was much smaller in terms of the time demanded. Since then, things have moved on.

In an earlier debate, the right hon. Member for Worthing wondered whether Select Committee Chairmen should receive a higher salary. He decided that they should not—rightly, in my view—but I do not see why hon. Members with an obviously full commitment to Parliament should survive on the salary of an ordinary Member of Parliament while Ministers received additional emoluments.

I feel that, considering the current reputation of the House, it is time for us to avoid in future the nonsense of moratoriums and freezes, which obviously cause embarrassment. The Government must recognise that they are embarrassed, given the background of "yobbo" memorandums, their desire for wage restraint on the part of others and—unhappily—the low esteem in which, to some extent, the House is now held. Unless the order is withdrawn, the House should divide to demonstrate that some of us are not prepared to alleviate that embarrassment tonight.

8.41 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), and intend to deal with some of his comments.

I feel strongly about this issue. I also feel strongly that there are times when—in the best interests of Parliament and the people whom it serves—it is best to resist the temptation to swing along with popular opinion, given the current state of that opinion. It is a bit like believing in anti-cyclical investment: "In a recession, invest; in the frenzy of a boom, rein in." Sometimes the same applies to politics, and I believe that it applies to the issue that we are discussing. When the mood is against us, we should hold our ground; when we think that everyone loves us, we should beware of hubris.

As a champion of a number of unpopular causes, I know very well that any proposal to raise a Minister's salary will not meet with universal applause at the moment. Nevertheless, I wish to defend the proposed increase. Although it is against the fashion, I think that, when sense is restored, a broader base of opinion will be prepared to admit that it is really in agreement with tonight's proposal. In the present climate, it is almost impossible to conduct a reasoned national debate about the pay of Members of Parliament or Ministers; those in favour of any increase risk vilification.

Given the current press reports, anyone outside the House would be forgiven for thinking that Ministers are due to receive massive increases, way ahead of comparable awards elsewhere in the public sector. They are not: let us be clear about the facts. The first fact is that, in 1993, the pay of all Members of Parliament and Ministers was frozen. If anyone asked for a declaration of principle to be expressed in hard cash, that would be it. The pay freeze did not provoke great headlines or great expressions of gratitude, and neither should be asked for or expected; but, because of that freeze, and because of the delay in linking Ministers' pay with civil service grades, Ministers have forgone—lost, never received, permanently missed out on—up to £4,000.

Because the former link with civil servants' pay had been undermined by changes in civil service pay arrangements, the House passed a motion that tried to re-establish a workable link for the pay of Members of Parliament with the average annual increase in salary for civil service grades 5 to 7 as a result of their pay settlement. It also provided for the resultant 1993 and 1994 increases for Members of Parliament to be staged, with 2.7 per cent. in January 1994 and 2.7 per cent. delayed until January 1995—when Members of Parliament would also be entitled to whatever increase was agreed for the 1994 civil service settlement. That settlement has turned out to be 2 per cent.

Although that motion could not determine the amount of Ministers' pay, it was made clear at the time that Her Majesty's Government believed that

"the right course henceforth is for the salaries of Ministers . . . to be dealt with on exactly the same basis as Members".—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1993; Vol. 231, c. 459.]

The order that we are discussing simply implements the policy set out last November. The key points that we are now discussing are exactly the same as those relating to the increase in the pay of Members of Parliament.

The root of the problem, and the discontent, is that, for purposes of easy comparison, no market can be freely left to set the salary of a Minister. It is essentially a pretty arbitrary exercise, ranging from the contention of some that they should be paid nothing to that of others who think that they should be very highly paid. When the spectrum ranges from zero to infinity, there is room for quite a few suggestions about who should be paid what.

The House of Commons cannot be compared with a private firm. When a concern is someone's property—when their own risk and money are involved—they can pay themselves what they like: on that basis thousands of people are being paid tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of pounds, and it is none of our business to object. In the public sector, however, people have a rough idea of what is the fair rate for a job by comparing it with the private sector or by bargaining.

Some fall between the two—this is relevant to what was said earlier by the hon. Member for Thurrock—such as, I admit, a former nationalised industry, such as British Gas, in transition to a competitive position in private enterprise. Such industries have their own methods. If we accept that, in such cases, share options are unreasonable because in a monopolistic company there is little prospect of shares falling, it must be right for British Gas executives to be paid a single open salary—as they have been. Those fully defensible changes in salary structure, however, fell on deaf ears, and few have pointed out that if the managers were poorly paid we should all probably pay more for our gas.

The problem is that there is no market to set the salary of a Minister. Some may say that that does not matter: my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) pointed out that there is no shortage of people ready to do the job. I caution against that view, however. I have not been in the House for long, but I can already cite a handful of hon. Members who have declined to become Ministers or asked not to remain in ministerial posts, simply because of the pay.

Most, of course, would do the job at almost any price. Politics is unique: if it is in the head and the heart, one does the job. We all know that, but if he has to worry about money, even a Minister of the highest calibre may do the job less well. Either as Back Benchers or as Ministers, some will find themselves earning more in the House than they would outside; some—rather more, I suspect—find themselves working for less.

Some Back Benchers have outside interests and some do not, but, in the main, Ministers have none. They receive the official salary and that is it. In Britain I do not know anyone who has chosen to go into politics for the money. People here certainly do not go into politics to make money, but they do in other countries, and look what is happening to them. Most Ministers leave office considerably poorer than when they went in and that is a highly unsatisfactory way to produce the best possible culture for government.

What should we do? We should base salaries on a publicly acceptable link, and stick with that for ever and a day. Every time we do that, something goes wrong and we break the link. It is always a mistake to do so. We get

no thanks for the gesture and it serves no constructive purpose. All we do is guarantee that greater problems will accumulate for the future.

Mr. Mackinlay: Whose idea was it?

Mr. Duncan: I shall come to that.

It is sensible to restore the link for which the House has already implicitly voted. We broke the link because the nature of civil service pay bargaining at the time did not allow us to stick with it.

I think that Ministers are grossly underpaid. Remuneration for our Ministers compares badly with that in other countries. In Singapore, which is much smaller but economically more successful, Lee Kuan Yew makes a point of impressing on his growing country that Members of Parliament there should be paid about the same as senior partners in an accountancy firm or a firm of solicitors or the same as senior managers in a bank or something like that. He believes that that is good for democracy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing pointed out that Ministers' pay has not kept up with earnings elsewhere or with inflation. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Lord President for answering a written question that I tabled yesterday. It points out that the differential between that which is earned by a Cabinet Minister and that earned by a Back Bencher in 1965 is now dramatically different from the differential that reigns today. If that same differential were to be in place, a Cabinet Minister would be paid well over £100,000 and the Prime Minister would be paid in excess of £150,000.

The salaries today are low compared with what could be earned in the commercial sector by most of those who hold a ministerial job.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will my hon. Friend address the relationship between ministerial pay and pay in the higher echelons of the civil service, particularly the pay of permanent secretaries? It is unsatisfactory that Ministers should be paid substantially less than those at the top of the civil service.

Mr. Duncan: That is a helpful point which further illustrates my argument. The remuneration of a Back Bencher compares poorly with that of many who work within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. We humble Back Benchers are paid less than the deputy chef. I imagine that there are some servants of the House—I do not begrudge them a penny of what they earn—who are paid more than many a Minister of the Crown.

Our Ministers are entrusted with enormous budgets. They shoulder heavy duties and responsibilities, more than many in commerce. In the world of commodities, I used to buy and sell. We could churn away in the market and, in an oil boom, we would find out at the end of the year that we had traded a volume perhaps in excess of £4 billion. That is an enormous volume but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security makes that amount look pretty paltry. He is in charge of £86 billion and I think that even the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) would admit that my right hon. Friend is in charge of delivering that amount to those who need it most. It matters how he does his job. For that significant duty we pay him less than £70,000 a year. There are 30-year-olds in the City earning more than that. It would not be impossible to find an adviser to a Cabinet Minister who is earning considerably more than the Secretary of State to whom he is answerable.

Those who parade their conscience by opposing the order do so to cement—so they think—some sort of identity with those who earn less and who resent a Minister earning more. They can claim compassion, as I would have it, on the cheap. They can enjoy a minute of applause and an echo of shared resentment. Such ephemeral posturing does not get us far. It serves no lasting purpose except to diminish further those who express the view and to encourage more to express unmerited discontent about Parliament and its work. At the end of the day, it makes everyone a loser and draws us all downwards.

I hope that, from now on, we can have a more enlightened approach to this issue. Let me immediately contribute to that enlightened approach by saying something that I believe to be true. Although the Leader of the Opposition has his car and his Short money, he is under-resourced. For the good of parliamentary democracy, I would give the Leader of the Opposition and his office far more than they receive at present.

"Every hon. Member knows that there is never a good time to increase the pay of Members of Parliament by so much as a ha'penny, regardless of the rate of inflation or the circumstances of the rest of the community. Those in the news media, who earn far more than any of us, will be loud in their condemnation . . . so will many members of the general public who do not earn as much . . . I believe in a fair rate for the job. I do not abandon that principle solely for Members of Parliament or other public servants . . . I believe that a fair rate for the job should be paid irrespective of a person's other circumstances."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1993; Vol. 231, c. 462.]

I am amused to see the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) shaking his head. I have cited word for word the statement made by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) when she spoke in this debate last year. We learnt of the right hon. Lady's principles in that debate and I am afraid that they now conflict with the attitude of her party's leader, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

The Leader of the Opposition has said that he will not take the increase. He hardly needs to, having just received a rise on becoming Leader. His office has briefed the press to advise that he also thinks that, in principle, the increase for Ministers is wrong. There seems to be a conflict there. I must ask the Labour party whether the right hon. Member for Derby, South has jettisoned her principles, whether the Leader of the Opposition has decided to indulge in an opportunistic stunt or both.

I fear that the Leader of the Opposition has made that decision, which is a pity. He has one policy and no one can deny that the mood suits his purpose or that he is doing well out of it. That policy is to feed discontent and then to milk it for all it is worth. He is choosing to seize on grievance and to cash in on the politics of what I call the lowest common denominator. I urge him to forsake that policy in public to the House and to the press, in this case and in all others. All hon. Members should support the increase. Let us hope that both parties will approach this parliamentary matter with maturity and enlightenment today and in the future.

8.59 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I cannot follow the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), who

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

may be trying to get a job. I have heard people make speeches like that before and in the next reshuffle they finish up as a Treasury spokesmen. We shall have to wait and see.

The furore over Mr. Brown and Mr. Giordano at British Gas has taken the heat out of the debate. Last weekend, the 4.7 per cent. pay increase for Ministers and the £3,000 increase for the Prime Minister were the issues. Twenty-four hours later, Mr. Brown came on to the scene with a £475,000 salary—so exit Members of Parliament from the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) will admit that the anticipation with which he was looking forward to this debate rapidly melted away. However, some issues remain.

The Government are always on about performance-related pay for workers—the real wealth creators in our society. I cannot stand that policy. When I hear the Government telling all and sundry to accept individual payments and regional pay systems, all with a view to reducing the amount of money that workers receive and to breaking the back of the trade union movement, which is organising to raise pay and conditions, I cannot stand it.

I oppose not so much the 4.7 per cent. increase as the fact that workers in all sectors of industry and those in other professions such as nursing are being told that they must have performance-related pay. That is why there is so much controversy outside the House. The pay freeze causes difficulties. Workers cannot reconcile the fact that, somehow or other, they have to pull their socks up and tighten their belts every time, with the fact that Ministers and Members of Parliament, on some golden day, get their pay increased after a pay freeze. By and large, workers never catch up after a pay freeze. That is why I made my earlier comments to the Leader of the House.

The signal workers' attempt to catch up with money that they had lost, relative to other grades in the rail industry and elsewhere, is characteristic of the debate. The Government said that they could not have the money and fought them for three months, along with British Rail. That is why I feel intolerant towards the idea of extra pay for Ministers.

I used to work with miners. I do not know whether many people are aware of the fact that the National Union of Mineworkers has not negotiated a single pay increase since the strike. There has been a total pay freeze for many years, so it is not difficult to understand people's opinions when they read headlines about Ministers having a catching-up process and a 4.7 per cent. increase.

I do not go for this percentage business. A 4.7 per cent. increase for someone on £40,000, £50,000 or £60,000 a year is very different from a 2 per cent. increase for a nurse on £200 a week or less. A 4.7 per cent. increase involves real money. When the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) talks about percentages, he fails to recognise that the percentage increase for Ministers, although it may have fallen relative to increases for other professionals, means that they get considerably more money.

Mr. Mackinlay: They get £3,000.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is right. The hon. Member for Worthing said that the increase was relatively small, but £3,000 is as much as some pensioners have to live on. That sticks in the gullets of a lot of people.

Sir Terence Higgins: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the difference between absolute and percentage levels, but my point was that ministerial pay has been cut by 58 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Skinner: But that is not understood by people outside. Pensioners who have lost money see Ministers getting an extra £3,000 a year while they have to get by for a whole year on that kind of money. What about the minimum wage? How often have I heard Tory Members—one after the other, parrot fashion—attacking us because we are trying to get about £4 an hour for people on poverty wages? They then have the audacity to say that a 4.7 per cent. increase and £3,000 extra is chicken feed. That is the background to the debate; it is not about us talking as a gentlemen's club, but about people outside making comparisons.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Skinner: No, I shall not give way. Two or three hon. Members have been here for the whole debate and are still waiting to speak. To give way to the hon. Gentleman would be unfair to them.

The motion will undoubtedly be passed, despite a vote, but I do not want to hear the Government say that nurses, local government workers and fire fighters will have to sup the mop in the next few months. Many people are waiting in the pay queue and they are due for an increase shortly. The Government should take note of some of them as they are in the public sector, but my guess is that the Government will tell them that they cannot have an increase greater than the rate of inflation—some will get less or even face a pay freeze.

I do not want to hear that argument from Tories who then say that they themselves have fallen behind and are simply catching up. That is what puts people's backs up. Yes, there will be a vote; but the chances are that, because of Mr. Brown and Mr. Giordano, some of our supporters have been lost.

9.6 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): As usual, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) made an excellent contribution. He has followed the issue for many years. He rightly said that there is never a right time to examine ministerial pay or, for that matter, Members of Parliament's pay.

I understand what the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said about percentage increases, but it is worth noting that the percentage increase awarded to the Prime Minister from 1979 to 1995 has been 107 per cent. while the increase that he—the hon. Member for Bolsover—has received as a Member of Parliament has been 251 per cent. I do not dismiss what the hon. Gentleman said, but we have to consider ministerial pay in the larger context.

I hope that the Lord President will pursue a little further what he said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who made a very reasoned speech. If one looks back over the years, it is possible to find reasoned speeches made by Opposition Members on this subject. When the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was shadow Leader of the House he said:

"Of course, by any outside comparisons, Ministers of the Crown are underpaid. I say that in an objective sense, not in support of Ministers in the present Government."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 824.]

The notion has been long accepted.

I cannot understand why Ministers receive a reduced parliamentary salary. It is nonsense to say that they do less in their constituencies than Members of Parliament. I know that the time is not right to change that, but it is time that we at least considered doing so.

We should also examine the pay of some other office holders in the House who I do not believe are adequately recognised. It seems strange that, because of the usual channels, the Opposition Chief Whip and two of his deputies should be recognised and yet, from what the Leader of the House has told us on many occasions, it also seems that the usual channels involve the shadow Leader of the House. She has been involved in discussions on the Jopling proposals.

Perhaps, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said, the matter should be considered by Nolan and the contribution made by people who have responsibilities—other than ministerial responsibilities—should be recognised in some sort of salary payment. I see that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) is saying that he, too, is involved.

Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Perry Barr mentioned the new Select Committees and said that the Members concerned will have extra responsibilities. It is true that some Members have more responsibilities and the matter should be considered on a far wider scale. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing said, the Nolan Committee could consider the matter.

It is astounding that the Solicitor-General is paid more than the Patronage Secretary. The Prime Minister is the second highest paid member of the Cabinet—the Lord Chancellor is paid considerably more. There are a number of nonsenses and they should be dealt with. I hope that at some stage the time will be right to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) mentioned the number of people in this place who are paid more than Members of Parliament. An interesting written answer in column *191* of yesterday's *Hansard* shows that 101 people employed here are paid more than Members. We should deal with that problem.

In some respects, I even agree with the hon. Member for Bolsover—two Derbyshire Members agreeing is most worrying—and it is probably the only issue on which we have agreed. We should consider the salaries of people with public responsibility on the various boards that have been set up. Some are paid far more than local councillors. We should consider that in more reasoned times. Perhaps the Nolan Committee would be the right means of doing so.

We have seen some examples of gesture politics recently. Last weekend, the Leader of the Opposition said that he would not take his percentage increase. That is hardly surprising. On 1 July, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) was paid about £31,687. According to the latest figures, he is now being paid about £61,349. It is easy to give up a 4 per cent. pay increase when one has recently received a 100 per cent. increase. I might have taken a little more notice if he had said that he would not take any increase, rather than trying to get some cheap, quick headlines, which he did.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be able to say at some stage that the whole issue will be referred to the Top Salaries Review Body or to the Nolan Committee.

9.12 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly at the end of this debate. It is always difficult speaking at the end and I can assure the Leader of the House and my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that I have one eye on the clock and will stop at exactly 9.20 pm, which will no doubt be a relief to everyone in the House.

On a serious note, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) that this is a sensitive issue. Factory closures have recently been announced in Norwich, North. That is a very serious matter as some people will become unemployed and will go on to low incomes. As other hon. Members who represent East Anglia know, my constituency is in an area of low wages. I support my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, therefore, in saying that the issue is sensitive to people outside this place.

In the remainder of my speech I shall speak in support of the order. From listening to the debate, it has become clear that the House supports it. Although the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is not listening at the moment, I must say that his speech almost convinced me that he was secretly in favour of the order, especially following the controversy about British Gas, to which I may refer again in a moment.

Mr. Skinner: No, I am not.

Mr. Thompson: I may have got it wrong. Certainly, the hon. Gentleman's opposition was nothing like as enthusiastic as I had expected—

Mr. Skinner: I am nearly an old man—[*Laughter.*]

Mr. Thompson: I have no personal axe to grind in this matter. It is fairly well known that my time in the House is limited.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): A couple more years.

Mr. Thompson: I hope so. I think that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has missed my point, but I shall not pursue that.

I well recall that in the 1980s I took a position that was not entirely shared by some of my hon. Friends and opposed the review of top salaries. I remind hon. Members that I believe that it is incumbent on people on high salaries to set an example from the top. I have not departed from that view. I believe that it is important that people on high salaries are conscious of the effect of pay awards on those on lower pay. I have not changed my mind on that matter.

[Mr. Thompson]

Nevertheless, I still feel that it is right to support the order. The hon. Member for Bolsover referred to the chief executive of British Gas. I put on record my own view which, I suspect, is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, even if not by all my hon. Friends. I believe that it is incumbent on senior captains of industry, even though there are no restraints on them as we have here, to set an example and to bear in mind their public responsibilities. Although it is not relevant to this debate, I join those, such as the hon. Member for Bolsover and some of my colleagues, who feel that the pay rise of the chairman of British Gas was an unfortunate example to set. I hope that lessons have been learnt from it.

I am in favour of a link not with captains of industry but with public and civil servants. I agree with my hon. Friends who have spoken of links with civil service pay, and about looking at the professions and other people who serve the public outside. It is wrong to look at captains of industry; it is right to look at civil servants. I go along with those who suggest that it may be a little odd that Cabinet Ministers are paid less than permanent secretaries. We should look at doctors, at editors, at teachers and at professionals generally when we make comparisons with Ministers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) spoke about the salaries earned by editors. It is most unfortunate that our national newspapers are writing in such a derogatory way not about my party but about Parliament in general. I asked myself why I wanted to speak at all in this debate. The main reason—I agree, therefore, with comments from hon. Members on both sides—is the way in which this Parliament, and this is not a party point, and what goes on here are being distorted by the press. That is another reason why I want to make a few remarks in support of the order.

I do not believe that this is the right time to talk about the pay of Members of Parliament, although a number of hon. Members have done so. After all, the issue of the pay of Members of Parliament is linked with other issues, such as whether they should receive pay from outside. The pay of Members of Parliament will be debated fully on other occasions. Ministers, of course, are constrained in the pay that they can get from outside. This is, as other hon. Members have said, a serious issue.

I remind the House that I do not support the order because I believe that there should be unrestrained pay increases at the top. I am in favour of restraint and I am in favour of an example being set, but I believe, as my hon. Friends and others have said clearly in the debate tonight, that Ministers' pay is low at present by any comparison.

A number of colleagues have referred to pay in the House. I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will not rule me out of order for concluding my remarks in the following way. I shall not refer to your salary again. That has been done already this evening. The Clerk of the House of Commons—I think that this is last year's figure—earns £95,051 a year. A Principal Clerk, junior to the Clerk, earns £64,283 a year. My final example, because we all know these figures, is that the Director of Catering Services earns £57,612 a year.

I rest my case. Ministers are not well paid by any standards. They work hard and ridiculously long hours, which is not good for Government, but that is another point. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be delighted, therefore, that I shall support a pay increase for him. I am delighted to support the motion.

9.20 pm

Mr. Newton: I am particularly grateful for the last point since, by the time I have finished this speech, in the past 24 hours I shall have made a total of five or six speeches, one statement and answered a lot of questions, so I have kept reasonably busy. *[Interruption.]* It links with what I was going to say. I shall comment briefly on each of the speeches, as far as I can. I did not in any way begrudge the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) his bit of knockabout and I was grateful for the serious support that he gave to the basic argument.

I am marginally less grateful, I must say, to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who I hope may not be as pleased with his speech when he thinks about it as he appeared to be at the time. [*Laughter.*] No, I have a serious point to make. He appeared to be denouncing the notion that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) could do anything to keep in his hand and his professional skills. In other words, the demand was that my hon. Friend should destroy his professional skills, or risk doing so.

Mr. Mackinlay *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Newton: At the same time, the hon. Gentleman was saying that my hon. Friend should not have any pay increase at all in comparison to a Member of Parliament. There were two parts to his argument: Ministers were to be paid no more than Members of Parliament and that my hon. Friend should not even be allowed to practise his professional skill. I ask him to think about that. Apart from that, I do not begrudge him his knockabout either.

I do not even begrudge the viewpoint of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), which he expressed with some vigour. I do not share his point of view, but I understand why he makes it. Indeed, I found the first part of his remarks about what had happened on another front quite engaging.

It would be very grudging indeed not to express my gratitude for the fact that nearly all of my right hon. and hon. Friends urged that should there be a bigger pay increase than I had thought remotely practicable to propose. Indeed, they put forward an impressive range of arguments for precisely such a pay increase. The point with which I am most readily able to agree, because it is exactly what I am proposing—this is not to imply that I dismiss any of the other points as there were some good points on which I hope others outside will reflect when they comment on our affairs—was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan): that we need to fix a link and stick with it. That is, of course, the basis of what was done in November last year and what is being proposed now. I am grateful once again to have the support of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen on that.

The only other point that I shall make is directed to almost all Conservative Members, to some of those on the Opposition Benches implicitly and to some of those who asked me questions in discussion and interviews on the

matter outside the House. People say—some of my hon. Friends were edging towards this—that the entire matter should be put to some great and good independent review body. Indeed, for all I know, the Nolan committee may decide to make some observations on it. One of the great ironies of the suggestion that it should go to an independent body, such as the senior salaries review body, is that not a person in this House does not know that, if it did, the recommendation that it would make would exceed by a huge amount what I have thought it right to put before the House. Every time that Members' pay and allowances—certainly in my political lifetime here and before—have been put to some great and good body, recommendations have come forward so large that the Government of the time have not felt able to recommend them to the House. Most notably, I recently made a recommendation to the House on Members' pay and allowances that was so much lower than the proposal of the senior salaries review body that the House voted to reject my advice because it believed that Members deserved more.

The key point, as everyone in the House knows, is that an independent body would recommend far more than I have thought it right to propose. I hope that others outside the House will reflect on that fact. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 179, Noes 13.

Division No. 4] **[21.24 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baker, Rt Hon K *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rutclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Eggar, Tim
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'ham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Janner, Greville
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Dr. Liam Fox.

NOES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mullin, Chris
Parry, Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Welsh, Andrew

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. D.N. Campbell-Savours.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.

CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL

Ordered,

That the Children (Scotland) Bill may be proceeded with as if it had been certified by Madam Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland.—*[Mr. Stewart.]*

Maternity Services, Edinburgh

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

9.36 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I applied for the Adjournment debate a couple of weeks ago because of the clear intention of Lothian health board to centralise all Edinburgh maternity services at one hospital, the proposed new Edinburgh royal infirmary at the southern edge of the city, and also because it planned to break its clear promise to reopen a maternity unit at the Western general hospital, which serves large areas of my constituency.

There were several reasons why that caused anger in my constituency and beyond. First, and most important, it was a denial of the fundamental principle of choice. Choice for women means not just choosing the kind of unit in which to give birth, but the location of that unit.

Secondly, there would have been very long travel times for women in my constituency when they had to go into hospital to have their children, for antenatal visits and for visits from their relatives when they were in hospital. That would have involved great expense and many people in the catchment area of the Western general hospital are poor and deprived.

The third reason was that the health board had overlooked the high density of population and the high birth density in north Edinburgh. It seemed an ideal solution to have a maternity unit at the Western general hospital, which serves an area where there is much poverty and deprivation. It seemed a good idea to have a maternity unit near such an area rather than miles away on the other side of the city.

The fourth reason was that there seemed to be no evidence for the proposition that one centralised maternity unit was safer. That argument was being advanced by many health professionals. Yet that opinion is not shared by other health professionals. There does not seem to be any evidence to back up such a proposition.

I received a copy of a letter from a professor of paediatrics in Canada who previously worked at the Western general hospital but now works in the university of British Columbia. He said:

> "We were, until recently, the only tertiary perinatal centre for a birth population of 45,000, with 8,000 births, heavily high risk oriented, in house. In my experience 8,000 deliveries is about twice too many."

People were particularly angry because the original acute services strategy put out for consultation earlier this year contained a proposal for a maternity unit at the Western general hospital. That was overwhelmingly approved by people during the consultation process. Therefore, people were angry when that proposal was rejected and it was decided to work up another proposal in which all the births would be centralised at one mega-unit in the south of Edinburgh.

Since then, there has been a strong and vociferous campaign against that proposal. It was spearheaded by a group called the Women's Health Lobby. They did a great deal of research which showed that women simply did not want such a proposal. The group was also supported by both councils in Lothian—Lothian regional council and Edinburgh district council. It was supported by many general practitioners and by the local newspaper, the Edinburgh *Evening News*.

That campaign was so strong and the opposition was so overwhelming that Lothian Health was forced late in the day to come up with a compromise proposal. That became clear only at the health board meeting on Tuesday. In that compromise, the board has come up with the smallest concession that it could get away with. It is a proposal for 1,000 deliveries a year in a midwife-led unit at the Western general hospital in Edinburgh.

I am not opposed in principle to a midwife-led unit, but there are several problems with the proposal. I should like to mention at least three of them. First, there is no guarantee that it will go ahead. The health board stated in the proposal that it would evaluate other midwife-led units currently in operation in Scotland and then come to a decision. We do not know what the result of the evaluation will be. Beyond that, the proposal has to obtain the approval of the Scottish Office. We know that Lord Fraser, the Scottish Office Minister with responsibility for health, did not accept Fife health board's proposal for a midwife-led unit at Dunfermline. That is an analogous proposal to the proposal for the Western general. Both are stand-alone units without obstetric back-up on site. It is by no means clear that the proposal will be implemented.

Secondly, even if the proposal is implemented, we are talking about a single unit of 18 beds and about 1,000 deliveries a year. That will not meet the demand for that type of delivery. If Lothian Health is now saying that such a unit is acceptable at the Western general, why not have one in other places in the city? If the principle of midwife-led units is accepted, why not have more? It is clear that there will be far more demand not only from the local population but from all over the area because many women are attracted to such small units rather than the large mega-unit on the outskirts of the city.

Thirdly, many women will not be allowed to go into such a unit. In the proposal that was worked up by Western general hospital, it was stated that only 40 per cent. of local women would be eligible for such care. So the majority of women in the area which I represent would not even be allowed to have their babies in such a unit. I shall listen carefully to what women in my constituency say about the proposal for a midwife-led unit. If they accept it, I will certainly accept it, but the message that I am getting now is that such a proposal simply is not enough.

I should like to know why Lothian Health did not adopt the proposal made my me and many other people that there should be two units with perhaps the larger at the new royal infirmary. It could even have a unit of 4,000-plus deliveries, and there could still be one of 2,500-plus deliveries at the Western general. Within those large units, there could be midwife-led units. An innovation in maternity practice is to have midwife-led units in a hospital setting alongside obstetrician-led units. That proposal was not even discussed seriously at the health board meeting on Tuesday. In fact, many attempts have been made to rubbish such a proposal.

In correspondence in the past few weeks, the chairman of Lothian Health said that there would not be enough people to use such a unit at the Western general and that the catchment area would mean that only about 1,700 deliveries a year would take place there. I cannot for the life of me understand how he comes to that conclusion,

because more than half of Edinburgh is nearer to the Western general than to the new royal infirmary proposed at Little France. Therefore, I do not see how he arrives at a figure of 1,700 or fewer deliveries at the Western general and, presumably, 4,500 or nearly 5,000 deliveries at the new royal infirmary.

One of the mysteries of the process has been how many deliveries we are talking about. When the proposal was first put forward, we were talking about 7,500 deliveries at the new royal infirmary, which would provide the largest maternity unit in the United Kingdom. But as the debate went on, it suddenly became clear that we were talking about 6,500 deliveries. There may be a good explanation for that. It has not been given to me. Some people are slightly sceptical about this, because the lower number of deliveries may have made it slightly easier to sell the case for a large unit.

I would like the proposal for the two units to be seriously considered. Most of all, I would like there to be a full consultation process on the new proposal. What we have before us is not the same proposal as went out to consultation earlier this year. It is for a small midwife-led unit. The indications that I am getting are that it is not accepted as adequate by the women whom I represent, so I would like an assurance from the Minister that he will ask Lothian Health to carry out a full and proper consultation. There was a slight ambiguity at the end of the meeting on Tuesday. The chairman began to talk about marketing the proposal and fortunately somebody else on the board objected and said that we needed consultation, but it was not clear if we would get it.

The most important principle in all this is that women should decide what kind of maternity care they want. Therefore, it is essential that we have full consultation on the proposal. I suspect that, if that takes place, women will say that they want a larger unit at the Western general; that they want something more in line with the original proposal that was thrown out earlier this year. That is what I am arguing for this evening and shall continue to argue for as long as the women of my constituency want it.

9.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) on his success in the ballot and on initiating this debate on an issue which we all accept is of great interest and concern to the people of Edinburgh and to his constituents in particular. He has put his case in his customary well-researched and forthright way.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the timing of the debate and, as he rightly pointed out, it was only 10 days ago, after he had applied for the debate, that my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State announced ministerial endorsement for Lothian Health's acute services strategy. At that time, proposals for the future of maternity services in Lothian were still to be finalised.

The hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out that the board has taken a decision in the past two days on how it wishes maternity services to be provided from now until the 21st century. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State will need to take time to consider the proposals carefully. Therefore, I am not in a position tonight to confirm the Government's endorsement or otherwise of the proposals. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that what he has said tonight will be read carefully by my noble and learned Friend and all the points that he has reasonably made to the House will be taken fully into account.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that we have made great strides in developing maternity care in Scotland. I agree with his point about meeting in principle the wishes of mothers, who have been saying loud and clear that they want services that are accessible, flexible and treat them with dignity. That shift in attitudes had led to positive changes in maternity care throughout Scotland, and we are actively encouraging those developments.

This debate is specific to Edinburgh, which has long been at the forefront of innovations in maternity care. It had the first professor of midwifery in the world in 1726—Professor Joseph Gibson. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the pioneering work later of Professor James Simpson.

To respond to the hon. Gentleman's question about the number of births in the city, there are currently 7,000 a year, and mothers have access to a full range of antenatal and post-natal services. Most women experience shared care between GPs, obstetricians and midwives. Both the Simpson Memorial maternity hospital and the Eastern general hospital offer home births, domino deliveries, midwife care and shared midwife and obstetrician care. Lothian Health is committed to building on that range of choices.

I know that the hon. Gentleman joins me in paying tribute to the major contribution that the Simpson and the Eastern general have provided to mothers over the years. Tribute should be paid also to the excellent delivery services formerly provided by the Elsie Inglis maternity hospital and the Western general hospital.

There have been major changes in the pattern of maternity care in Edinburgh over the years and growing recognition of the need for proper community-based maternity care. Lothian Health would freely admit that there is considerably further to go in developing community-based services and ensuring that delivery services are fully sensitive to the needs of mothers. It is addressing those issues in its review of maternity services.

The immediate spur to action for Lothian Health has been the need to reconfigure maternity services in the light of its acute services strategy. In future, adult acute in-patient hospital services will be provided from three modern hospitals in Lothian. For Edinburgh, that means a new state-of-the-art royal infirmary, which will be built in Little France in south-east Edinburgh, and a substantial redevelopment and upgrading of the Western general. That is excellent news for Edinburgh, which for too long has had to make do with aging and increasingly outdated hospital buildings.

The proposals were, of course, strongly supported in Lothian Health's public consultation, and they promise substantial improvements in acute in-patient care. The hon. Gentleman raised the specific issue of further consultation. That matter is for Lothian, which will no doubt carefully read the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

To deliver that 21st century pattern of hospital services, it is necessary to close outdated and old buildings. More specifically, when Lothian consulted the public on its acute strategy, it proposed three maternity units in Lothian, with one each at the new royal infirmary and at

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

the Western general hospital—the third being at St John's hospital in Livingston. That proposal was, of course, widely welcomed.

Subsequently, the board accepted that it should take account of concerns expressed that the highest standards of care might not be possible unless deliveries were kept to just two sites in Lothian. The health board was mindful of the need to consider both the importance of local accessibility, to which the hon. Gentleman rightly referred, and the requirement to secure a pattern of service that offers the greatest possible scope for successful outcomes. The board therefore commissioned its maternity services liaison committee to conduct a full appraisal comparing the two-site and three-site options. As the hon. Gentleman told the House, the committee's report came down in favour of two sites—one at St John's and one in Edinburgh—and the board undertook to consider that report at its meeting on 22 November. Ministers were happy to announce their approval of the acute services strategy last week on the understanding that the maternity issue could remain unresolved for a little longer, but Ministers would need to approve the board's final proposals.

As the hon. Member knows, the board has now decided to accept its maternity services liaison committee's recommendations. It is committed to the principles that primary care should be the main focus of maternity services; community-based midwifery teams are needed to ensure greater continuity of care; and consultant-led obstetric outreach facilities should be further developed to provide local community care for more complex pregnancies. The board also intends further to develop neonatal services, enhance the range of anaesthetic services and look into further developing maternal intensive care services for those with the greatest need for medical care.

Mr. Chisholm: Does the Minister realise that, in some ways, the centralisation plan was sold under the cover of having community services for antenatal care, yet in the original acute services strategy, it was proposed that antenatal care should be given in the community, so the issue of antenatal care is separate from that of a mega-unit?

Mr. Stewart: Yes, but in the context of the strategy as a whole, antenatal care is a key issue. The hon. Gentleman and I do not disagree about that. If those principles are taken together, they represent an impressive list of commitments and the key principle of the strategy is a major move towards community-based ante and post-natal maternity services. I am not pre-empting anything that my noble Friend the Minister of State may decide by saying that those principles are to be welcomed.

The hon. Gentleman concentrated on the key issue of whether facilities should be supplied in addition to those already proposed by the board. The Government welcome the evaluation of the midwife-led model of care for deliveries. In proposing the unit to which he referred for the Western general hospital, the health board has been mindful of the experimental midwife units that have been set up in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Kirkcaldy, as well as south of the border. We are now starting to learn about the key conditions that need to be met to ensure that such units can work effectively and safely, especially if they are not alongside an obstetric delivery unit. The support of all participating professionals is needed. Midwives running the units need the necessary skills and confidence. That is common ground.

To sum up, I congratulate the health board on coming up with proposals for maternity services which clearly demonstrate its commitment to delivering the highest possible quality of service. I welcome its concern to deliver greater choice in delivery, to ensure the highest standards of safety and further promote the availability of accessible and flexible services based in the community.

I congratulate the hon. Member on raising this debate, in such timely fashion, on these important matters and assure him that my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State will take his comments fully into account before final decisions are made.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 25 November 1994

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Road Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

9.35 am

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I am delighted to be opening this morning's debate on road safety. By common consent, it is a matter of vital importance to us and to all our constituents, and one to which the Government devote a great deal of effort—and they will continue to do so.

On a personal note, it is now about four months since road safety was added to my other responsibilities in the Department of Transport. I was delighted that the challenge was offered to me. It is a particular pleasure to be the first Minister to have the words "road safety" as part of his official title. I am sure that we all want a specific commitment to the concept of road safety in everything that the Department does.

Modern road safety history began in 1987, when the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), announced what has become known as the casualty reduction target to reduce all road casualties by one third by the year 2000, compared with the average numbers for the years 1981-85.

Setting that target was a historic decision, and in some ways rather a gamble. I dare say the officials who advised my right hon. Friend might have called it a courageous or brave decision—as followers of "Yes Minister" will appreciate. He made it against the background that target setting has never been a popular practice in this country. Delivering the target depends on not just the actions of Government or official bodies but the behaviour of millions of individuals.

My right hon. Friend's decision proved entirely right and, paradoxically, that is precisely because so many other people are involved in delivering road safety. Nothing is gained from setting a target when achieving it is entirely in the Government's hands—that is simply a hostage to fortune. But in a case such as this, where so many other players are involved, setting a target can act as a focus for attention and activity, and a beacon to remind people that they are not working alone, but that we are all striving for a common objective. In many ways, we set a trend. Since the road safety target was set, there have been others. I cite in particular "The Health of the Nation" targets, which included the reduction of accidental death as one of its prime objectives.

Road accidents are the most common single cause of accidental death, especially for the young. In 1992, they comprised 38 per cent. of all accidental deaths in the whole population. Among 16 to 19-year-olds, 79 per cent. of accidental deaths and 35 per cent. of deaths from all causes occurred on the road. "The Health of the Nation" target is to reduce the death rate from accidents among children under 15 by at least one third, and among young people aged 15 to 24 by at least a quarter by the year 2005.

We cannot build for the future unless we do all that we can to ensure the survival of young people. In that context, reducing road casualties is an important plank in the Government's overall strategy to improve the nation's health and well-being.

It is worth looking for a moment at our assumptions in 1987 when we set the casualty reduction target. It was not a panic measure simply prompted by ever-rising casualty figures. As hon. Members here, all of whom have considerable experience of these matters, will be aware, casualty figures at all severities had fallen steadily throughout the 1970s, but were levelling off in the early 1980s. At the same time, there seemed to be no end to the steady growth of traffic volume. Our research at that time had shown that we could maintain casualty figures at effectively the same level against an annual 4 per cent. growth in traffic, but if traffic volumes grew any faster, casualties would also rise. So to maintain and, preferably, accelerate the downward trend in casualties, we needed to push a bit harder.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Has my hon. Friend read the recent article in *The Times*, which said that although we should not be complacent about the number of road accidents, the number per road mile in the United Kingdom is lower than in any other country in the European Union?

Mr. Norris: I shall say a little more about the context of accident rates in this country. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the link between the absolute number of accidents and the growth in traffic, which is the point that I was just making. It is appropriate to put that on the record at an early stage in the debate, and my hon. Friend is noted for always getting his point on the record at a very early stage. Indeed, taking the Minister's best ballpoint is another practice at which my hon. Friend is a master. I yield to no one in my admiration for him in that respect.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will be delighted to acknowledge the fact that Britain's record on road safety generally is literally second to none in the developed world. It is from that basis that we start looking to do even more. It is an extraordinary commentary on accident rates that fewer people were killed on our roads in 1993 than in 1926, when we started to collect accident statistics. That is an extraordinary statistic. I forget the precise rate of increase in traffic growth between then and now.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Fourteen times more.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend prompts me to say that the figure is about 14 times more traffic. Yet traffic deaths are fewer. The other side of that tragic coin is that nearly 4,000 people lost their lives as a result of road accidents of some kind. That is the important context of the debate that we shall have today and why the House should devote time to this vital subject.

The target that we set was simple. It did not distinguish between different levels of severity or types of road user. With hindsight, it is easy to question whether it would

[Mr. Norris]

have been better to set different targets for different levels of severity. Arguably, there is a considerable distinction between causation of minor accidents and that of accidents in which people are killed or seriously injured. But the important proposition, which Ministers rightly accepted at the time, was that that would have meant sacrificing the clarity and simplicity that have proved so valuable in galvanising into activity the various agencies involved in road safety. We were well aware that some measures would reduce accidents altogether while others would simply reduce severity. But it was important at the time and remains important today simply to get the overall numbers down.

In the event, the best results have been in reducing really bad accidents. Fatal and serious casualties have fallen far more rapidly than even the most optimistic might have hoped. In the 12 months up to June 1994, there were 33 per cent. fewer road deaths than the average for 1981-85 and 39 per cent. fewer serious casualties. That means that, when we take fatal and serious accidents together, we have hit the target that we set for the year 2000 seven years early. That is an extraordinary performance and a tribute to a range of organisations and individuals, including excellent officials in the Department of Transport and countless thousands of volunteers, individuals and local authority road safety officers, who have all played a part in that staggering achievement. *[Interruption.]* If my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) would like to intervene, I should be delighted to give way to him.

Mr. Ottaway: I apologise for intervening from a sedentary position. I simply said that the Minister, too, should take much of the credit for that achievement.

Mr. Norris: I owe my hon. Friend one. I am merely the rapporteur in this matter. I am not a protagonist. But several of our hon. Friends, especially the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who was a distinguished roads and traffic Minister, deserve credit, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who, during his time in that post—he was there far longer than I have been—devoted a great deal of attention to the matter. Ultimately, Ministers simply indicate the importance with which a subject is to be treated in a Department's range of priorities. I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend on that score. My antennae must have picked up the fact that my hon. Friend was going to say something nice, which is why I fear that I embarrassed him by asking him to say it formally. But it is an important point.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Before the Minister forgets the point of the debate, with the plaudits coming from behind him, may I make a serious point? The publication, "Statistical Report on Road Accidents in 1991", produced by the European Conference of Transport Ministers, rightly says that, apart from Norway, Britain has fewer road casualties per road mile than the rest of Europe, the United States, Japan and Canada. That is a remarkable statistic. But throughout Europe, the rate of road accidents is falling consistently. It would be interesting if the Minister identified areas of research that have shown where the real successes have come from. Some countries have adopted a legislative approach, some have looked at vehicle design and others have considered the question of speed. Which research has been useful in that matter?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The reduction has in some respects been mirrored elsewhere in the world and is attributable to three main causes, all of which have many complex subheads. First, it is, of course, attributable to vehicle design, a matter on which I intend to expand later but which I mention briefly now in response to his intervention. Secondly, it is related very much to the work carried out by the Department of Transport and local authorities to make the road system itself inherently safer. Thirdly—this is the absolute key—it is attributable to driver behaviour.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Transport Research Laboratory, many independent institutions, the manufacturers of safety products and others have all carried out extensive research. Manufacturers alone have spent literally billions of pounds, but not one single reason can be isolated as either the single or most common cause of the reduction.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is ironic that car manufacturers are designing ever-more powerful car engines which can go from zero to 60 mph in X seconds? When I ask car manufacturers why they make such powerful cars, bearing in mind the fact that there is a 70 mph speed limit, they say that drivers like them. Surely powerful cars need to be curbed—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Norris: I might have to protect my hon. Friend from the blandishments of my substantial colleague, the notionally silent Whip on duty—my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown)—who, to judge from his sedentary intervention, appears mildly to disagree with what she said and whose disagreement was audible at least at the top of Whitehall if not as far as Staffordshire. At the risk—and it is a substantial risk—of incurring the wrath of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East, I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) makes a valid point.

Generally speaking, the more powerful engines are safer in the hands of experienced, capable and responsible drivers because such engines give drivers the opportunity to escape from potentially dangerous situations provided that they act properly. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam was also referring to advertising that stresses the transfer of libido that occurs when one buys a nice red sports car such as that owned by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), whom I remember seeing exit from here in a rather natty Lotus, something that he no doubt enjoys hugely.

I shall refer later to the encouraging trend in the design and manufacture of motor vehicles. That trend has been identified not by selfless, charitable manufacturers but by hard-headed and sensible ones. Largely because the climate is changing, they are beginning to accept that customers are finding safety and security elements in the design of cars increasingly attractive.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Has my hon. Friend noted that insurance companies now take a very serious view of the issue and that their line on insurance premiums means that many young,

irresponsible idiots with over-powered cars are deterred whereas responsible drivers, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), are not?

Mr. Norris: I was able to agree with all that my hon. Friend said—until his final remark. My hon. Friend makes an observation which I am sure that many other hon. Members will develop if they are lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Ninety-five per cent. of all accidents are caused by human error. My hon. Friend is a stalwart of the Guild of Experienced Motorists and is the first to acknowledge that it is experience and responsibility behind the wheel, rather than the technical specification of the vehicle alone, that prevents accidents.

I was talking about the accident reduction target. We allowed 17 years to make the one-third reduction, but achieved it in 10. The peak of road deaths in the mid-1960s was about 8,000 a year and, as I said, the number last year was well below 4,000, although traffic has increased 14-fold. Those people who believe that nostalgia is not what it used to be and who look back on a golden age when it was apparently safe to walk, cycle and play in the streets should think again. One is often tempted to look back on a mythical bygone age that may have felt safer, but, in fact, a great many more people lost their lives.

We are doing remarkably well in reducing the number of fatal and serious road accidents, but we have not finished our work. One should not rest on one's laurels. We must ensure that the trend is not halted or reversed. All our projections have assumed that at least the present level of road safety effort will be maintained and we still have a long way to go to reduce the number of slight casualties to the target level. In addition, we must remember that the target is not a destination but merely a milestone. Every accident is, of course, one accident too many and it is extraordinarily intolerable that, in an average week, 75 people die on our roads.

If we consider separately the different classes of road user, we find that the best progress in reducing accidents is made among what are commonly called the "vulnerable" groups. That is not a patronising term; it is simply a matter of physics that people are more likely to be injured in a crash if they are not surrounded by a metal box. Pedestrian deaths have been reduced by 36 per cent., pedal cycle deaths are down by 44 per cent. and motor cycle deaths by 56 per cent. However, in my opinion, the most gratifying news is the reduction in the number of child casualties which, by the end of 1993, was 40 per cent. below the average for 1981-85.

Those figures reflect the priority that we have all given to safety measures directed at the vulnerable road user. Of course, some, but by no means all, of the reduction reflects a drop in distance travelled by those modes. For example, the average distance walked fell by only 4 per cent. between the national travel surveys of 1976 and 1991.

More than half all road accidents involve car drivers and passengers. In this sphere, too, we have reduced fatal casualties by 19 per cent. and serious casualties by 24 per cent., but, unfortunately, there has been a steady rise in slight casualties involving car users. They are now 49 per cent. higher than in the early 1980s which, sadly, is almost enough to offset all the gains that we have made among other groups of road users. Of course, as I said to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), some of that shift from the "serious" to the "slight" category is due to safer vehicle design, the use of rear seat belts and compliance with seat belt legislation and, of course, increased car use in general. However, it is still a matter of some concern that we have not done better in this regard. There is still a substantial amount of time until the target date in which we can continue to act.

Lady Olga Maitland: Can my hon. Friend give any figures about the accident rate among cyclists, bearing in mind the fact that there are more cyclists on the roads than ever before? They are extremely vulnerable to the risk of traffic knocking them off their bicycles, which can cause quite severe injuries.

Mr. Norris: The point made by my hon. Friend is immensely important. One of my concerns when I first came to the Department of Transport two and a half years ago was that we appeared to stress that cycling was dangerous, as my hon. Friend says, because the cyclist was very vulnerable in modern traffic conditions. The Department did not feel that it could encourage an activity that involved such danger. It has been of tremendous benefit to us all to have changed that psychology to an approach that represents best practice in pretty much every other country in Europe. The centrepiece of cycling policy there has been that cycling is healthy and environmentally friendly, that it eases congestion and that it should be encouraged in many ways.

If one wants to treat cyclists sensibly, one must protect them from their vulnerability to much larger and heavier pieces of metal travelling at speed. The separate cycle way is far more a feature of the continental landscape than it has been in the United Kingdom. I am delighted that we are now looking much more positively at the role of the bicycle.

If one asks people in a city, such as London, why they do not bicycle more, they say first, ironically, that they do not want to run the risk of getting wet. Our weather is hardly likely to alter hugely despite the direst predictions of the ecological lobby. Secondly, they say that cycling is dangerous: they do not want to have to navigate roundabouts where one seems to takes one's life in one's hands. I believe that we can make real progress in that area.

I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam to some figures that I found very telling. The other day, I looked at a graph that showed two statistics which were overlaid and contrasted with each other. The first concerned the proportion of all trips made by bicycle, and the United Kingdom was compared with Germany and Holland. In this country the proportion is, as I suspect the House knows, about 2.5 per cent. to 3 per cent. In Germany, the average was 15 per cent. Other research shows that in individual towns and cities, the figure can be as high as 30 per cent. The figures cannot be dismissed, as people who should know better have done in the past, on the basis that Holland is flat. I am afraid that it is not good enough to suggest that there is a topographical difference which explains the figures. In many European capitals, there is a lattice-work of cycle ways, which are an embarrassing comparison with the British experience.

The figures for accident rates to cyclists in the three countries were very telling. There are several times more accidents to cyclists per cycle mile in this country than there are in countries where cycling is practised so much more. In other words, as part of their culture, those

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countries have built a far larger safety margin into cycling. There is a real lesson for us. There is an environmental gain there, as the royal commission has pointed out, in terms of the nation's health and people's individual health. There is also a gain in terms of traffic safety. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam for raising the issue of cycling.

Mr. Miller: The Minister is quite right in his analysis of the European picture. It is interesting to see the tables on page 35 of the European report to which I referred earlier. The Netherlands is down close to the UK level of accidents. I know that the Minister is right to suggest that increased use of cycle ways and planning cycling into road traffic design schemes would have saved some of the 189 lives that were lost in 1993. How much of the road budget has been allocated for that purpose? Will the Minister ensure that in all road schemes, moneys are ring-fenced for that purpose?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is precisely right to point to the need to ensure that when we spend money on our road system, cycling is taken into account. I heard a depressing story the other day from Graham Webb, who is a member of the council of the Confederation of British Industry and a very successful business man. He is also a keen cyclist who lives near Tonbridge in Kent. Although I do not know the scheme personally and, therefore, would not draw too many conclusions from what Mr. Webb says, I trust his judgment. He tells me that a local authority scheme in the area involved the spending of about a quarter of a million pounds, as a result of which cycling in the area is now more difficult than it was before.

That story stresses one point that I want to make clearly on the subject. The answer is often not huge additional resources. As the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston suggested, it is important to ensure that when schemes are designed, they are designed with cycling in place. I can go further to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance he seeks, although I cannot, of course, speculate on the shape of the public expenditure settlement because that is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. The hon. Gentleman will know, however, that we have made it clear to local authorities that we believe that the package approach to transport solutions is the right way in which to proceed. That package, in essence, stresses the multi-modal approach to congestion and pollution issues, and to the movement of people in town centres.

There have been some excellent examples, such as the scheme in York. The local authority has built cycling provision very well into what is still a healthy and vibrant town centre. It has lost none of its economic force as a result of fewer private cars travelling there. I have made it clear in all my discussions with local authorities that I want them to build cycling much more centrally into a budget which, in any year in recent times, has generally been about £1 billion a year, to give the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston a broad idea. The transport supplementary grant settlement from which local authorities generally benefit is a substantial sum. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can take some comfort from that reassurance.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am pleased to hear about this refreshing change of attitude towards cycling, which is long overdue. The Minister has just spoken about the importance of integrating cycling into what happens at local authority level. Will he issue written guidance so that all the schemes devised by local highways authorities, within the package approach, will have to address the whole issue of cycling? What will he do within his Department to ensure that what was British Rail and is now a collection of business operators has a policy of encouraging cyclists on to trains? If we do not have a multi-modal approach, we shall not have an increase in cycling at local level, given that we have to fit the whole country together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Mr. Norris: I believe that it will be a beneficial exercise to build in some specific guidance from the Department on how cycling should be fitted into schemes, especially the town centre solution. The other day I and, I believe, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) attended the launch by Sustrans of its national cycle way scheme. It is an ambitious and attractive scheme, much of which concentrates on recreational cycling. I was especially interested in the way in which the project lattices into town centres. There is a double benefit. Such an approach would facilitate safer cycling and would attract people out of the car and on to the cycle to make a straightforward business journey.

There needs to be a substantial culture change if we are to integrate cycling much more into the fabric of urban transport. That is about employers providing employees, especially in larger buildings, with facilities that enable those who come to work on a cycle to change their clothes or at least to present themselves slightly more attractively than might otherwise be the case. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire needs no assistance in that respect, but others are not so fortunate. There should also be places where cycles can be left safely. There must be a separation of cycles and motor cars.

At the same time, it should not be assumed that cycles should be put at the top of a list of priorities within modes. We have made a great mistake in the past in thinking in terms of a priority list of modes, save that the most important priority in terms of traffic and road safety must always be the individual, starting with the pedestrian. That is essential to the debate.

I return to the statistical analysis. The total casualty figure, taking account of the increase in slight accidents, has fallen by 3 per cent. since the early 1980s. That has to be set against the increase in traffic, which was 40 per cent. during the survey period. If we consider the overall casualty rate per 100 million vehicle km we find that it has decreased dramatically from 108 during 1981-85 to 74 in 1993.

In recent years, as I have said to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam, customers have been getting more concerned about the safety of their cars. That has encouraged manufacturers to install features such as airbags, seat belt pretensioners and webbing grabbers, for example. Indeed, they have gone further. They have been working to improve the overall crashworthiness of cars. We see that every day when watching car advertising on

television. The days when marketing people argued that "safety does not sell" are, mercifully, long past. I was talking recently to a representative of one of the major car manufacturers, who told me that safety and security are now at the top of the customer wish list. That, of course, is the basis on which manufacturers will make their production decisions. Increased customer concern about safety has come about for a complex variety of reasons to which, I am sure, my hon. Friends will wish to refer.

There is still a long way to go. For all the improvements of recent years, the pace of legislative change in vehicle standards is slow. We must continue our efforts to negotiate higher vehicle construction standards in the European Community.

The public are more concerned about the safety of their children when travelling on coaches and minibuses. That is understandable, as there have been some tragic accidents involving school and voluntary transport. It is little comfort for those affected to know that, statistically, it is about twice as safe, mile for mile, to travel in a minibus or coach as in a private car.

There would obviously be great road safety benefits if seat belts were fitted to all seats on all minibuses and coaches. Many schools and voluntary organisations have already fitted seat belts to their vehicles and many others are planning to do so. Virtually all new minibuses coming off production lines have seat belts fitted. But a legal requirement for all new vehicles can be arrived at only through the European Union. We are pressing it extremely hard, and meanwhile we are doing what we can to progress faster within the United Kingdom.

In the summer, we announced that we would seek agreement to make seat belt fitment compulsory on all minibuses and coaches used specifically for the transport of children. We have been having urgent discussions with the European Commission on this. Where seat belts are fitted, we shall be ending the concession allowing three children to be carried on two seats.

The voluntary sector plays a vital role in providing transport in minibuses to many people whose mobility would otherwise be restricted—especially children, the elderly and disabled people. Those people rely heavily on volunteer drivers. Our legislation has long enabled those volunteers to drive minibuses on the strength of their ordinary car driving licence. When we were negotiating the second EC driving licence directive, we fought, successfully, to preserve that important concession through a derogation.

We had to consider especially carefully in the light of some recent extremely tragic minibus accidents whether to continue the concession after the directive comes into force in 1996. We took account of all the views of those responding to our consultation on the issue. It must be said that opinions were strongly divided, some opposing the adoption of the derogation and others favouring it. I announced earlier this month that we came down on the side of adopting the derogation. It was not an easy decision. Shortly thereafter I received a letter from Bert Massie, whom many of us know as the director of RADAR, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation. In that letter he says

"how delighted I am at your decision to use the right of derogation from some of the requirements of the directive. This will ensure the mobility of many tens of thousands of disabled people. It is, of course, right to consider these issues from time to time, but I am convinced that you have made the right decision."

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Is my hon. Friend aware that there are many youth organisations—notably the Scout Association and parent-teacher associations throughout the land—that rely on voluntary drivers to enable them to carry out their many pursuits, and that they are extremely grateful to him for the close attention that he has paid to their concerns?

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I had much in mind precisely the sort of groups to which he has referred. The drivers whom we are talking about are all volunteers. The volunteering element is, of course, the whole spirit of voluntary and community work. It is one of the country's great strengths, and has been across generations. It is not only a matter of cost. It would have been sad to have lost that element. It is an important feature of our social and community life and it is immensely important that we protect it. I am glad to have the confidence and backing of disabled people and of others, as my hon. Friend has said.

Voluntary organisations have always taken, and continue to take, a responsible attitude to road safety. Both the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Community Transport Association have produced guidelines on voluntary minibus driving. The CTA has only this month published a code of practice covering all aspects of voluntary minibus operation. The Government are therefore confident that adopting the derogation will not endanger road safety.

I have mentioned examples of greater safety awareness among the consumers of road transport. It seems to be part of a wider change in attitudes, and one which was not foreseen when we launched the casualty reduction target. As I said earlier, much of the credit for this belongs to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham, who was, and still is, one of the most persuasive advocates of road safety. He certainly started a national debate, especially on drink-driving, which has continued to this day.

It is with drink-driving that the change in attitude and behaviour has been most striking. We have had the same drink-drive limit since 1967. When it was introduced, the fall in accidents was quite dramatic. That effect lasted for only about a year before drink-driving crept up again. That shows that changing the law does not of itself produce real changes in driver behaviour. Too many people were still unconvinced that the law was necessary, that it was their drinking and driving that needed to be curbed and that they should do something about it. In any event, the law was so full of procedural loopholes that enforcement and prosecution became something of a lottery. That was the position which we inherited in 1979. During that year there were 1,650 road deaths where at least one driver was over the legal limit. Since then, we have tightened the law and we have introduced evidential breath testing so that taking blood samples is rarely necessary. We have increased penalties, especially where a death is caused, and we have started to carry out medical checks on high-risk offenders. We have also begun experiments with rehabilitation. In short, we have used a wide range of measures and it seems that their effect in combination has persuaded large numbers of drivers to

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change their drinking habits. In 1993, there were about 550 deaths from drink-driving, but that is one third of the level in 1979.

The role of the police in the campaign has been extremely constructive. Last year in England and Wales, they conducted just short of 600,000 roadside breath tests. That is about two and a half times the number in 1983, the first full year of evidential testing under the Transport Act 1981. Back in 1983, no fewer than 41 per cent. of drivers tested either gave an alcohol-positive reading or refused to give a sample, which is also an offence. In 1993, that percentage was down to 15—the lowest yet.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in addition to the good progress that has been made in reducing drinking and driving, in seeking to persuade potential drink-drivers not to drink and drive it is very important that publicity and propaganda should not shy away from bringing home to those drivers the tragic consequences which can arise from their drinking and driving—for themselves and for others?

Mr. Norris: I hope that my hon. Friend will develop his thoughts on that later because he has hit the point absolutely squarely. The great change occurred the day we recognised that the message, "If you drink and drive, you are breaking the law and you might lose your licence," powerful and perfectly accurate though it was, was never going to work.

We had to bear that point in mind in relation to the results that were obtained—and my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) will agree that the advertising material we have used in this respect has been particularly powerful—when we said to people, "You are a perfectly respectable individual. You are not the kind of person who would ever knowingly commit violence on another individual, but you could in a moment do something which would result in a perfectly innocent person losing his life. Not only will that mean that you will carry a serious criminal record with you for the rest of your life, but you will never forget what you have done. You will be haunted by it until your dying day."

God forbid that that should happen to anyone. However, that is, of course, the tragic consequence of just a little excessive drink on an occasion when a perfectly normal person believes that he or she can handle what he or she is drinking. While the law is well intentioned, and these are law-abiding people, they do not believe that it need apply to them.

That is a crucial change. I have taken an interest in practice elsewhere in the world over the past few years. It is clear that our campaign has been a real achievement for this country. There are far more breath tests in other countries. France carries out many more breath tests than we do, but because it has not understood the psychology of drinkers and drivers—I am referring not to people with a substantial medical problem, but to the occasional drink-driver who is the real difficulty—the French have not made anything like the progress that we have been able to make.

Mr. Miller: Before the Minister leaves his point about breath testing, a Victim Support report published in 1994 contains a survey of breath testing by police authorities after road accidents. The pattern is not consistent and that is worrying. Only half of police authorities will test the blood alcohol level after an accident as a matter of course. Will the Minister talk to his colleagues in the Home Office and try to increase that ratio? Such tests should happen as a matter of course.

Mr. Norris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will develop that point. I will certainly draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friends, as I quite understand his point.

Before we leave this important area of road safety, I must point out that there has been quite a radical change in the attitude of the drinks industry, among the brewers, distillers, licensed victuallers and so on. The Portman group, which represents many of those interests, has played a very positive role in promoting the separation of drinking from driving in several ways. Two months ago, the group collaborated with the Department of Transport to organise a joint seminar on drinking and driving which was opened by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That seminar brought together experts from research, medicine, police, advertising and the media to look at ways to bring new life into the drink-drive campaign.

There had been a perception in the media and among some road safety professionals that the campaign might be running out of steam. There was no sign of that in the statistics as drink-related deaths are still falling at much the same rate. However, in that area, as in many others, people's perceptions are almost as important as the reality. The seminar produced several interesting suggestions on how we might reduce the number of drink-driving cases even further.

People in the road safety world have often said, "If only we could do as well in reducing speeding as we have done in reducing drink-driving, we would be able to take a great step forward." Excessive speed is a factor in between 22 per cent. and 32 per cent. of all road accidents. International experience suggests that a reduction of average speed of only 1 mph could save 5 per cent. of all injury accidents and 7 per cent. of fatal accidents.

Other things being equal, the faster one drives, the more likely one is to hit something and the greater the damage will be. That can make the difference between passengers surviving unscathed, especially if they are wearing seat belts, and being killed. That does not mean that the fastest roads are the most dangerous. Motorways have been designed for high-speed traffic and are by far the safest roads because many of the features that cause collisions have been eliminated. In fact, over half the fatal and serious road injuries occur on roads with a 30 mph speed limit.

The problem is not absolute speed; the problem is relative and inappropriate speed. That is the important distinction between speeding and going too fast. No one would call driving at 25 mph speeding, but if one happens to be travelling at that speed outside a school when children are setting off home, one would almost certainly be travelling too fast.

Sir Anthony Grant: Especially if the road is wet.

Mr. Norris: As my hon. Friend says, the condition of the road surface is relevant in such circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West and the House will be aware of the new campaign on the "kill your speed" theme in which we have focused on urban and mainly residential roads where

most of such accidents happen. We will have to continue to plug away at that theme. We want to make speeding take on in people's minds the same status as drink-driving. However, other things are going on.

Engineering measures are being taken to control speed. Traffic calming has moved in from the fringes of road safety and is now playing an increasingly important role. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), as a private Member, brought in the Traffic Calming Act 1992. That legislation has placed beyond doubt the legality of the way in which techniques such a chicanes and road narrowings are applied in local areas. The variety of measures made possible by that Act are explained in an excellent booklet entitled "Safer by Design", which was launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in August.

Lady Olga Maitland: With regard to traffic calming, does my hon. Friend agree that some traffic calming guidelines, particularly in relation to road humps, have been taken on board by local authorities with almost excessive zeal? There is, rightly, a great deal of objection in my constituency to humping down a mile-long road. Should we not encourage a greater variety of traffic calming facilities of which there is a considerable dictionary?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend may have to revisit the way in which she phrased that point.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am sorry.

Mr. Norris: There is no need for my hon. Friend to apologise. I am grateful to her for making a perfectly serious point. Funnily enough, we find that people in many parts of the country are concerned about the potential danger to their children, particularly on residential roads. They want measures to stop cars travelling too fast. They know that simply putting up a roundel with a number on it does not achieve the desired effect. Therefore, they have considered taking a variety of measures, of which road humps are one, to stop traffic travelling at excessive speed.

People realise that road humps will pose issues for emergency service vehicles, for example, and that they will constrain people who have been used to using the road perfectly normally and who will find it rather irritating that they must slow down substantially in order to make progress. That demonstrates the importance of always taking such decisions as openly as possible and considering all options before one assumes that one technical solution is necessarily the only one that can deliver the desired effect.

We have also been considering the design of road cushions, which can have the same effect. There are several around Westminster, which hon. Members might have encountered, and they can facilitate emergency service vehicle access and bus access. Low-floor buses are again on the agenda for a very important social reason, which all hon. Members welcome. From time to time, certain low-floor design features might be incompatible with some types of traffic calming measures. It is important to have a variety or a menu available—that is what our "Safer by Design" booklet says—and to make sure that people understand the full implications of what they are seeking to achieve.

Sir Anthony Grant: In my constituency, the problem is not road humps but the narrowing of roads to such an extent that poor old farm vehicles cannot get through. That is a great problem for farmers.

Mr. Norris: That underlines the crucial importance of never reacting too quickly. It is said that hard cases make bad law. There is the problem in this country—I suspect that it occurs in every country—that, as I know from my postbag, the minute an accident occurs, the natural reaction is to want to change the law in some respect or take an instant measure as a result. From time to time, that might be necessary, but, in general, common sense has to prevail. As my hon. Friend suggests, serious thought must be given to all the implications of introducing measures such as chicanes, road narrowing, speed humps, tables, cushions and so on. Those measures are all useful in their way, but they must be introduced with care.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): On road design, does my hon. Friend agree that some people in the anti-roads lobby lose sight of the fact that, broadly speaking, motorways are safer to drive on than dual carriageways, which in turn are safer to drive on than single-track roads?

Mr. Norris: Yes. That is broadly the point that I was making. The motorway system has generally designed out a number of the hazards which cause accidents. As I have said, more than half the fatal and serious accidents occur on roads with a 30 mph limit. It is important to remember that.

In that context, we have been considering a 20 mph zone, which is a fairly new phenomenon. I opened the 100th scheme in my constituency in August. We introduced the scheme in a rather unusual way, because we had a considerable accident problem in Epping forest, which had been used by a few motorists as a race track. By definition, Epping forest is a rather rural environment in which the roads were never built for modern vehicle numbers or speeds and in which street lighting would be absolutely impossible. Indeed, there would be no public support for street lighting there. Such schemes can work in context, but that does not mean that the answer to every serious injury accident is the introduction of a variety of measures or 20 mph schemes. It is a matter, as I am sure the House will expect, of putting such matters into proportion.

Much road safety engineering is paid for through the local roads capital settlement. We have made more than £170 million available over the past four years, thereby saving more than 250 deaths and 15,000 casualties every year. On the basis of local authorities' returns and some recent research by the Transport Research Laboratory, we have calculated that the money invested in that way produces a first-year rate of return of more than 250 per cent.

We have also been attacking speeding in another way—that is, by more effective enforcement. Since the Road Traffic Act 1991, automatic speed cameras have been installed, especially in London. As Minister for Transport in London, I have been associated with the west London pilot scheme from its start. It was introduced in October

[Mr. Norris]

1992. I remember introducing it on Twickenham bridge. Our monitoring and evaluation shows an average speed reduction of 10 per cent., and that accidents are down 21 per cent. and deaths and serious injuries are down 37 per cent. In the first year of operation there were seven deaths, which is tragic, compared with an annual average of 23 over the previous three years.

If we could replicate that improvement nationally, we would really make an impact on casualty statistics. It is a matter of resources, of course, and of enormous fixed penalties and many court hearings. We continue to encourage well-targeted camera enforcement, concentrated on the roads most subject to accidents at speed. The more traditional types of speed enforcement still have their place.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Norris: We have had a very interesting hour, but it is about time I allowed other hon. Members to make more than just interventions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I am disappointed that that is the only remark that I have made this morning which has been universally applauded. However, I inform my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire that, when we introduced traffic speed cameras, I made it clear that the objective was not to prosecute motorists. The objective was to show motorists that they would be monitored and to give them the opportunity not to be an accident statistic. Large signs warn motorists when they approach every camera. That has been a requirement from the beginning of the scheme and it will continue to be so. That is why I regard it as successful not when we prosecute but when we see large reductions in deaths and serious injury accidents.

A large number of casualty reduction measures are being introduced in various areas. We cannot monitor them all individually, but we have a fairly good idea of their impact. The effect could be even more dramatic if one town used the whole range of existing measures, and perhaps some new ideas as well, as a safe town demonstration project. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West will remember the Slough experiment in the 1950s, which pioneered several road safety ideas that later came into general use. We are talking now to local authority associations about the possibility of a demonstration project in a suitably sized town. That project is at an early planning stage, but it will be very exciting.

Engineering measures can be effective, but, as I have said, human error is a feature of about 95 per cent. of road accidents. New and inexperienced drivers in particular are likely to be involved in accidents. There are some obvious reasons for that. Some have been taught to perform well in the driving test and they pass it first time, but they lack the subtle skills that they need to be good drivers. Some, particularly young males, are over-confident or naturally inclined to show off and take risks. Others are just plainly irresponsible—they deliberately break the law and they know that they are putting lives at risk.

Last year, we put forward several proposals to try to improve such matters. We must influence the attitudes of young people even before they start to drive. Some of them think that road safety is just kids' stuff—for example, the green cross code and cycling proficiency—and that, once they are old enough to drive, they can forget all about it. We need to put the message across that, as drivers, they will have to take on some adult responsibilities for the safety of themselves, their passengers and all other road users. However, it is no use preaching or talking down to that age group. A much more direct, hard-hitting, street-wise approach is better. Alexei Sayle hit the right note in the BBC's "Drive" series early this year. We are reworking that series into a video, with a full supporting pack of teachers' notes for use in sixth forms and colleges.

Changes will also be made to enhance the theory element of the driving test, which should have an impact on the way in which people are taught to drive. Early in the new year we will launch a scheme for those who have passed their driving test but who want further training. The scheme is being promoted in conjunction with a large number of major insurance companies which will offer insurance discounts sufficient to meet the entire cost of the training.

However, I believe that we also need more appropriate sanctions for new drivers who pass their tests but who then go on to drive badly and commit offences. Research shows that new drivers who commit offences are twice as likely to be involved in accidents as those who do not. I will be frank: I am talking about young men who think that they are great drivers, that they can drive on water, and that somehow the law does not apply to them. Sadly, they are wrong.

The House has to hit those young men where it hurts most—in their egos. They might lose their licences and find themselves back with their fathers sitting beside them and L-plates on the front and back of the car. It might bring home to them how seriously irresponsible driving is viewed. That proposal will involve the introduction of primary legislation which we hope to put on the statute book at the earliest opportunity. I am confident that this package of measures will reduce the unacceptably high number of road casualties involving inexperienced drivers.

Mr. Ottaway: I apologise for intervening again when I know that the Minister is trying to conclude his speech. Might not amendments to the daylight saving regulations have some impact on saving lives? It is believed that a change to the regulations could save hundreds of lives.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is perfectly right to draw attention to this important subject in which, as he knows, a number of Departments of state are interested. The daylight hours issue involves consideration of a variety of important aspects, ranging from business interests, to transport operators needing to harmonise timetables, and the needs of travellers, the rural community and so on.

I do not suggest that what I am saying represents the definitive Government position precisely because all those interests need to be synthesised. I also appreciate that views about the matter vary greatly in Scotland and between the north and south of the United Kingdom, because geographical differences impose different daylight regimes on communities.

There is no doubt that the proposed legislative changes will reduce significantly the number of road accidents. It is true that there may be more accidents in the morning, but the saving in the number of accidents that occur in the evening will more than compensate for that. I have no emotional, business or other interest in the subject, but I have to say that, merely from looking at the analysis of

road statistics and at the time profile of when accidents occur, that conclusion is clear. We cannot escape from debating this important issue; it should be central in our minds. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making his point.

We have achieved a great deal since we embarked on the casualty reduction programme. We are also doing very well by international standards. Great Britain had 7.5 road deaths per 100,000 people in 1992—a figure lower than any other OECD country. Norway had 7.6 road deaths per 100,000 people, as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston will no doubt confirm. The Netherlands had 8.5 road deaths; Germany, 13.2; the USA, 15.4; France, 17.3; and Spain, 20. So there is no need for Brussels or anywhere else to lecture us about improving road safety.

But we still have plenty to do. We must keep up the activity that has enabled us to make those achievements. We must now begin to look to the longer horizon beyond the year 2000 and set a new target for 2005 or 2010. It is easy to pluck a figure out of the air, but there is no point in doing that. We must set a target which is both challenging and realistic.

We set the 1987 target on the basis of a careful assessment of what could be achieved given the possibilities open to us. We now need another assessment of what we can reasonably aim for in the first decade of the new millennium. We must decide whether to set another global target—reducing all casualties by a specific percentage—to concentrate on fatal and serious casualties, or to set targets relative to distance travelled. We intend to consult widely with the various road safety authorities and organisations to develop a shared target that will maintain the momentum and make our roads even safer.

I know, from the many interventions that we have heard this morning and from the number of letters in my postbag, that many hon. Members are interested in the subject and are prepared to make significant contributions to the debate.

I do not believe that I, any of my predecessors, or the Department is the fount of all knowledge in these matters. We have a great deal to learn. I hope that this debate will introduce some new thinking that will enable us to achieve our aim of making road transport, and transport generally, in this country as safe as is humanly possible.

10.45 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): A debate on road safety is long overdue, but it is very welcome. Unless we have the opportunity for proper and regular debate about road safety issues, we cannot discuss the details of long-term decisions that must be made.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) intervened to talk about summer time and how we deal with it. It is right that that subject should be debated in the House. All kinds of considerations are involved in the debate, but clearly those who care about road safety want a full and informed public debate so that the decisions of the House reflect the needs of the country across the board.

This debate is also welcome because it gives us an opportunity to tackle the Government about their road safety record so far. We have heard a great deal about the progress which the Minister says that the Government have made. However, he said that he is not the fount of all knowledge on this important issue, and I agree with him on that.

In the brave new privatised and deregulated world which the Government are busy setting up, it is difficult to see how issues of public safety and road safety can be integrated.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: If the hon. Lady thinks that this debate is long overdue, can she tell us why, when the House spent 24 or more days debating subjects raised by the Opposition, those opposite did not raise road safety once? Today we are debating it in Government time.

Ms Walley: The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that the Government have the initiative in determining the business agenda of the House, although a number of days are allocated to the Labour party—and also the other party, whose members are not in their places this morning. We currently have proposals before the House to debate only private Members' Bills and such on Fridays. If the Government were as interested in road safety as the hon. Gentleman suggests, they would have ensured not only that we had this debate in Government time, but that we had this debate when all members of the House were present. However, I am in danger of going down a route that is not in the best interests of road safety, so I shall make some progress with my speech.

We need to ask whether the Government are treating their transport policy any differently from other areas of policy making. We can see from the announcements that have been made this week about the privatisation of Railtrack that the Government are desperate to find money to pay for the tax cuts which they feel that they will need to win votes at the next general election. When there is such an agenda, it is essential that within that framework, which applies just as much to road transport as to rail, the Government should pinpoint the importance of issues such as public safety and road safety, which we are discussing today.

Throughout the country, the public are crying out for safer roads. The Minister was right to recognise that that is what they want. They are right to demand that, nationally and locally, the Government and local councils do what is required to ensure road safety. The Opposition are right to challenge the Government on their failure to provide a framework within which we can adequately—I stress "adequately"—identify, plan, enact, enforce and monitor the effectiveness of the safety measures that people are entitled to demand and expect.

The Minister made a comprehensive speech and we heard a great deal about the progress that he and his Department have made. I am always ready to give credit where credit is due and I was pleased to note the change of attitude—the Minister used the word "psychology"—in respect of cycling. It is long overdue. I acknowledge that the Government have set targets and that considerable progress has been made towards meeting them.

I wholeheartedly welcome the fact that the total number of child road accidents in 1993 was 15 per cent. lower than the 1981-85 average. I note that there has also been progress towards meeting the casualty reduction target for fatalities and serious injuries. We must continue to make progress at each and every opportunity.

[Ms Walley]

However, we must not be complacent. Neither can we ignore the fact that the number of slight injuries has increased, meaning that progress towards the target for all casualties is slower than hoped for. We must recognise that fact and do something about it. The figures for 1993 show 3,814 fatalities, 45,000 serious casualties and 257,199 slight casualties—which is 306,013 too many. Whatever progress we have made, each accident is one too many.

We can cite statistics, but that does not show the human misery, the agony and the remorse behind them. The almost universal response of all involved in a tragedy is that lessons must be learnt in a way that will prevent further such accidents. Other factors include, not least, the victims and their families. That is something that my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) wants to raise in his speech.

It is the Minister's job to plan for safer roads. Who else can? He should have given us some information on the Government's policy to hand so much responsibility to the Department of Trade and Industry's Deregulation Committee, which was set up last night. The new deregulation procedures will not receive full parliamentary scrutiny, so the hon. Gentleman should have given us some sign of what the changes will mean. For example, is it the case, as has been rumoured, that a large number of road traffic Acts or sections of them will be deregulated in January? What are the implications of that? Will there be an extension in the number of domestic working hours of drivers of heavy goods and public service vehicles? Is that part of the Government's agenda? What are the implications for the underpinning of safety measures?

At the same time, the Minister will be busy deregulating buses. We should not forget that only yesterday London bus drivers presented a petition to the House expressing concern about the safety of the engines in Routemaster buses. He will also be busy dismantling the, in our view, effective system for overseeing the London lorry ban and operating licences for heavy goods vehicles and buses.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, my near neighbour, for giving way. Does she not think that there is room for deregulation in the road traffic Acts? Is she aware that under current regulations hackney carriages—black cabs—have to carry a bale of hay in the back? Does that not need deregulating?

Ms Walley: Every time I get into a black cab in London I am made aware of the great concern among drivers about what the Government's deregulation proposals will mean for them. If they were simply about bales of hay, that would not be a problem. However, if the proposals undermine the safety of taxi operations and private hire vehicles, that is a different matter. Much wider considerations have to be taken into account.

The Minister is going to be busy privatising the Transport Research Laboratory. He made much reference in his speech to the importance of research and I believed him when he said that he valued research. But does he not value independent research? Does he not value the independent body of knowledge that has been built up at the laboratory at Crowthorne in Berkshire? What effects will privatisation have on the long-term future of transport research? Of course, the Department of Transport has cut the budget for research, against the express wishes of many distinguished Conservative Members—some of whom are usually in the Chamber for transport debates, but regrettably are not here this morning.

The Minister will be busy making arm's-length agencies such as the Highways Agency responsible, with the private sector, for the construction of motorways and for repair work to motorway service areas. He will also be busy, at a local level, considering even more contracting out of services, which will include the design and building work done by highways engineers. He will be busy cost-cutting by 20 per cent., thereby undermining the effectiveness of civil service departments responsible for vehicle testing, driving standards and vehicle inspections. It is no wonder that people feel a deep sense of unease and anxiety about the effects of all that on road safety. No amount of statistics can gloss over that.

I want to give a few examples of areas in which we could have expected real progress. The prime one is seat belts. I listened carefully to what the Minister said on that issue. Last week was the first anniversary of the tragic accident on the M40 involving a school minibus. A year ago there was a public outcry and widespread demands for seat belts to be fitted to new vehicles. What have the Government done other than to promise on 19 July action ahead of the European Union to seek agreement on the introduction of compulsory fitting of seat belts to all minibuses and coaches used specifically for the transport of children? I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman had to say. He promised us action in advance of what could be done through Europe. I have not seen the introduction of any new regulations to implement that promise.

Mr. Norris: This is very important—I want the hon. Lady to say now, on the record, what measure she believes should have been taken in this respect that has not been taken. I want her to say what measure. She knows well that she simply cannot do so.

Ms Walley: It is clear that the issue is complicated and technical. Since it became an issue, the Government have had 12 months to find a way of fitting seat belts in advance of Europe and through the construction and use regulations. That is what people, and especially parents, want. They want to know that there is a seat and a seat belt for every child.

The Minister made many references to ending the three-to-two seats rule. I looked into the matter very carefully and I understand that that has been done and that considerable progress has been made in Scotland where, if I understand the position correctly, there is a difference. Where two children to a two-seater seat is now a requirement, local education authorities have a disregard. When the Scottish Office give grant settlements to local councils, any extra cost that the change has entailed is disregarded. Why has the same provision not been made available in England, as it would do so much to ensure that we have two children to two seats, rather than having mere rhetoric on the subject?

On fitting seat belts in minibuses, the Government have all the expertise of the civil service available to them. We want seat belts fitted and we want an agreement that that will be done in advance of any European directive on the matter. If there is a will to do it, a way will be found.

The public want action. I understand that the issue is technical and complex, but we want action more quickly than Europe can achieve it. That is what the organisation to belt up school kids wants and that is what we want from the Minister.

Mr. Norris: I do not want to embarrass the hon. Lady any more, but that is not good enough. She is simply trading on people's natural concerns about improving safety standards in the most appalling and cynical way. It does not do her or her party any credit. She knows very well that unless changes in United Kingdom law are agreed by the Community and reflected in directives, they are in every practical way of no effect. I ask her again to state, among all the words that she trots out so easily, what measure she would have introduced during the past 12 months to remedy the problem that she described so graphically.

Ms Walley: I will answer. The Minister's reply sounds fine, but why did the Department of Transport issue a statement on 19 July—if my memory serves me correctly—to say that it would introduce some sort of regulations in advance of European legislation and that the Government were seeking a procedure for achieving seat belt regulations in advance of a decision by Europe? They did so after suggesting research, which I have no doubt has been carried out.

It is now up to the Minister, who is responsible for road transport, to find a way to introduce those regulations. He said that he had carried out the research and he promised that the regulations would be introduced in advance of European legislation. It is now November and we have not yet seen the regulations. We await them in advance of a European commitment.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Lady must know that the Community must agree before we can introduce legislation in advance of a Community directive. The delay has not been on the Government side. The hon. Lady is also wrong to say that the M40 tragedy triggered the desire for regulation, as the M2 coach accident was the spur. Since that accident, the Government have worked quickly and hard in Brussels to persuade the Community to grant us the right to go faster than it is going—the Community that the Opposition so wholly, enthusiastically and uncritically endorse. The reality is that the hon. Lady cannot produce one shred of evidence to show that we have not acted with all expedition in the matter. By treating it in such a cynical manner, she has done her party no service.

Ms Walley: I am pointing out that parents do not understand the delay. I await with interest a detailed letter from the Minister setting out each and every move that he has made since the matter first became an issue—a letter setting out what he has done to ensure that regulations are put on the statute book in advance of European directives. The Government promised us those regulations, but have not delivered them. If there are reasons for the delays, the Minister should tell us what they are.

We will return to that issue time and again because people clearly want the regulations. Although people in some parts of the country might be willing to insist that commercial operators provide seat belts, that is no substitute for regulations so that minibus and coach operators know exactly what should be fitted, in what circumstances, how the belts should be maintained and what should apply retrospectively. We need clear guidance on all those matters.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Will the hon. Lady put me out of a predicament? I listened carefully to what she and my hon. Friend the Minister said. Is she saying that she wants the Government to act unilaterally, without a collective decision with our European partners? Does she want us to do as we want and to tell the rest of Europe to go to wherever?

Ms Walley: People outside this place who take an interest in such debates will see how the issue is being turned into a different issue about Europe. We need to know exactly what the Government have done in advance of European legislation. They said that they would find a way.

How councils' stretched budgets can shoulder the price of safety is another issue. More than anything else, the Government's empty rhetoric on seat belts sums up the difference between what they say and what they mean. That is true of road safety education and road safety officers, who should have the resources to do the work—working in partnership with voluntary agencies such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, motoring organisations such as the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club, and other council departments, especially schools, the police and the local authorities that employ them—of co-ordinating road safety at a local level.

I am sure that the Minister will agree that road safety education is essential. Indeed, he said so in his speech. Education has a major part to play in making the changes necessary for improved road safety relevant to people of all ages, especially to the young. One change must be in the attitude to excessive speed and use of the roads.

The debate has various aspects and strands. It is clear that motor manufacturers' advertising campaigns have stressed speed—often at the expense of road safety, and we must study that.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Lady accept that there is a distinction between acceleration and speed? I take her point. She is right in saying that some advertisements pander to the boy racer. Does she accept, however, that acceleration can get people out of, rather than into, difficulty and that there is a difference between acceleration and top speed?

Ms Walley: Yes. I am talking about excessive speed, responsible driving and the ways in which advertising often undermines that. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's argument.

As good as they are, unless the Department of Transport's campaigns on speed, drink-driving, pedestrian safety and the use of seat belts in cars are backed up by properly resourced, local road safety officers, their success cannot be maintained. I cannot stress too strongly how important it is that, having made progress, we maintain it. Just because there has been some success with the drink-driving campaign, that does not mean that we can ease off; we must keep up the pressure and maintain the results. Road safety officers can play an important role in achieving that.

[Ms Walley]

We must pay more attention to the proper enforcement of regulations that already exist. Clearly, following the first road traffic legislation, it was natural for the police to be handed powers of enforcement. We could not have anticipated today's world of performance-related pay for chief police officers. How can the Transport Minister guarantee adequate levels of enforcement for traffic officers for motorway incidents and routine patrol work when the interim report of the Home Office review of core functions fails to define traffic police work as the major objective that we would like it to be?

Who is responsible for guaranteeing that police resources are available for enforcement of road traffic offences and how is that to be done in future? There has been a great change in the way that local police forces operate. They will have a set of objectives and targets—it is crucial that road safety should feature among them. When the Minister winds up, will he tell us what relationship he has with the Home Secretary on that issue and how he wants to set objectives in respect of the work of the police?

What priority has been given to ensuring that there are enough police to carry out lorry checks and speed checks? I am sure that those who followed the Sowerby bridge incident and other such accidents will be aware of the dangers ahead on our roads. There are fewer and fewer police carrying out spot checks, and fewer controls on maintenance standards and on the limit on hours worked by heavy goods vehicle drivers and bus drivers. Such factors increase the likelihood of serious accidents—we must take account of that.

I was glad that the Minister said a great deal about speed cameras. From what I have read—I do not have his first-hand knowledge of the west London experiment—I believe that the cameras have led to a decrease of more than one third in the number of accidents, which must be welcomed. That shows that we need far more speed cameras, as well as the resources to buy them and to place them where they are most needed and can make the biggest contribution to reducing the number of accidents. We also need the money to ensure that the evidence from those speed cameras is properly processed. We hear a lot about profit generation and the ways in which, within the police service, different offences can lead to income generation. I am glad that the Minister said that he would ensure that those cameras are placed where they are most needed in the interests of road safety.

There are many new laws and regulations, including construction and use regulations, which will be beneficial. I shall mention one that the Minister did not: bull bars on on-road vehicles. The research carried out shows that the Minister could easily act to outlaw bull bars to ensure that they are not used on cars as they are at present. I should like the Minister to have said something about how that could be done and what he proposed to do in future. It is a cause for worry, particularly as the impact of bull bars is so great that, rather than causing less severe accidents, the chances are that accidents will be severe, if not fatal.

Evidence recently produced by the Department of Transport shows that drivers under the age of 21 are involved in 1,000 fatal accidents a year. We must acknowledge that and act accordingly. I welcome the Government's four-pronged attack, particularly pre-driver training in schools. When can we expect the introduction of the legislation mentioned by the Minister? It is now about a week since the Gracious Speech. I wonder why it did not include such legislation—it is not as though we face a taxing time with a heavy legislative programme. Why did not the Gracious Speech include legislation to enable the Government to respond to the problems mentioned by the Minister in his speech? What is the Government's response, particularly to the proposal advanced by the AA for a graduated points threshold for new drivers?

Developments in Europe provide an opportunity for enhanced safety, but there are more opportunities that the Government could grasp. The Minister said that theory tests would be introduced on 1 July 1996. There is much uncertainty about who will manage the tests, how they will be introduced and to what extent they will be hived off to the private and commercial sector.

I am glad that the Minister mentioned the second European Community directive on driver licensing, which would require voluntary minibus drivers to take a separate official driving test to drive vehicles with a carrying capacity of more than eight passengers. I think that there is some common ground between us over that issue. We are aware that the United Kingdom is different from most other European countries in that voluntary organisations depend far more on their own minibuses than is the case elsewhere in mainland Europe. There are many good reasons for that. One reason is the lack of investment in public transport, which is not on a par with that of other European countries.

The Opposition are also aware of important financial considerations. But, having derogated in that way, is there some way for the Government to introduce national guidance so that volunteers driving minibuses on behalf of organisations do not drive them simply according to a set of guidelines issued by a county council, but drive them to a standard that complies with national guidelines issued by the Government? It is a skilled operation and it is crucial that minibus drivers are competent to handle vehicles. We also need tighter regulations for those employed in the minibus industry.

Fears a out road safety apply as much to rural areas as to urban—some policies impact equally on both. We have heard a lot about drink-driving, and the campaign to kill speed, which must be maintained. We must understand the way in which the creeping privatisation of the arm's-length agencies for inspections and training results in lower standards.

There are worries about the future viability of school crossing patrols. I am concerned that they are being reviewed in many parts of the country. In urban districts, local safety schemes are effective in reducing the number of road accidents. However, the money available for traffic calming and traffic management, which benefits all road users, including cyclists and pedestrians, is not enough to cope with the demand.

Our exchange on cycling was useful. No one is more pleased than me at the change in psychology on cycling, which is now recognised as a healthy pursuit that can drastically reduce road traffic. Stoke-on-Trent is twinned with a city in Germany, Erlangen, which has a wonderful system for cyclists. It is second nature for people to cycle whenever possible and there are facilities for people to leave their cycles so that they can travel to and from work. I am pleased that a school in my constituency has recently received some grants to enable it to build cycling

facilities. I hope that that will open up other opportunities. The city engineer will have to integrate those facilities into wider traffic systems.

We must consider ways to change the attitude of engineers responsible for highway policy. Where cycling has been overlooked for many years, we need to ensure that engineers are properly trained and receive national guidance from the Department of Transport to show clearly how cycling can be encouraged. I look forward to seeing a copy of the guidance notes to which the Minister referred.

I am glad that the traditional casual approach to road safety is being challenged. Leeds council, for example, has responded to that challenge by

"moving out of the ghetto of bright armbands, and poster competitions, and into the realms of sustainable transport, public health and quality of life issues."

It has set up a road danger reduction forum. I hope that the Minister will encourage similar forums in other parts of the country. I hope that the Minister will endorse the new approach to road safety, which is based on reducing danger at source while promoting equity and accessibility for non-motorised users.

The accident statistics for rural areas are grim. In 1992, an AA foundation study revealed that rural roads in Cambridgeshire accounted for 89 per cent. of fatal accidents and that 44 per cent. of all traffic accidents occur on rural roads. Those roads were found to be more dangerous and to cause higher casualties than urban ones. Will the Minister tell us what action he proposes to take in rural areas to reduce single-vehicle accidents; accidents at T-junctions and staggered junctions; accidents on private drives and slip roads and those involving heavy goods vehicles and slow-moving traffic?

Many issues deserve to be properly considered in this debate, which is all too brief. I do not think that Fridays are the best time for such a debate. Just as there has been a change in the psychology governing cycling policy, so there is a great wind of change that wants to alter our sitting days and the way in which the business of the House is managed. A debate on a Friday does not guarantee that the subject in question gains the maximum amount of attention. Road safety needs to be properly debated.

To make our roads safer is an enormous task and it can be undertaken only in a consistent, comprehensive and co-ordinated manner. The Government have fragmented and dismantled many of the agencies that used to underpin road safety and it is clear that their approach to it is piecemeal. We have heard some encouraging policy suggestions from the Minister, but we will look closely to see how he follows them up in the long term.

11.21 am

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): This is an important debate. At the risk of being ungallant, I regret to say that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) has not made a good fist of it. I agreed with some of the points she made, but the impact of her speech suffered because of the dismal turnout on the Opposition Benches. I am not fussed about the Liberal Democrats—the only surprise in their case is when they turn up. We all know that hon. Members have constituency engagements on a Friday and I would excuse the absence of Opposition Members if it were not for the fact that they are always rabbiting on about integrated transport, as though they knew all about it. Today would give those Opposition Members a wonderful opportunity to explain their case and I am sorry that the hon. Lady does not have the support that perhaps she deserves from her colleagues.

I must declare an interest, because I am not merely a stalwart, but I have the honour to be president, of the Guild of Experienced Motorists, which has about 60,000 members. We consider ourselves to be one of the premier road safety organisations in the land. Our theme, if it can be called such, is care, courtesy and concentration at all times. The guild takes a close interest in road safety.

I entirely agree with the Minister that our accident reduction record is extremely good. We compare extremely favourably with Europe, but we should not be too smug about that. We must keep relentlessly on the job of reducing road accidents. It is sobering to reflect that a Lockerbie-type accident happens every month on our roads. To put it another way, if 4,200 people were killed by shotguns each year, the outcry would be deafening. We would go berserk and demand legislation. That number of people are killed on our roads each year, to say nothing of the 50,000 people who are seriously injured and possibly permanently maimed. For that reason, we must take the subject of road safety seriously.

I was interested to note what my hon. Friend said about drink-driving, because the guild has been active in stopping that practice. It has been a particular success story because young people now consider it normal for the driver not to drink. If there is still a problem, I am afraid that it is still evident in my generation, which is largely at fault.

The great statistic has always been that one accident in five is caused by drink. According to lateral thinking, however, that means that four out of five accidents are not caused by drinking. We must try to reduce those accidents.

In the past, Governments have faced great difficulty—

Mr. Miller: I am not trying to trick the hon. Gentleman into a silly position, because I am sure that he is not suggesting that the 510 deaths that occurred in 1993 as a result of alcohol-related accidents are not serious and do not need to be addressed. Surely he is not saying that his generation, members of which are perhaps not as astute as some younger people, does not need the rod as well as the carrot.

Sir Anthony Grant: Certainly not. I praised young people, but I readily acknowledged that much of the trouble lies with older generations. We must recognise, however, that four out of five accidents are nothing to do with drink. We must aim to reduce that accident rate in the future.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North mentioned Cambridgeshire. Everything in Cambridgeshire and throughout East Anglia is excellent. It is the healthiest region and it has the lowest unemployment rate. You name it, everything is wonderful there, with one exception: the region has the worst record of road accidents. That is a disgrace and I am glad that the hon. Lady referred to it.

In my constituency, the A45 and the A505 are nightmares to drive on. They are straight, narrow roads with sudden bends. People come off the motorway at high speed and then endeavour to overtake. Those roads are a

[Sir Anthony Grant]

deathtrap. I agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of attempting to reduce road accidents in rural areas. That is one reason why the debate is so important.

Until recently, successive Governments had not caught up with the motor car phenomenon. They recognised that increased prosperity and more vehicles were a good thing—I accept that up to a point. When I started motoring it was a joy, but now all too often it is a nightmare. We know that motorways are an important feature of the transport infrastructure. They are far and away the safest roads to drive on—statistically that is incontrovertible. On the M25, however, one often drives in a 70 mph traffic jam.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) spoke about the dangers of excessively powerful vehicles and I have found that the more powerful the vehicle I drive, the faster and faster I drive from one traffic jam to the next. Apart from the Netherlands, which is smaller than this country anyway, Britain is more overcrowded with vehicles than any other European country. We must address that serious problem. The answer for the future is rather draconian: we must ensure that there are fewer bad drivers and fewer bad cars on the roads.

I was delighted when the Minister spoke of clamping down on vehicle licensing evasion. He pointed out that £145 million per annum was lost because people did not pay their road licence. Let me praise the fact that Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire were used as pilot regions in that clampdown. One million vehicles on the road are uninsured. One might ask how their owners can purchase vehicle excise discs. They simply obtain a temporary cover note and get a tax disc for a year, if necessary. They subsequently continue to drive while uninsured and cause the most appalling accidents, annoyance and injury. One's insurers can help in that respect, but that does not help to get one's vehicle repaired. I hope that the Government will carefully review the scandal of uninsured vehicles.

Mr. Fabricant: Just as one has to display a vehicle excise licence on the windscreen, would it not be a good idea to adopt the practice of many European countries and of the United States, and require drivers to display a certificate of insurance on the windscreen? I mean not the certificate in its traditional format, but a smaller document that could easily be checked by police officers.

Sir Anthony Grant: That is an excellent idea, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will give it thought. It is one thing not to pay one's road tax and to cost the Government money. It is quite another thing to drive while uninsured. I hope that my hon. Friend's suggestion will meet with favour.

I know that the Government are giving serious thought also to improving driving standards. I have always been critical of the fact that one can get in a little Mini, tootle around a suburban road at 30 mph and pass a driving test—then get straight into a Ferrari or Jaguar and belt round the M25. Entirely different driving techniques are required. Everyone assumes that the roads are always as in spring or summer—clear and free of ice. European drivers appreciate that driving conditions can differ.

Good eyesight is a matter of particular interest to the Guild of Experienced Motorists, which makes sight-testing machines available to local authorities and other organisations. The results are staggering. Those tests reveal how many people should not be driving. I shall let the House into a secret. I took the test as the president of the guild and was told, "You ought to get another pair of spectacles."

Lady Olga Maitland *rose—*

Sir Anthony Grant: I was about to tell a funny story, but I will allow my hon. Friend to intervene.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am sorry to interrupt, and I hope that my hon. Friend's funny story will follow my intervention. Is he aware that it is possible to take a sight test for night driving? That test, devised by Professor Paul Cook, confirms that different perceptions are involved, which may require rectifying by the use of different spectacles.

Sir Anthony Grant: Anything that draws the public's attention to the need for good eyesight and appropriate spectacles is important.

One member of the guild's council is a retired senior police officer. He told the story of a motorist who was stopped for driving erratically, but who was perfectly sober. The officers noticed that he was not wearing spectacles and asked him to read the number plate of the police car parked some yards ahead. The motorist asked, "What police car?"

I am confident that the Department, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister are applying a good deal of new thinking. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who is a zealot in this respect, and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who brought huge enthusiasm to his task. I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Minister talk of the progress made in achieving the target set for reducing road accidents. I shall suggest one or two more targets.

It is important to get unroadworthy vehicles off the road. The report of the Royal Commission on pollution should be studied carefully. In due course, no car that is environmentally unclean should be allowed on the road. In future, I hope that all vehicles will have catalytic converters and use unleaded petrol. I look askance when I am in a traffic jam and ahead of me is a disgusting old banger belching forth the most filthy fumes, which has in its back window the sign "Nuclear? No thanks". There is a lot of hypocrisy.

Many road casualties involve stolen cars. The level of car theft in this country is among the worst in Europe. We need to address that scandalous and disgraceful situation. Drivers of stolen cars are most likely to cause mayhem and accidents. Another target for the future is that there should be no car on the road that is not fitted with a full security system, an immobiliser so that it cannot be driven away—there are many inexpensive immobilisers on the market—and a tracking device. A tracker allows the police to identify the changing location of a stolen vehicle almost immediately and to halt it at the next junction. Such equipment should be installed as a matter of course, as are seat belts and radios.

The greatest cause of accidents on motorways is vehicles driving too close to each other and failing to allow for their speed and the road conditions. When I drive up the M11, I am appalled to see heavy goods lorries travelling within inches of vehicles in front. That causes terror to some of my constituents. One can imagine poor old ladies driving along on the inside lane. My wife—who is not actually a poor old lady—drives up the M11 and keeps to 70 mph on the inside lane, but enormous juggernauts travel only 2 ft or 3 ft behind her. That practice could be defeated by the use of available technology that shows when a vehicle is too close. I am advised that it is also possible for such a device to govern the vehicle's speed.

I should like also to see vigorous testing of heavy goods vehicles. One police officer in my constituency told me that the police test HGVs whenever they can, and that it would make one's hair stand on end if one knew the condition of the brakes and other equipment on many of them. I will not get into a Euro debate but many such vehicles come from Europe, where standards may not be as high as those in this country.

The courts should make much greater use of the power of disqualification, which is the greatest deterrent that they have. I would add one other. If the courts could confiscate vehicles, that would get bad vehicles and bad drivers off the road and that would be a much more salutary punishment than a fine.

For years, the Ministry of Transport was the Cinderella of Government. Today, transport is assuming a much higher priority. I was afraid that it would change from being the Cinderella to being one of the ugly sisters, but I am satisfied that, under the stewardship of my hon. Friend the Minister and the new Secretary of State, it will become the Prince Charming.

11.39 am

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I want to spend a little time sharing with colleagues ideas about death on the roads. It is easy to be complacent and argue that we have one of the best records in the world. On that basis, we could all pat ourselves on the back and go home. The figures in the document to which I referred earlier, the "Statistical Report on Road Accidents in 1991" by the European Conference of Transport Ministers, published last year, shows that Britain has 433 vehicles per 1,000 population. Many vehicles travel on this small island, yet we are almost at the bottom of the table on road risk. Therefore, the general advice to motorists and pedestrians is that it is safer to travel in Britain, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands than elsewhere in Europe or in the United States, Canada or Japan.

I am pleased that the Minister acknowledged that we should not be complacent, because 4,000 people still die on the roads every year. Although the figures throughout Europe and the UK are falling, people are still needlessly dying. We can do much to improve road safety. The Minister mentioned road design, and we could educate drivers and improve vehicle design. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) referred to some of those measures. When all of that has been dealt with, the fact remains that we need to legislate against drink-drivers and the lunatic fringe, who show little responsibility towards others.

How should society deal with a person who causes the death of another while at the wheel of a car? I contend that we should approach the offence just as we approach that of any other culpable death. I hope that hon Members will bear with me while I go through the statistics because it is important to see what is happening and put it in perspective.

In 1992, an estimated 510 fatal accidents involved illegal alcohol levels, with 610 casualties. The corresponding figures for 1990 are 650 and 760 respectively. That shows that the vast majority of road deaths—some 85 per cent.—are not caused by drunken drivers. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West made that point. Although it is impossible to tell how many of the deaths were accidents and how many were caused by negligent driving or bad vehicle maintenance, the latter category may account for as many as those killed by drunk driving.

On the charges brought, in 1992, 402 people were tried at Crown court level for causing death by dangerous driving, compared with just two for causing death by careless driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Committals for trials at magistrates courts ran at 307 and six respectively. The offence of causing death by dangerous driving is therefore numerically more important than the alcohol-related offence. For that reason, it should be straightforward for the police to charge somebody with that offence.

The Road Traffic Act 1991 replaced the offence of causing death by reckless driving with the offences of causing death by dangerous driving and of causing death by careless driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The change was intended to facilitate a greater number of such charges being brought against a driver who had killed, but it has not worked.

The most detailed figures available from the Home Office statistical bulletin, "Motor Offences, England and Wales, 1992", are for offences causing death or bodily harm. As well as the two aforementioned offences, that category includes causing death by aggravated vehicle taking, which is another point mentioned this morning, and causing bodily harm.

Since 1989, the number of people charged with those offences has remained static at about 600. The conviction rate has not improved, with some 400 people found guilty of those offences every year. Although the number of people charged with such offences is proportionately higher as the number of road deaths has declined, it is not a highly significant improvement. The difference between the number of accidents in 1991 and 1992 was just 1 per cent.

It is difficult to obtain a conviction in cases involving causing death by dangerous driving. In 1992, just 9.44 per cent. of cases of that nature coming before a magistrates court were discontinued. That may seem a small figure—less than 10 per cent.—but it compares with just 4.35 per cent. of charges of careless driving. Of the cases heard, 82 of the 402 led to acquittals and two never came to trial. That compares with 24 of the 300 cases of driving without due care and attention heard at Crown courts and 12,606 of the 88,422 charges of driving without due care and attention offences, which is the most common careless driving offence. Proportionately, more cases are discontinued and more are dismissed or acquitted when

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

death by dangerous driving is the charge. That is important as it backs up speculation that it is difficult to gain a conviction for such a charge.

Organisations and individuals concerned with that matter suspect that the Crown Prosecution Service would rather not risk a charge of causing death by dangerous driving but prefers the relative certainty of a guilty plea to driving without due care and attention. That charge, however, is not suitable for such a serious offence. The death of a victim is not a factor in the careless driving charge, and inevitably victims' families are upset when it is not even mentioned in the court proceedings. The sentence is also thoroughly inadequate: fines result in most cases.

In the most serious careless driving cases—those tried in the Crown court—of the 278 findings of guilt, 189 were dealt with by fines; 21 by conditional discharge; 16 by probation or supervision orders; only three by community service; and 49 were otherwise dealt with. No one was gaoled. The average Crown court fine for cases of careless driving was £206 and only one fine was in excess of £800. At the magistrates court, the average fine is £99 when sentences for careless driving are passed by a magistrate.

There seems to be a problem with the concept of causing death by dangerous driving. The acquittal rate is much higher than for any other offence and no different from the old law against death by reckless driving, which was known to be flawed. The police seem to be reluctant to press charges as they charge only the same number of people as they did under the previous charge, which they were widely felt to be reluctant to invoke.

However, organisations such as Roadpeace and relatives of victims of road crashes are understandably upset about sentences. Their concerns seem to be split between the apparent inadequacies of the present system—gaps in the law—and dissatisfaction with the severity of sentence handed down. In 1992, of the 320 people found guilty of causing death by dangerous driving, 70 received a sentence completely unrelated to prison, 27 received a fully suspended sentence, five received a partially suspended sentence, 60 were sent to a young offenders institution, while 156 got an unsuspended sentence.

Mr. Ottaway: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to something he said a few moments ago? It has taken me a little while to reflect on it. He was complaining about the number of acquittals in cases of death by dangerous driving. He might correct me, but I was under the impression that such cases are jury cases. I understood that they are not matters for the prosecution or for the police but that 12 good men and true decide on acquittals.

Mr. Miller: I would not complain about the principle of jury trial. I am merely putting on record the statistics—which are giving rise to a great deal of concern—the greatest of which is that many people who cause a death in a road accident are prosecuted under the Road Traffic Act 1991 not for causing that death but perhaps for leaving the scene of an accident or for some seemingly trivial matter. That is the theme that I am attempting to develop, but I am nevertheless pleased that the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) is listening carefully.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): One of the reasons given for introducing the charge of death by dangerous driving was that, at that time, juries were very reluctant to convict on manslaughter so another charge had to be introduced. However, it followed that juries were equally reluctant to convict on the death by dangerous driving charge. If the hon. Gentleman is advocating some sort of fiercer punishment for death by careless driving, it will probably follow that there will be an equal reluctance to convict. The view might be that, if the death were due to, for example, momentary inattention, the jury would be thinking, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Mr. Miller: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman, who is my neighbour in constituency terms, is also listening attentively because I shall develop that very point. If he waits for my conclusion he will find that I shall propose an idea for consideration by the House which would accommodate his concerns but which would nevertheless deal with the very real needs of victims and victims' families. I hope that the House will bear with me for a few minutes while I complete my statistical analysis.

Sentence lengths are unsatisfactory and the much-lauded increase of maximum sentences from five to 10 years seems to have had little effect. Groups such as Roadpeace are understandably outraged at such sentences, which they regard as pitifully low. Even after Alison Burgess successfully brought a private prosecution and got her husband's killer, and killer he is, gaoled for three years, she was understandably unhappy about such a sentence for a killer in circumstances which, by any standards, do not fit what the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) called the "There, but for the grace of God go I" cases. That case involved a serious criminal offence.

A reform of the law to ensure that the charge of causing death by dangerous driving can be brought more easily by the police is unlikely to satisfy such campaigners. Many people feel that justice is not done.

Mr. Waterson: I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Gentleman is saying about sentences, but is not one of the difficulties, not only in motoring offences but in other cases of unlawful killing, the so-called tariff of sentences? Life sentences do not mean "life" but, on average, 12 years. As, sadly, no death penalty is available, the whole tariff is depressed. Does he agree that, even if we do not restore the death penalty, we could at least ensure that life sentences for manslaughter and murder mean life, which would pull the whole tariff upwards?

Mr. Miller: That is one issue on which I agree with the Prime Minister. I am fundamentally opposed to the death penalty because mistakes are made, as happened recently in the Stefan Kiszko case and many others. Although the hon. Gentleman's logical argument about the suppression of sentences needs consideration, I do not believe that taking his uncivilised approach—I am sorry to have to use that word—in extreme cases is the solution. We must find another way.

In an attempt to find another way, I have examined the law as it stands and, in response to the point made by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), some of the cases that I considered were in countries where the death

penalty is enforced. I examined all the states of the United States of America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand for some inspiration about how to deal with this horrific problem. My research involved reading thousands of pages of text, some of which is beside me in case colleagues want to question my conclusions or join me in trying to secure an improvement in the law.

There should be an automatic charge of culpable death by driving when an investigation reveals that an incident was not a pure accident. It should be akin to motor manslaughter, a charge that exists in some of the states in America. As hon. Members will know, the Law Commission is examining that proposal. In fact, the closing date—31 October—for submissions on its consultation paper entitled "Involuntary Manslaughter" has just passed. I hope that the commission will listen carefully to the spirit of this debate.

I should like the House to consider paragraphs 5.22 to 5.29 and paragraphs 6.5 to 6.7 of the commission's consultative paper No.135. The commission states, among other things, that

"We do not think it can be sensible for the present law to remain untouched."

The two sets of paragraphs to which I referred appear under the heading "Motor Manslaughter".

I believe that the law requires fundamental reform, and that it should include the concept of motor manslaughter. There are arguments for and against calling the offence "manslaughter", "motor manslaughter" or any number of other titles but my assertion is that any title should link three points—culpability, the fact of death and the fact that the person was driving. The penalties should be in line with that for manslaughter; in other words, wide ranging, up to and including long prison sentences.

In an intervention on the Minister, I referred to breath testing which, I believe, should be automatic when a death occurs, as should testing for illegal substances if there are suspicions about the state of the driver. There is a further problem when the person who is alleged to have caused the crash is himself hospitalised. Forensic samples should be taken and analysed, but not released until the accused is in a fit state to give consent. Failure to give consent at that stage should either be interpreted by the courts or become an offence in itself.

Such a scheme should overcome the British Medical Association's ethical concerns, which were voiced by the Government when my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) raised the matter in the Committee that considered the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill in the previous Session. In response to my hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Home Office said:

"The BMA would be very unhappy about samples being taken from someone who was unconscious and had not given his consent. Although I am sympathetic to the point that the hon. Gentleman made, we cannot move towards such a policy because our law fundamentally depends on the consent of the person."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 10 March 1994; c. 1335-36.]

I made inquiries at the House of Commons Library about the history of the BMA's position. The research officer of the ethics, science and information division of the BMA replied to the Library on 23 June this year. He wrote:

"If a blood sample has already been taken for clinical reasons, it is not acceptable for that sample to be released for police purposes unless specific consent is gained from the patient."

I have looked at that point in a number of countries. It is interesting to note that in Germany, a blood sample is taken automatically without any consent. If the investigating police officer believes that the person who is hospitalised was the cause of the accident, he has the right to require a blood sample to be taken. A more liberal interpretation—

Sir Anthony Grant: Where are the Liberals?

Mr. Miller: Indeed, where are they?

A more liberal interpretation of the need to provide vital information to determine the innocence or guilt of the driver in question is found in Australia. New Zealand, incidentally, has a system in which no consent is required, but there are some qualifying caveats. The general philosophy in Australia, as I understand it, enables a sample to be taken and analysed, but the information is not released to the police until such time as the person concerned is able to give consent. That seems a sensible way in which to overcome the understandable objections from the BMA's ethical committee. The question of consent to information being released to the police is not dealt with until the person is fit enough to consent. If the person does not consent, I believe that either the courts should be able to interpret that refusal or refusal should become an offence in itself.

We need to consider how the issue of culpability is dealt with in some cases. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West made the point that four out of five road accidents involving deaths—"accidents" may be a misnomer—are not caused by drinking and driving. There are cases in which driver schedules, road design, local parking arrangements and the design of vehicles should, perhaps, require other persons to join the driver in the dock. Examples are the lorry company that requires a driver to go out when it knows that the vehicle is not fully safe or the coach company that provides a timetable that is not sensible in terms of getting from A to B. We must consider the possibility that culpability can extend far beyond the driver. The Law Commission is looking at the concept of corporate manslaughter in the broader sense.

One of the tragic cases brought to my attention—such cases are happening all over the country—occurred in the Wigan area. It took place in a narrow road; perhaps the local authority could have done better. The parking arrangements may have been relevant; perhaps, again, the local authority had not addressed needs as well as it could have done. I am not accusing the local authority, but simply speculating about a particular set of circumstances. The driver backed the van and he did not act very sensibly because he backed the van where visibility was poor. The Department of Transport and the Minister himself are responsible for the type approval for that van. That van had no audible means of signalling the fact that it was reversing and it had huge blind spots which meant that it had a questionable level of safety.

A whole series of circumstances need to be looked at carefully when the question of culpability comes up. In the particular case to which I have referred obliquely, a small child died unnecessarily. The van backed on to the pavement over the child and then drove forward over the body of the child. The Minister said in his opening speech that things were getting better. However, we must all remember those tragic cases.

[Mr. Miller]

I hope that the Minister will give his support today to encouraging the Law Commission to look at those matters in a positive manner. The consultation period is over and it is now down to the commission to respond.

I give my thanks to the people who have written to me from all over the country. Many of them are victims or the families of victims. They have contributed to my research despite the obvious grief that they are suffering. I extend my thanks to organisations such as Roadpeace, and to the many organisations throughout the world that have written to me. On a light-hearted note, I especially thank the National Commission Against Drunk Driving in the United States, which wrote, "Dear Minister Miller," which may be a little premature. Organisations in the United States, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which has collated enormous amounts of information from all the states, European organisations and people in a good number of countries outside Europe who have also provided information deserve thanks. All the information helps us to examine the possibilities rationally.

I have today floated one possible way in which to eradicate the deaths that take place as a result of the drinkers and the lunatic fringe who still exist on the roads. I am not seeking to penalise the motorist. I have driven large mileages all my adult life in a number of different occupations. I understand the pressures that the Government would face from some of the motoring organisations if they were to take a draconian view. The point I emphasise time and again is that we must never lose sight of the interests of the victims and their families. We should accept that the point made by the Minister at the beginning of this debate was correct. We should not relax in our effort to reduce the number of deaths down towards zero. Our national record may be good, but one death is one death too many.

12.10 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): It should again be emphasised that the Government have a successful record in helping to reduce the number of tragic deaths on our roads. I have a few suggestions to make which, if implemented, would, I hope, help further to reduce such deaths. As I suspect that some of them might be considered controversial, I shall welcome responses from Opposition Members and from my hon. Friends if they feel that I am going beyond the mark.

My hon. Friend the Minister emphasised that deaths and serious injuries as a result of road accidents have been reduced considerably and are at their lowest level since 1926. It is worth emphasising, too, that there are 14 times as many cars on the roads now than there were in 1926. The reduction in serious accidents and deaths is something of which we can be proud. In the European Union table of accidents per road mile, we find that the United Kingdom is the lowest. Again, that is something of which we can be proud. Perhaps I can say in these troubled times that it is a statistic which might reflect on the British sang froid as opposed to the more excitable nature of some of our European neighbours.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) talked about drinking and driving. It was interesting to hear him say that people of his generation are possibly more lax about it than young people. In Lichfield, there is a fair amount of drunkenness on the streets on Friday and Saturday nights. It has been suggested by members of the city council that the young people involved should go to Tamworth, where there are cinemas and discotheques. There is none in Lichfield. Young people do not go to Tamworth, interestingly enough, because they are not prepared to drive there, to drink and then drive back to Lichfield. That is laudable. As much as I condemn drinking, I condemn even more drinking and driving.

There are some important issues that the Government are examining in the long term. My right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), the former Secretary of State for Transport, said on 9 February that drivers should be retested if they have been convicted of serious driving offences. That is an exciting and interesting initiative. It has been suggested that post-test driver training—"pass-plus"—and better road safety education should be introduced and made available for the 16-plus age group. Those are excellent initiatives.

We have heard about the second EC driver licensing directive. I shall be interested to know what the one Opposition Member who is in his place—the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller)—thinks about the proposal to place photographs on driving licences. I consider it an excellent idea. I suspect, however, that some of the bleeding hearts—perhaps I should say heart—on the Opposition Benches will feel that it would be an infringement of civil liberties.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman disappoints me by responding to the debate so frivolously. We are dealing with life and death. I do not think that photographs on driving licences will solve the problems that we are discussing. Identity becomes an issue only in the context of stolen vehicles. An eminently sensible proposal—the hon. Gentleman referred to it earlier—is identifying insurance on a vehicle. That is a better approach. The libertarian argument about whether photographs should be placed on driving licences is a red herring.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman accuses me of approaching the debate frivolously. The frivolity of the Labour party is reflected by the sparse number of Opposition Members in their places.

The hon. Gentleman misunderstands my argument about photographs on driving licences. As he said, the question of identity often arises when vehicles have been stolen. It has already been stated that drivers of stolen vehicles often cause fatal accidents. If we had photographs on driving licences and if there were fewer stolen vehicles, it follows that road traffic accidents would be reduced.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing such an important topic. Is he aware that Britain is one of the few countries in the European community that does not require photographs on driving licences?

Mr. Fabricant: Indeed, I am aware of that. My hon. Friend will know that I undertook most of my doctoral thesis in the United States. I was proud to hold a United States driving licence, and proud also to have a not very pleasant photograph imprinted on the licence. It was a

useful form of identification. All Members have identity cards, on which our faces are imprinted. There is nothing new about identity cards.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman is going down a blind alley. If his argument were sound, the United States would have better accident statistics than those of the United Kingdom. Instead, they are far worse. The Minister has said that there is a host of issues that are far more fundamental than photographs on driving licences—issues that have been shown to have an impact and that should have priority. Why does not the hon. Gentleman concentrate on some of those?

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is missing the point. I shall come to other proposals in due course.

As for the United States, I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has not read the statistics accurately. He will recall that I was talking about stolen vehicles. Is he aware that there are fewer cars stolen per car on the road in the United States than in the United Kingdom? That is the point.

I commend my hon. Friend the Minister on the publicity campaigns that have been introduced. In the coming year, £6.5 million will be spent on road safety publicity campaigns. The Government hope to continue the spend at about that level in 1995 and 1996. As my hon. Friend has said, the campaign themes are likely to be speed, child safety and drink-driving. We have heard from the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston about the importance of reducing the number of drink-driving incidents.

The United Kingdom is in the forefront of developing improved standards in Europe for front and side impact testing for new designs of vehicle. The initiatives of my hon. Friend the Minister are to be commended.

My hon. Friend the Minister and his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), have been proactive, not reactive, in ensuring that seat belts are introduced in coaches and other forms of public transport.

We are hoping to introduce to all new vehicles anti-lock brakes by the end of the century. It is an interesting objective from my point of view. As I have already said, I drive a Lotus, which does not have that facility. It is most unfortunate that a British manufacturer such as Lotus does not provide ABS as standard or as an option.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) rightly referred to cycling. I strongly believe that cycle lanes should be introduced where practicable. When I did my masters degree at Sussex university, many people used to ride from Brighton to the university, which was in Falmer. There was a great campaign at the time, of which I was part, for the introduction of a cycle lane. I am pleased to say that such a lane now exists.

One of the Government's great successes over the past few years with regard to child safety in cycling has been the introduction of hard hats or crash helmets for cyclists. More often than not, children and adults now wear hard hats when they are cycling whereas, five or 10 years ago, that was not the norm. There has been an 80 per cent. reduction in the number of child pedestrian and cyclist casualties and that is partly due to the introduction of hard hats. The Government have introduced 20 mph limit zones and these have also helped to reduce casualties. Eighty such zones are now in operation.

I want to raise specific points about motor cycles. I used to be, and still am to a much lesser degree, a keen motor cyclist. As I pointed out to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North in the debate on European Union regulations last night, I used to ride a Yamaha FJ1200. I used to travel around Europe every year. One year I managed to obtain a three-week holiday from work and I travelled overland from Britain to eastern Turkey and Kurdistan and returned via the Greek islands. Trying to ride a motor cycle up a 4 in wide plank on to a boat is a difficult and dangerous task.

The Motor Cycle Industry Association has said that motor cyclists are the only road-user group to achieve or better the Government's targets. Motor cyclists should be applauded for that. Many people fail to realise that two thirds of motor cycle accidents are caused by other road users—those driving four-wheeled vehicles. It is important that the Government continue to heighten the awareness of car drivers to road users on two wheels—bicycles and motor cycles.

It is important to note that the Government introduced compulsory basic training for motor cycle users in 1990. That was a very important initiative. Before that, motor cyclists did not have any formal training although they had to be tested.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North referred to "modality". I was not sure about the meaning of that word, but I understood it from her context when she said that, if we are to encourage cyclists, they must be able to use other forms of public transport, including the rail system. I fully agree with her and I would extend that to motor cycles. Many fair-weather motor bike riders who use their motor bikes in and around urban areas would like to be able to take their motor bikes on trains to travel longer distances.

Mr. Miller: It is particularly important that all road users, including people with bicycles, small motor cycles and invalid vehicles, should have access to trains. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that British Rail should, as a matter of urgency, ensure that its current ludicrous restrictions, including the 63 cm width maximum which is obviously a door constraint, and the rule whereby three-wheeled invalid vehicles can be carried by train, but four-wheeled invalid vehicles cannot, are addressed? British Rail should also consider the transportation of other forms of vehicle on trains.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman has raised a good point. I believe that when the rail services are privatised, there will be very good commercial reasons for taking up the points raised by the hon. Gentleman. Huge sections of the community are not using the rail services for the very reasons that he gave. It will make commercial sense to allow invalid carriages, motor cycles and bicycles on to trains so that more people can use our train services.

I want now to consider several useful improvements. I commend the Minister on the use of cameras on our roads. I am pleased that he reassured the House, following my sedentary intervention, that where cameras are used for checking people who exceed the speed limit, drivers will be pre-warned by signs stating that cameras are present. That is very important.

Cameras have another role and that is to catch red light dodgers at junctions and pedestrian crossings. I appreciate that a cost will be involved, but far too often people cross red lights at zebra crossings. They may think that the light

[Mr. Fabricant]

is red and no pedestrians are trying to cross, so they drive through the red light. They might not see a pedestrian at night. It is important that all red lights should be obeyed by motorists. There may be an additional incentive for motorists to do that if they think a camera will catch them if they cross a red light at a zebra crossing as well as at important junctions.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North referred to bull bars. If a young child is hit by a Jeep with bull bars at speeds as low as 5 mph, that child may be killed. However, if the Jeep had normal bumpers, the child would have every chance of surviving. Bull bars serve little or no practical purpose and are fixed purely for cosmetic reasons. They should be banned. I always hesitate to suggest to a Minister that we impose extra restrictions, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London at least to consider doing so.

My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned traffic-calming ramps. They have an important role. Several people on buses, particularly in London, have supposedly suffered neck injuries as buses have gone over particularly abrupt ramps. I hope that the Government, if they are not already doing so, will issue guidelines on the shape of ramps. I was reassured by my hon. Friend's statement that the Government are considering soft ramps and means by which emergency vehicles can quickly pass over them. It is in the public interest that their speed is not impeded.

I shall now make some possibly controversial points. I shall welcome interventions if hon. Members think that I am going a little too far. I have mentioned that I attained my masters degree at Sussex university. Most of my work for my doctorate was done at the university of Southern California. When I left university, after a very short career in broadcasting—I was also in broadcasting before I went to university—I became involved in business, which caused me to be abroad for eight months of the year. I have travelled a lot. Some of my proposals come about from my experience of driving abroad. I shall make three suggestions.

Some road accidents occur through driver frustration. Although, at first sight, it might seem that my three suggestions might increase road accidents, there is evidence abroad that they can reduce them. First, many motorists become frustrated when, at 2 am or 3 am, they are held up at red traffic lights for one minute, two minutes or three minutes, when nobody is coming the other way, and there is the greatest temptation to jump the lights. Other countries have solved the problem. I have seen the solution in operation in the United States, Australia, South Africa, and, I believe, certain parts of—

Mr. Waterson *rose—*

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend wants to intervene. I have not even made the suggestion yet, but I am happy to give way to him.

Mr. Waterson: I am happy to slow my hon. Friend down a bit. I am most grateful to him for allowing me to intervene. My hon. Friend might be too young to remember that, during the three-day week in the 1970s, when at times there was not the power even to operate traffic lights in central London, if anything, the traffic statistics improved, because people took elaborate care when approaching busy junctions because the traffic lights were not working.

Mr. Ottaway: The traffic ground to a halt.

Mr. Waterson: I wonder whether my hon. Friend had that point in mind when he evolved his three-point plan.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is not the point that I was going to make, but it is an interesting observation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) said from a sedentary position, the fact that there were fewer accidents may have resulted from the whole of London grinding to a halt because of the lack of traffic lights. However, I wonder whether there is over-enthusiasm for traffic lights.

I sold several radio station systems to Radio Uganda. In Kampala, not a single traffic light is now working. I am told that the traffic system there works a darned sight better now that the lights are not working. At times, roundabouts or other forms of traffic control might be more appropriate than traffic lights.

Let me now make my suggestion. In the early hours of the morning, or when there is little traffic on the road, we could have a system whereby traffic lights are altered so that, if cars enter a main road from a side road, the traffic lights flash red. The red flashing light would be equivalent to a stop sign. Hon. Members laugh as though that is an odd idea, but, throughout the United States of America, Australia, South Africa, where they strangely call traffic lights robots, and in what used to be Rhodesia—Zimbabwe—that system works.

The idea is that, at certain times of the night, or possibly during the day, a red traffic light flashing on-off would be equivalent to a stop sign. As at pedestrian crossings with traffic light control, drivers would stop at the flashing red traffic light and, if the road were clear, would approach the junction. On the other side of the road there could be a flashing amber light which would be equivalent to a give-way sign. We all know what that means: motorists slow up at the junction and, if the road is clear, they continue. This would alleviate much motorist frustration.

An obvious argument against the proposal is that motorists would become confused. Of course, there would have to be a lot of advance publicity before we introduced the system. However, I am not too young to remember when we introduced traffic lights on zebra crossings.

Mr. Deva: Can my hon. Friend explain how the flashing red light system would prevent accidents from occurring among frustrated motorists, who presumably take care to look left and right before they jump red lights? What additional benefits would the flashing red light system produce?

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. The answer is that at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning the number of cars may build up at traffic lights. An impatient driver, perhaps two or three cars back, may say, "Blow this, I will not wait for three or four minutes because I have already been waiting long enough—something may have gone wrong with the traffic lights." That driver may overtake the other cars and cause an accident. A flashing red light would prevent queuing at traffic lights.

As I have said, I am not suggesting anything new in the context of world traffic methods; it is something new only for the United Kingdom. The system has been in use in the United States, Australia and South Africa for years. At junctions where two important roads intersect, all sets of traffic lights would flash red in the early hours of the morning, creating the same effect as a red traffic light.

Mr. Miller: In his worldwide travels, did the hon. Gentleman bother to look at the statistics for road traffic accidents at junctions? He will find that while that practice alleviates driver frustration—which, in itself, is a cause of road accidents—it does not improve safety at junctions. I invite the hon. Gentleman to think about using available technology to adjust the switching mechanisms of traffic lights in the early hours of the morning, with the timing to be determined by traffic flows in the area. It would be very easy to time such changes using technology which is currently available from road traffic research laboratories.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman raises a reasonable point; that would be an alternative suggestion. However, if we were to study statistical queuing theory, the number of cars coming from different directions when there was not a constant traffic flow, would cause unnecessary delays and driver frustration.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point: yes, I have looked at the statistics. They show that the number of accidents at junctions at night is lower in countries which use the flashing light system than in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Deva: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Certain countries I have visited—I will not go through a litany of them—have a system called the "green wave". This means that when one is travelling at a certain speed on a heavy traffic road one can go through all the traffic lights at a constant speed. This is not the case in Britain. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister for Transport in London could consider implementing that system here?

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend has raised an excellent point. Returning from Staffordshire, the most beautiful county in the country, to the House of Commons last week, I was coming down Portland place past the headquarters of my former employers, the BBC, and I had to stop at every traffic light. There was no phasing of the system. There would be less frustration if there were.

Mr. Ottaway: My hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) and for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) have made interesting points about phased traffic lights. However, we must remember that under the phasing system they are all timed for traffic to pass through them at 30 mph, so that motorists should get a green light the whole way through. Of course, some smart Alec discovered that he could go through them at 60, 90 or 120 mph, which rather brought the system into disrepute.

Mr. Fabricant: Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister wants to intervene on this point.

Mr. Norris: I am loth to interrupt my hon. Friend. His speech has been fascinating and he is only on point one. I cannot wait for points two and three.

I must tell a number of my hon. Friends—it may be the fault of the traffic authorities that they are not already aware of this—that although my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) may have been stopped at a series of traffic lights, London has the most sophisticated system of traffic light management of any major city in the world. It allows free flow through a whole series of traffic lights on continuous routes. It is called the SCOOT system. I am delighted to say that that technology, which was developed and is used in London, is sold all over the world as an example of how to develop systems to allow continual traffic flows.

I am not suggesting anything about my hon. Friend's driving habits as he cut down Portland place past the BBC. I merely take up the observation of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) that to make the system work it is necessary to stick to the legal speed limit.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. Is not it another demonstration of how British technology leads the world? I just hope that the British system was not in use in Milan when "The Italian Job" was filmed. As I recall it, Benny Hill reprogrammed the Italian computers to cause a major traffic jam.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for telling me about his night-time driving habits. He praised the system in the United States, Australia and South Africa. Does he have any statistical evidence to show that the accident rate has dropped since those countries changed to the flashing red light system? Have the numbers really gone down? I find that hard to believe.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, although it was not totally helpful. Those countries have had that system for so long that I do not think it is now a question of producing figures to show that the accident rate has gone down. Indeed, the United States and other countries have had it for at least 25 years.

I come now to point two, as we have more or less covered point one. The United States—again—has a system that allows traffic to turn right on red. That was gradually introduced state by state, but it is now in use in all 50 states except at junctions that specifically state that traffic cannot turn right. We should have a similar system at certain road junctions in Britain, although, of course, it would be to turn left on red. A motorist wanting to turn left at a junction would treat the red light as a stop sign and would have to stop. However, provided that no traffic were coming the other way, the motorist could filter left. That would be a helpful system and it has been shown to have reduced traffic accidents in the United States. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider introducing a similar system in this country. As no one has sought to intervene, I shall assume that that means that my suggestion meets with the approval of hon. Members.

Finally, my most controversial point—

Mr. Waterson: A man with a red flag.

Mr. Fabricant: I do not know whether they had red flags in 1926, but even if they did I must remind my hon. Friend that there are fewer road accidents now than there were then. Clearly, the red flag was a frustrating influence on drivers, which demonstrates my argument that when motorists are frustrated they can cause accidents.

[Mr. Fabricant]

My final suggestion would certainly reduce the number of people breaking the law. In the early hours of the morning, when there are few cars on the road, many motorists, including myself, often drive at more than 30 mph in a 30 mph zone if there is no traffic around. Everyone does it. I suggest that in zones where the speed limit is under 70 mph the limit should be increased automatically by 10 mph at certain times in the morning. Perhaps, between the hours of 2 am and 4 am—whatever the Minister decides—one might be allowed to drive legally at up to 40 mph in a 30 mph zone.

Mr. Waterson: I do not want to disturb the flow of my hon. Friend's radical ideas, but does he not think that if that were the case people would go 10 mph faster than those limits? People will always drive at speeds above the limit when they think that it is safe to do so and that no one is around—or, perhaps more importantly, that no members of the constabulary are around. If there is an informal increase in the limit at certain times, some people will go even faster.

Mr. Fabricant: That is a reasonable argument. Perhaps, in conjunction with the changes, we should increase the penalties for breaking the speed limit. Let us have practical and reasonable limits and a radical increase in penalties for those who break them—perhaps more or less along the lines that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) suggested.

Mr. Deva: On speed limits and breaking them, does my hon. Friend have any views on the radar detection systems that one can buy and instal in a car? I have not done so, but I have seen them in shops. They warn the driver when a speed detection system is ahead. If one is driving a car and at the same time looking at the speedometer and the radar detection system, it would completely divert one's concentration from the road. I see no reason why people would buy them unless they intended to break the speed limit. Does my hon. Friend have any views on those systems in regard to his theory on increasing speed limits?

Mr. Fabricant: I would not condone any device that would assist people to break the law, although I must correct my hon. Friend. He said that people would be distracted by using such a device. I have not bought one and I do not have one in my car, but I know that they bleep, so it is not a question of looking down. If one enters an area in which the police are operating a radar detection system, the device bleeps. I condemn their use and it is wrong.

People should keep to speed limits, but those limits should be sensible. That is why my third point was that they should be increased by 10 mph at certain times of the morning, which would be sensible. After all, did not the Minister or the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North—perhaps it was both of them—mention the use of inappropriate speeds? People should not drive at inappropriate speeds, but it is appropriate and safe to drive at speeds above the speed limit in the early hours of the morning, if that limit is 30 mph and there are no other cars or children around.

I drive a fast car, but when I drive past schools and parked cars where children might be about to come out into the road and one cannot always see them, I drive at a darned sight less than 30 mph and I am always careful to do so.

The Minister will be relieved to know that I have come to the end of my three points. However, will he assure the House that he will not entertain any plans to standardise our legislation with that of the European Union, particularly when it comes to driving on the right?

Hon. Members may recall that many years ago drivers in Sweden drove on the left. The country undertook a costly programme to change the system to driving on the right. Recently, Transport Ministers in Sweden have said that if they were deciding whether to change the system now, they would not do so because of the cost involved, the increased number of cars on the road and the increased number of traffic accidents that occurred following the changeover.

I am reminded of the joke that, when Idi Amin had difficulty with the United Kingdom and called it a toothless bulldog, he said that he would change the system in Uganda so that drivers drove on the right, but to make things easier for the citizens of Kampala and Entebbe, the change would be phased in over a week so that people could get used to the new system. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure me that that will not happen.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure the House that he will resist any moves to make people in this country drive on the right. If anyone here were foolish enough to say that that would help our motor industry, that would be nonsense. Indonesia, Thailand and Japan, as well as much of the Commonwealth, still drive on the left and continue to be major markets for the United Kingdom.

This country has gone a long way and has taken much innovative action to reduce the number of road deaths. That has been demonstrated by the fact that Britain has the lowest road accident rate in the European Union. Much of that progress is due to what the Government have done over the years. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider some of my proposals which I hope might, in a small way, help to reduce the number of road deaths still further.

12.51 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): It is a pleasure to follow the imaginative, thoughtful and provocative speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). Of his three points, the most interesting was the first, dealing with the technological approach. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we have a highly sophisticated system in London and many computerised systems. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) will know—her constituency is close to mine—we also have a number of computerised systems in the suburbs. An effective system has been introduced at Purley cross, where the A22 and the A23 merge. A highly sophisticated computerised scheme, introduced by the Department of Transport, has resolved one of London's big trouble spots. Like any system, when it becomes overloaded it grinds to a halt. Utterly predictably, Purley grinds to a halt at 5pm on a Friday night.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire has a point when he talks of modern technology as a solution to many of the problems and as a means of raising safety standards—the issue at the heart of today's debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend on coming up with positive ideas as they will advance debates such as today's.

Only a couple of weeks ago I was reading a book by Admiral Sandy Woodward, who was in charge of the British expeditionary force to the Falkland Islands. When he was flying home at the end of his 100 days in the Falklands—where he experienced the clamour and noise of battle—he considered the number of casualties in the war. He found that, during those 100 days, more people were killed on the roads in Britain than in the Falklands war. He mused over why it was that we took something like the Falklands so seriously—it was the focus of world attention—when more people were killed on Britain's roads.

The reason is that the Falklands became a matter of national pride, but road safety forms part of our daily life. We have all learnt to live with it—we all went to road safety lessons when we were at school. That is why debates such as today's are so important. They encourage Ministers to report to us on the steps that the Department of Transport is taking to reduce accidents and invite us to sit down and address sensibly the problems which are faced daily, hourly and by the minute on our roads.

Our roads are now busier than they have ever been, with 14 times as much traffic on them as when records began in 1926. The Government have long been encouraging people to be more responsible as road users, both as drivers and pedestrians, but with the ever-increasing volume of traffic, new measures must be constantly sought to improve safety.

Our roads are among the safest in the European Union. However, because of what some observers have entitled the greatest epidemic of our time, about 4,000 people are involved in fatal accidents each year and more than 300,000 people are involved in less serious accidents. Although the figures for deaths and serious injuries caused by road accidents continue to show a welcome, encouraging downward trend—in 1993 they fell by 12 per cent.—we must still do all that we can to make our roads a safer environment for their users.

As well as the terrible human costs of road safety accidents, they impose a massive financial burden on society. According to the Department's own figures, an accident resulting in slight injury costs more than £9,000. If that accident is more serious, the average cost rises to £84,000, but should it tragically prove to be fatal, the cost is in excess of a massive £760,000.

In 1993, road traffic accidents in the London borough of Croydon, part of which I have the privilege to represent, cost society £52 million. That represents a vast waste of human and financial resources which no society can willingly bear without considering how the majority of those accidents can be prevented.

The Government's efforts to reduce accidents on our roads are working and I congratulate the Department of Transport on everything that it has done. The number of drink-driving incidents has reduced, but, unfortunately, drink-driving is still responsible for up to 14 per cent. of deaths on our roads. The need for deterrence is still as strong as it has always been.

I am aware that the Government's annual Christmas advertising campaign, which rams home the awful consequences of drink-driving, is due to start on 6 December. Over the years, that campaign has been successful in reducing the number of those who drink and drive. It has been assisted by the way in which society has come to view those who act in such an irresponsible manner. The attitude to drink-driving has changed drastically and people now view with contempt those who take the wheel when under the influence of alcohol. That shows how effective the medium of television advertising can be.

Mr. Deva: Those of us who drive are careful not to do so when under the influence of drink. People may go to a dinner party or a ball by taxi, consume some alcohol and then take a taxi home. In the morning one assumes that one is sober enough to drive a car, but there is no way or knowing whether one is under or over the limit. The instruction and advice available to the average driver on whether he should drive his car in the morning, having consumed alcohol the night before, is scarce. That problem has been on my mind for some time and I wonder whether my hon. Friend has any views on it.

Mr. Ottaway: I would have liked more notice of my hon. Friend's question, but I imagine that one should allow at least eight hours before driving. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can provide an answer when he winds up. I believe that one can buy a personal breathalyser, but that there is some doubt about their reliability. If one has any doubt, one should not drive. I do not argue that no alcohol should be drunk, because I believe that the present threshold is about right. If one has drunk half a pint of shandy, for example, there is no reason why one should not drive home. Perhaps those of a scientific mind may be able to answer my hon. Friend's question later.

Under revised guidance in the Road Traffic Act 1991, the courts can ensure that drink-drivers and those who cause death through dangerous driving receive the sentences that they deserve and which reflect society's attitude to drivers who recklessly endanger lives by their selfish actions.

New and younger drivers remain high accident risks. Although they represent only 10 per cent. of all drivers, they are responsible for 25 per cent. of all accidental road deaths. I welcome the Government's announcement of new measures to reduce accidents caused by newly qualified drivers. Most important among them is the attempt through education to change attitudes. The Department of Transport has proposed the development of a scheme devised by the Driving Standards Agency in collaboration with the insurance industry, to give newly qualified drivers financial incentives. They would undertake a structured training course to improve the driving standards of that vulnerable group, designed to impart skills such as observation, hazard perception and awareness that are known to make drivers safer but which can take years to acquire. Drivers who successfully complete the six sessions that comprise the course could be guaranteed a discount on their insurance premiums, to reward skills that are so necessary to that high-risk category.

Automobile Association research showed that young, newly qualified drivers do not know how to drive safely and are sometimes known to choose to drive badly, often solely to impress their friends. The AA has asked the

[Mr. Ottaway]

Government to consider implementing measures to deter bad driving behaviour with lower penalty point thresholds for new drivers than for experienced motorists. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister carefully to consider those proposals and to work hand in hand with the insurance incentives that I mentioned.

Another major cause of traffic accidents is total disregard for speed limits by a small number of road users. Excessive speed is a contributory factor in 30 per cent. of all road accidents. That single most important behavioural factor endangers, especially in built-up areas, the lives of not only drivers but pedestrians. Of the seven people killed in traffic accidents in the borough of Croydon this year, six were pedestrians—speed being a primary cause.

The introduction of speed cameras in certain areas has reduced deaths and serious injury by up to 40 per cent. That is a remarkable achievement, but detectors that alert a driver when a radar trap or camera is ahead are, according to the police, increasing in popularity. It is not illegal to supply such equipment—only to use it. Until there is a sea change in public opinion against motorists who speed, there will be drivers who continue to believe that the law applies to everyone but themselves and who will look for ways to avoid being caught.

There are more subtle ways of preventing road accidents. For more than 70 years, we have taken part in an annual ritual which leads to more road accidents—caused by the lack of daylight in the darker hours that we experience when the clocks are put back one hour in September. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!] Twilight, when many people are on their way home from work or school, is a time when traffic accidents are notoriously common. I raised that matter when I intervened on my hon. Friend the Minister's opening speech, and his response was fair. I appreciate that the matter embraces a number of Departments, but I hope that the Government will address the issue seriously. As we have just heard, there is a strong feeling that something straightforward can be done to reduce the number of accidents. As most hon. Members know, the Daylight Extra group, supported by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, is actively campaigning on that issue. The transition would be achieved simply by failing to put back the clocks one autumn. We would then go on to double summer time the following summer.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), who has taken a particular interest in that subject, will develop that theme in due course. The pure financial benefit of that inaction has been estimated by the Policy Studies Institute at more than £200 million, but the reduction in the cost of human lives—an estimated 140 fewer fatalities and just under 2,000 fewer injuries on the roads—is a much more compelling argument. British summer time was maintained throughout the winters of 1968-71 as an experiment which the House ended in 1970. Opposition has come mainly from the agricultural and construction industries, but subsequent analysis shows that the experiment was effective in reducing the number of road casualties, especially among pedestrians and children.

The number of lives saved by wearing seat belts in rear seats of cars is about the same as would be saved by an extra hour of daylight. The Government have proved their commitment to safety by implementing the former measure; I sincerely hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider carefully the benefits of that simple but effective measure.

Another issue that has a great bearing on the number of accidents that take place each year is the urban road environment. Many steps can be taken to make our local roads safer, such as traffic calming through the use of speed ramps; chicanes; improved road markings; and other measures. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam mentioned the need for more humping on local roads. This has become a valuable tool in slowing down traffic and has helped to avoid pedestrian injuries and fatalities. My hon. Friend is probably well aware, however, that local communities are sometimes upset that local roads that they have used for years have become irritatingly slow.

Lady Olga Maitland *rose—*

Mr. Ottaway: Before I give way to my hon. Friend, may I say that mothers in my constituency want more humps while residents in the same roads want fewer.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way on this extremely important topic. My long-suffering constituents have put up with those wretched humps for years. When I talk to the highways department of Sutton council, however, I discover that people hate them. Councillors make that admission with a rueful laugh. When I ask why they stick to humps without considering the litany of other ideas that would achieve the same objective, the answer is that we are stuck in a groove on this issue. The time has come to look at the wider selection and move away from those wretched humps.

Mr. Ottaway: I partially agree with my hon. Friend. As Abraham Lincoln said, you cannot please all the people some of the time—let alone some of the people all the time.

The most vulnerable sectors of society, but mainly children, have great difficulty judging the speed of oncoming traffic. In Croydon, 80 children on average are injured, some seriously, each year. The Government's successful campaign, "Kill your speed—not a child", helps to force home the message that traffic speed in urban areas all too often has tragic consequences. Thankfully, however, in certain areas including parts of my constituency, traffic-calming measures have reduced accidents in known urban black spots by as much as 20 per cent. The schemes have the benefit of improving road safety without necessarily reducing traffic volume and I hope that many more local authorities will consider using them.

Before dealing with passenger and driver safety, I should like to make a further plea to my hon. Friend the Minister. I took my driving test some 30 years ago and passed it the first time, having been examined on the "Highway Code". But what I was examined on 30 years ago bears no resemblance to the road signs that I now see around the country. One may read in the newspapers what new signs mean—"straight on" or "no right turn", for instance—but it is an ad hoc way of learning about new regulations. It is a fundamental principle of British law that ignorance of the law is no excuse, but that does not help when we are trying to improve road safety and reduce the number of accidents.

I suggest that when a fundamental change is made to road signs or regulations, the Department of Transport might distribute to all holders of driving licences a copy of the new "Highway Code". I do not know how many drivers there are but, if we assumed that there were 20 million and that printing and distribution costs were about £1 a head, the cost would be £20 million. It may be substantial but it would be worth while if it resulted in greater awareness of new road safety regulations.

I have so far confined my comments to accident prevention but I deal now with driver and passenger safety. Although I welcome the reduction in the number of accidents which I have mentioned, users must be able to be confident that, in the unfortunate event of an accident, their vehicle would provide protection. More than 90 per cent. of accidents are due to human error while very few are caused by mechanical failure or the inadequacy of vehicle equipment.

However, poor maintenance of vehicles can have tragic consequences. The fatal accident at Sowerby bridge in 1993, caused by a heavy goods vehicle having poorly maintained brakes, led to the death of six people. The promotion of safer vehicles by the Department of Transport through research and constant updating of standards is crucial. Research has shown that, although enhanced vehicle construction standards do not prevent many accidents, substantial reductions in accident severity can be achieved by using better-built vehicles. Many manufacturers have recently adopted such enhanced standards.

The introduction of passenger and driver air bags, anti-lock brakes and crash bars, has probably made a major contribution to the reduction in the number of fatalities and serious injuries in the past decade. Many features are now being supplied in standard production models in reaction to heightened awareness of safety. Indeed, safety is often a more prominent feature of advertisements than speed, which also assists in the necessary shift in public opinion.

Following the tragic accident on the M40, when the whole nation felt for the 12 pupils from a midlands school who were killed in a minibus accident, the Government introduced a package of measures to improve the safety of minibuses and coaches. First, my hon. Friend the Minister has taken steps through the European Commission to introduce the compulsory fitting of seat belts in all minibuses and coaches used specifically for the transport of children. I do not share the views of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), who criticised the Government for not taking adequate action in time. Were she ever to be part of the governing party, she would realise that governing the country is not easy, especially when one has to take steps through the European Commission. I believe that the action taken by my hon. Friend the Minister is utterly reasonable and sustainable.

Secondly, the Government have amended the public service vehicle carrying regulations to ensure that the three-for-two concession, whereby three children were permitted to travel in a double seat, was no longer allowed. I congratulate the Department on that. Such measures can and do work.

In a serious road accident involving a Croydon school minibus in 1993, it was generally recognised that pupils were saved from more serious injury by their seat belts. That has led to the borough of Croydon introducing a £40,000 plan aimed at installing seat belts in all Croydon school coaches.

Standards are rising but there is an ever-increasing hidden danger on our roads—the breed of vehicle now termed "cut and shut". As I am sure the House knows, this is a practice whereby two write-offs are welded together to make one complete but corrupted vehicle. Each year in the United Kingdom up to 150,000 written-off vehicles are rebuilt and returned to the roads. They may have been so badly damaged that they are deemed to be beyond repair, but they can be legally reused. In 1993, the Royal Automobile Club and vehicle inspections across the country uncovered some 800 cars that had been created in that way. That figure, applied to the whole second-hand car market, is very disturbing.

There is nothing wrong with making financial write-offs roadworthy if the cars are repaired well, resulting in a safe and reliable vehicle. However, there are increasing examples of substandard work undertaken by unqualified and uncaring profiteers who produce unsafe and potentially lethal vehicles which they then sell to unsuspecting purchasers. As a result, unsuspecting motorists, many buying their first cars, are placed at risk. Some are lucky enough to discover the defect, but others may be seriously injured or even killed when a badly repaired write-off crashes. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can look at that aspect, if not in his winding-up speech, perhaps in the future.

Since 1979, the Government have been at the forefront of road safety campaigning. Many measures, including the introduction of seat belts, standards for child restraints and tougher penalties for drink-drivers, have resulted in a 40 per cent. reduction in total road traffic casualties, a 44 per cent. drop in serious injuries and a massive 66 per cent. fall in the number of deaths caused by drink-driving. However, the Government cannot ensure that people use the roads responsibly. They can only encourage good driving practice and legislate against those who endanger themselves and others through reckless behaviour on the roads.

The drive for improved road safety is and must continue to be a partnership between the Government, the police, local authorities and, above all, those who use the roads. Motorists and pedestrians must bear responsibility for their own safety and they must ensure that their actions do not endanger themselves or others. Public information campaigns and visible roadside technology are both increasing people's perception of the risk of being caught. However, until we see a change in public opinion, as we have seen on the drink-driving issue, there will always be those who believe that being caught and fined is the worst that can happen to them when they show a total disregard for the law. We must strive to make them understand that the result could be much, much worse.

1.16 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this important debate and I am even more delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) who, in his inimitable fashion, has put his finger on some of the crucial issues relating to road safety. I shall touch on two central topics. One is the effect of road design on safety statistics and the other is daylight saving, which

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

has already been covered by one or two hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South.

As you may know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for some time, there has been quite a campaign to ensure that we change our clocks so that we are on the same time as most of Europe throughout the year. I genuinely believe that it is an idea whose time has come. One need only run through the host of organisations concerned with road safety and many others that back the proposal to understand the massive support generally for such a proposition.

In October this year, an NOP survey showed that three quarters of British people were in favour of the change including, surprisingly, 62 per cent. of Scots. That is an amazing statistic when one considers that traditionally, the three groups in opposition to the proposal have been the Scots, farmers and builders. The Scots seem to be coming round to the idea, possibly because the statistics show that they would benefit proportionately more than the rest of the country, according to the experts, in terms of saving lives and preventing injuries on the roads. Even the National Farmers Union, at least in England and Wales, has dropped its previous opposition to the proposal, no doubt again persuaded by the road traffic figures.

The honour roll of organisations and individuals supporting the proposal is far too long to go through here. We have heard about the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, about Age Concern, and about the organisation of which I am happy to be a member—the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, or PACTS.

Having considered all the arguments, I introduced a ten-minute Bill, the Summer Time (Amendment) Bill, on the subject some months ago. When I read the Order Paper, I was horrified to find that my ten-minute Bill was on the same day as Scottish questions. Both sides of the House were awash, if I may use that expression, with Scottish Members. Even so, the Bill was carried comfortably by 103 votes to 86. I believe that on a more typical day on a free vote there would be a more significant majority in favour of the proposal. I think that there would be support from all parties and, indeed, from all the countries making up the European Union.

It is perhaps a matter for regret that the fairly simple proposal that I am recommending was not featured in the Gracious Speech. I hope that one of the lucky private Members in the ballot yesterday will take it up. If that happens, I hope that the proposal will ultimately acquire Government support, and it will be seen through.

Apart from road safety, the proposal has a variety of arguments and factors in its favour. It is clear that there would be an enormous benefit to the British tourist industry. I do not apologise for mentioning that during a road safety debate, representing as I do one of the country's premier resort towns. It is estimated by the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board that an extra £1 billion-worth of revenue would be attracted to tourism by the change that I am advocating.

It is reckoned that £250 million would be saved on electricity bills alone by introducing the change. We often lose sight of doing business with Europe, but there is the irritating difference in time of one hour, or even two hours in some instances, when we travel to the European mainland on business or when we do business on the telephone or by means of fax or telex.

Also to be considered is security in a broad context—I shall deal with roads specifically later in my speech. I have in mind the security of women of any age walking alone after dark, young children going out after dark and the elderly. It is a regrettable fact of modern life that in constituencies such as mine, elderly people often have a sort of self-imposed curfew when it becomes dark. They are unwilling to go out or to answer their door after dark. The change would give an enhanced feeling of security as well as actual security to those groups in our society.

Overwhelmingly, the most important single reason at the top of the list for double summer time, or central European time, as it is sometimes called, is road accidents. We have heard about that aspect already. It is estimated that such a change would mean 140 fewer deaths on our roads and 520 fewer serious injuries. That would result in an annual saving, apart from all the grief and unhappiness caused by such accidents, of over £200 million, including national health service costs.

In Scotland, double summer time would result in an overall reduction of about 60 deaths and serious injuries each year. As I have said, that would be a greater reduction proportionately than that for England and Wales.

If right hon. and hon. Members have not had the opportunity of reading Mayer Hillman's pamphlet entitled "Time for Change", I commend it to them. It is published by the Policy Studies Institute. It sets out with relentless logic and in considerable detail the arguments for the change.

There is still a sort of instinctive reaction against the change that I am advocating because of worries about dark early mornings and children going to school, for example. A mythology seems to have built up since the days of the Wilson Government, which some hon. Members may just remember, when the experiment was tried unsuccessfully.

The expert evidence is clear. It shows that although there might be a modest increase in the number of accidents first thing in the morning, there would an enormous net saving because of fewer accidents in the evenings. The reason for that seems to be principally that drivers' concentration is less acute when they are driving home in the evening than it is first thing in the morning.

Mr. Deva: Is my hon. Friend aware that medical evidence from the Royal College of Surgeons and from opticians shows that, as twilight falls, it is much more difficult for the eyes to adjust to deepening gloom rather than the other way round when the day becomes lighter? It is part of the aging process that people find it more difficult to see properly as it becomes darker.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his obviously expert knowledge of the aging process. I was not aware of that research and I am grateful to him for adding yet another brick to the wall of the inevitability of that provision eventually becoming part of British law.

The PSI report makes it clear that if clocks are put forward one hour, more journeys home in the evening could be made in daylight. As more of our population are fortunately employed in white-collar occupations and start work a little later in the mornings, problems with the

darker earlier hours are becoming fewer. The evidence is clear and detailed. The attention paid by all road users, not only drivers but children going home from school and other pedestrians making their way home, deteriorates as the day wears on.

I commend the PSI report to the House. It states:

"In the four winter months alone from November to February inclusive, and taking into account road accidents on all seven days of the week, there are over 50 per cent. more fatal and serious injuries among adults in the peak hours from 4 pm to 7 pm as from 7 am to 10 am, and nearly three times as many among children in the peak hours from 3 pm to 6 pm as from 7 am to 10 am."

As we know, there have been many legislative changes in recent years in respect of the behaviour of all types of road users. As has already been said, in 1992 the then Transport and Road Research Laboratory analysed the likely effects of the introduction of double summer time and I have quoted the figures of 140 fatalities, 520 serious injuries and 1,300 lesser injuries that could be avoided.

My second point relates to the effect of design on road safety. We have heard much about design. One issue when designing roads is that of speed cameras. The Road Traffic Act 1991 introduced new dangerous driving offences and it made the use of cameras for speeding and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) very sensibly pointed out, for traffic light jumping, very much easier. The latest figures show that there has been a 37 per cent. reduction in deaths and serious injuries as a result of the use of cameras. That is very heartening.

There are also much broader questions about the design of roads. In my intervention during the Minister's excellent speech, I pointed out that motorways are, on the whole, safer to drive on than dual carriageways which, in turn, are safer to drive on than single carriageways. The evidence for that is clear.

I want to link that argument with a current issue that affects my constituents most significantly. That is the proposal for the new A27 road between Lewes and Polegate. There are many arguments in favour of that scheme, and I shall adumbrate them again shortly with my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads. For example, there are environmental reasons. One of the issues that the anti-roads lobby seems incapable of grasping is that, on occasions, road schemes actually assist the environment.

There are many economic arguments for the road scheme in my constituency of Eastbourne and in other parts of east Sussex. There are tourism implications in terms of access to the town, which is very difficult at the moment, and there is linking with other road schemes, including the A22 new route, work on which started at the beginning of the month. As you follow such matters closely, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will know that the Government have allocated £25 million to that scheme.

Therefore, it is all the more surprising that a group of protesters is opposing that scheme. I suppose that, in the modern age, it is inevitable that any road scheme, no matter how innocuous, attracts protesters like a magnet. That rag-tag group of opponents includes some of those who may fairly be called the great and the good who happen to have their second homes near the route, some people, including some local Liberal Democrats, who happen to have their homes close to the proposed route, and, inevitably, the Friends of the Earth. The road is extremely dangerous at the moment and it can be made significantly safer simply by dint of turning it into a standard dual carriageway.

I shall quote briefly some statistics. The Sussex police have recorded 141 injury accidents, resulting in 267 casualties. There have been seven fatalities, 63 serious injuries and 197 slight injuries on that stretch of road during the five years to December 1993. That equates to 31 personal injury accidents per 100 million vehicle kilometres, which is extremely high compared with other types of roads. It is estimated, in a report to the county council's highways and transportation committee, that that has cost the community more than £10.5 million altogether—a very significant figure indeed.

Traffic flows on the A27 are very heavy, with 22,000 vehicles a day. It is well within the ordinary parameters of what is required in respect of traffic flows for modern dual carriageways. In fact, the report also points out that

"In safety terms, there are significant gains to be made. The accident rate is approximately one third"—

that is, for a dual carriageway—

"of that of a single carriageway."

I am indebted to Mr. Brian Stoodley, a leading local surgeon at Eastbourne district general hospital, who has taken an interest in the issue. He is one of the excellent medical team in our local hospital who literally must pick up the pieces of lives and of people when they are injured or killed in tragic accidents.

I underline the point that people in the anti-roads lobby and Opposition Members from time to time oppose roads, often without seeing the safety and other implications in certain road schemes. I do not say that every road scheme is needed. Some road schemes can rightly be criticised, but many road schemes—the A27 Lewes to Polegate is a classic example—will not only enhance the environment and the local economy but will be significantly safer than the existing road. If that means that my constituents will remain alive and well rather than be killed or injured, I am very much in favour of the scheme. I support the Government's integrated, widespread approach to all elements that will make road safety such a success story.

1.34 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): I am grateful to be allowed to follow my distinguished colleagues in speaking in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has just made a very interesting and articulate speech, putting the case for increasing daylight hours. He has pursued the matter with some vigour, and I commend his efforts to the House.

The people of Brentford and Isleworth, Chiswick and Hounslow are very concerned about road safety. My constituency is bordered by Heathrow airport and is blessed with motorways which allow access to the heart of London. As a consequence, my constituents suffer a daily stream of traffic to and from London and the airport.

In recent months, it has become obvious that the traffic in the area will get worse unless we do something to address it. I refer to the proposal by the British Airports Authority to build terminal 5 at Heathrow, which will double the airport's capacity from 48 million to about 80 million passengers a year. My constituents wonder how those people will be transported to and from the airport. If they are to be carried by road, it will have some bearing on my constituents' safety.

[Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva]

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London on attempting to make it safer for motorists to use the road system in my area. I congratulate him particularly on installing the traffic lights system at Chiswick roundabout which has enabled the traffic to flow far more easily. In the past I received letters from elderly constituents who said that they were terrified to go near the roundabout before the installation of traffic lights. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his foresight and vigour in implementing that system.

The Government have a superb record on road safety. As we have heard this morning, the number of road fatalities has decreased by 40 per cent. since 1979, serious injuries have decreased by 44 per cent. since 1979, drink-driving related road deaths are down by 66 per cent., and motor cycle fatalities are down by 63 per cent. Those are bald facts which the Labour party must recognise as a substantial achievement by the Government. The Government have taken the bull by the horns and acted to improve road safety.

The Government have looked at future trends very carefully. It is obvious that the amount of road traffic will increase and in London particularly there must be a balance between road traffic and public transport.

I am concerned—I would like the Minister to take note of this—that my constituents have had to suffer a number of road works on major arterial roads in the area. Many cones have been stuck all over roads, causing motorists to change lanes and creating traffic jams. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has said, it is not very nice and it is also very irritating and quite dangerous. I ask my hon. Friend: why do cones have to stay in the same place for so long? I recognise that repair and maintenance work must be carried out, but why is it that every time I drive in that area no one is doing very much work, but the cones are still there? I receive letters asking me to explain that, so I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would do something about a matter that causes great concern and irritation to my constituents.

Various new and radical ideas have been suggested by my hon. Friends during the debate. I want to add a radical idea that may prove helpful. I have noted that motorists on motorways, especially in wet or foggy conditions, tend to drive extremely fast. They come close to the car in front and seemingly ignore the fact that stopping distances increase with the speed.

With today's modern technology and with all the radar equipment, is not it conceivable to fit cars with a warning bleep that would be activated if a motorist approached the car in front of him at too high a speed and without allowing a safe stopping distance? That would be an automatic means of telling drivers to slow down and put sufficient space between their cars and those in front. I am sure that the technology to provide such a device exists. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister would encourage research into that. I do not know what the state-of-the-art technology may be, but I am sure that there is a simple solution as it would be based on radar, which we have had since the 1930s.

I hope that the Government will continue to deal with road safety with the vigour and determination they have shown since they took office. I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) and tried to concentrate on her main theme. Unfortunately, I did not find her speech either comprehensive or comprehensible. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will put that right.

1.42 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I have great pleasure in bringing up the rear from the Back Benches in such an important debate. It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva). He raised a point that I wanted to raise, so I shall simply give him my total support on the problem of what I call motorway madness.

There is an argument for promoting research into developing some sort of radar system to stop cars coming too close or speeding. I dread the experience of a driver of a powerful car roaring up the motorway with lights full on—he would blow his horn if he could—and coming right up behind me, almost trying physically to push me aside. That is not safe driving. Likewise, that monster might come right up behind me and then zip to the left and overtake on the inside. That sort of behaviour is pernicious and extremely dangerous. Currently, the only thing that brings such a monster under control is the sight of a police patrol car.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Lady touches on an important matter—drivers' motorway habits. She described someone overtaking her on the inside. That has some bearing on driver education. Why is it that time and again there are lots of cars in the second and third lanes of motorways, but none in the first lane? Perhaps she contributed to the problem by not moving to the nearside lane at the right time.

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. Gentleman missed the point. One can be driving along in the fast lane legitimately, but if a car rushes up behind at well over 100 mph it can put normal good motorway behaviour out of kilter. No matter how impatient, it is totally unacceptable for any motorist to weave in and out of the traffic as the hon. Gentleman described, although he has a point as motorists must stick to the appropriate lane. None the less, that does not mean that they have to hop around like jack-in-the-boxes because a road monster has leapt up behind them. That is motorway madness and it spins out of control. We must consider more measures to bring it into proportion.

The debate has touched on many topics, including seat belts. While I congratulate the Government on their enormously important campaign to introduce seat belts and the education that went with it, which has resulted in everyone being aware of the fact that they must belt up if they sit in the front seats, regrettably the campaign to encourage people to belt up in the back seats has not taken off. Far too often they are not doing so. I congratulate the royal family, who seem to be meticulous about wearing their seat belts when they sit in the back—especially the Princess of Wales. I want that campaign to go further.

On car design, hon. Members said that improved technology has resulted in cars with more powerful engines. I hope that the Government will join a campaign to encourage the use of small, nippy and effective cars on the basis that small is beautiful. The Minister touched on that, but if we are to go down the sensible route of getting people into sensible cars, we must get away from the idea

that it is smart to drive an enormous, high-performance car. I say so with some feeling. I drive a modest car, a Ford Sierra estate with a roof rack, which is in the motherly rather than the racing mode.

Other Conservative Members looked somewhat askance when my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) outlined his radical ideas for traffic lights at night. Although it caused some amusement, radical ideas often get the brush-off in the first instance and I urge him to continue trying to persuade the Government to legislate for that if the idea has some merit and to back it up with some factual information. It is said that we must think the unthinkable, or we shall never achieve. It is too difficult for me to say whether I would support his ideas, but they should be fully explored.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words. But to paraphrase Disraeli, "You laugh at me now, but the time will come when you will hear me".

Lady Olga Maitland: Speed cameras have undoubtedly played a useful role on the roads and their use should be increased. Unfortunately, drivers are beginning to get the idea that the cameras are not a deterrent as they will not catch up with them. We must therefore ensure that they are backed by some sort of power or sanction. It is not enough merely to monitor motorists. We must catch up with the offenders.

The topic of red routes has not been raised today, but there is great feeling about it in my constituency, particularly in Cheam village. If my hon. Friend the Minister opens his map of London he will see that a red route passes through Cheam village. It is a quiet village with broad streets that could easily take almost six cars abreast. As a result of the proposal to introduce a red route, parking has been driven off the streets and local shopkeepers will lose trade.

Cheam is already suffering from village starvation of services. If the retailers cannot provide their services, they will go out of business, which in turn will affect the elderly, the disabled and quick shoppers because they cannot avail themselves of the services of local shopkeepers. Does the red route have to go through the quiet, safe little village of Cheam, which is way outside the intensely urban area of London? I beg my hon. Friend to reflect on the question. He has doubtless already received representations from my constituents, but I should like to emphasise that the feeling in my constituency is strong and hostile.

On a more positive note, I congratulate the Government on their tremendous success in reducing the level of accidents in this country. It is yet another tribute to our efforts to bring rationality to the roads and to save lives, and the success should be shouted from the roof tops. We should be proud of it as it is a credit to us. I was sorry that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) spoke grudgingly about an achievement that has changed the map of Britain in terms of road safety.

Ms Walley: Does not the hon. Lady understand that if we do not have the same number of spot checks on vehicles, there will be an increase in the number of dangerous vehicles on our roads? The Minister might say that there is no suggestion of that, but he should know what took place during the course of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention—she sounded somewhat defensive.

Families have been tragically torn apart because a loved one has been killed, very often by a drunk driver. I speak with personal experience because the wife of one of my first cousins was killed in an accident, having been smashed into by a drunk driver. She was barely 30, had two young children and left a grieving widower.

All too often my constituency's local papers, the *Sutton and Cheam Herald* and the *Sutton Borough Guardian*, feature appalling car crashes that have occurred as a result of drink-driving. In any week one can guarantee at least one third of the court cases reported will cover a drink-driving charge. Last year alone, nationally, more than 500 people died as a result of drink-driving. The encouraging news is that the figure has fallen by a half over the past 10 years. In 1984, more than 1,000 people were killed. That shows that today's programme of stick, carrot and persuasion is changing public attitudes. Drivers involved in accidents are more likely to be breath-tested, but less likely to fail than they were 10 years ago.

As we move into the Christmas season of office parties, now is the time for the Government, as they always do, to step up their advertising campaign on drink-driving. Although some people were startled by the shock approach of those advertisements and the horror they revealed, frankly it was worth it. If that campaign can cut the number of people killed in drink-driving accidents this year from 500 to 250, it would save many more families from suffering a devastating bereavement and a miserable Christmas.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend will probably not recall it because she is far too young, but when the then Minister of State for Transport, Barbara Castle, introduced penalties against drink-driving she was interviewed by the BBC and other media. They portrayed her action as draconian because it was considered that she was trying to deter people from having a good time. Surely that demonstrates how far we have moved on from those ignorant days.

Lady Olga Maitland: I agree with my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to Baroness Castle for her efforts to prevent drink-driving.

How interesting it is to note how social habits have changed. It is now the normal way of life for a couple invited to a party to discuss who will drink and who will drive. It is quite normal for a host to serve soft drinks and a party goer who sticks to orange juice or tomato juice is no longer regarded as a wimp or a killjoy.

Parents also play a vital role when their children give parties by insisting that all the guests should stay overnight. That may mean we have households of sleeping bags all over the floor and no space at the breakfast table in the morning, but, as parents, we are acutely aware that we should not allow young people to drive after going to a party.

When I attend constituency association dinners I notice that many people determinedly leave their cars at home and arrive by taxi. When we have a dinner at the House of Commons the guests hire a coach. Attitudes have not

[Lady Olga Maitland]

changed by accident, but because the Government have taken determined action to promote good behaviour on the roads and I congratulate them on that.

I think that we could still go further and we should look at banning drivers from drinking any alcohol. I know that that is the subject of much debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) has already suggested that perhaps one or two drinks is permissible. I have the feeling that we have reached the point when drivers should not be allowed to drink. For one thing, it is extremely difficult to know what is one's real limit—everyone has a different benchmark. Three glasses of wine may knock one person out, while another person may be safe to drive. I think that it would be better to say that drivers should not drink at all.

Such a prohibition would help to reach the worst offenders—those heavy drinkers, usually male, in their mid-20s. Research shows that young men reach their peak age of misbehaviour in terms of drink-driving at 24. Next comes 29-year-old men, who are also high-risk offenders and, when stopped, are found to have drunk themselves blatantly over the limit, as though they could not give a damn.

The other road menace is the white spirit drinker, who sticks to gin or vodka and who takes advice from no one—that is, until we make the penalty really fit the crime. We need to create that deterrence. Unless we hit those drivers hard and impose penalties that hurt, they will carry on regardless.

I welcome the considerable powers that the courts have been given as a result of Government concern. Although the maximum penalty for someone who kills a person while under the influence of alcohol is five years' imprisonment, the courts should not hesitate from passing more custodial sentences when appropriate. They should certainly not hesitate about withdrawing a driver's licence and banning someone from the roads, not just for two or three years, but at least for 10 years or even for life. When I have suggested that to lawyers and judges they have argued that that is not practicable because such people would return to the roads anyway. I do not accept that argument, and we should examine seriously the question of banning drivers for life.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister wishes to reply to the debate, but I will make two more points. My hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, South and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) expressed their concern about changing to double summer time. It is iniquitous to have rolled along all these years with an inconvenient mode, which makes life difficult for business men and is dangerous for road users.

It is estimated that 2,000 accidents a year occur when dusk falls earlier in the afternoon, including 120 deaths. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to press on with supporting double summer time. I cannot imagine anyone who would object. There is a myth that children can go to school only in daylight and that people can wake up only in daylight. It is a fact that people are most alert in the morning, even if it is dark. In the afternoon and early evening, people are weary and do not concentrate so well. That is when they need all the light available.

I was lucky enough to be drawn 17th in the ballot for private Members' Bills. I have not yet decided the subject of my Bill, but I am seriously considering whether the rules and regulations for newly qualified drivers should be stiffened, and penalties imposed in the first year or two of their driving lives. Drivers under 21 are involved in 1,000 of the almost 3,500 fatal accidents that occur every year. They are positively lethal and it is time to give serious thought to measures that could bring them under control.

If such drivers committed offences that exceeded a minimum limit in their first year of driving, they could be compelled to retake their driving test.

Ms Walley: Is the hon. Lady able to say whether the Minister would approve such legislation introduced under the private Member's Bill procedure?

Lady Olga Maitland: I have every reason to believe that it would have his support. I am sure that it would receive across-the-board support. It should be a non-contentious issue, and I should be sorry if the Opposition obstructed its passage.

Mr. Miller: No. It would find sponsors among Opposition Members.

Lady Olga Maitland: That is good to know.

In an earlier intervention, I raised the question of traffic calming. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to encourage local authorities to adopt more flexible attitudes to traffic-calming measures. I am not convinced that road humps are the only way to control speeding drivers. Local authority traffic departments take the view that they must follow the Department's guidelines, but they should not follow only one route.

The Department of Transport has produced some colourful booklets about alternative schemes, but somehow the message is still not getting through. Not only is it unpleasant to go over those humps in a conventional car, but, as the Minister has admitted, we should look at the problems faced by low-platform buses that are coming on stream throughout the country to help not only the disabled but many other people. They would find the humps difficult to cope with. Ambulances that must drive up residential streets riddled with those humps have a dangerous task. Imagine what it is like when an ambulance carries someone with a spinal injury. It defies belief that patients are subjected to journeys that could make them more devastatingly ill than they already are. The point has been made and I have the impression that the Minister will look into it further.

I congratulate the Minister and his Department on the enormous progress that has been made in attitudes towards road safety. We have changed society's attitudes through schools, teaching children how to ride bicycles, and educating people on how to behave on the roads and on drink-driving. My hon. Friend should not flinch from taking the credit which is entirely due to him.

2.5 pm

Mr. Norris: With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have had an excellent debate this morning and I am glad of an opportunity to refer to a number of the points that have been made and to try to answer as many as I can.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) and I have sat on opposite sides of the Dispatch Box for several years and I have heard her make a number of speeches. In all honesty, today's was not one of her best. A classic error that permeates the Opposition's thinking and which we heard trotted out again today is that, the minute we try to make an organisation with the slightest responsibility, direct or tangential, for safety even remotely more efficient, it necessarily results in reductions in safety standards.

Mr. Miller: My hon. Friend did not say that.

Mr. Norris: With respect to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), I listened carefully and the record will show that that is exactly what she said. Moreover, it was the tenor of what she said, and what she was not prepared to say explicitly she implied. To put the matter to rest, may I make it clear that we have made it a cardinal principle of all the deregulation legislation that we have introduced—it is a cardinal principle of the concept of deregulation—that it means getting rid of unnecessary regulation that does not contribute to safety, better health or higher living standards but is simply bureaucratic nonsense.

The hon. Lady was not on the deregulation Bill Committee whereas I was. I sat there month in and month out, as did the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. Try as they might during the Bill's proceedings, there was not one occasion when the Opposition could show that there was even the possibility that safety standards might be compromised. That was a given, and it remains a given.

In the context of road safety, I admit that we have required efficiency savings from the Vehicle Inspectorate, for example. The inspectorate responded constructively, as it always does, and those savings will be available to taxpayers to spend in areas where there is a need. The savings will be derived from eliminating waste, from restructuring and from redesigning responsibilities, which responsible organisations are doing all day long. There will be no reduction in enforcement activity or in safety levels because the Government are fundamentally committed to the concept of safety in the office, in factories, homes, schools, the workplace and, more important, on the roads. Let there be no doubt about that.

The hon. Lady mentioned the availability of police resources. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary recently wrote to chief constables about key policing objectives. There is general agreement that one of their objectives should be to ensure that road traffic law is properly enforced in the most efficient and cost-effective way. He has commissioned a thorough study of the use of public resources and established a working group of officials, including members of the police and HM inspectorate.

It appears that some functions are not central to the police's responsibility—for example, escorting abnormal loads, although the hon. Lady mentioned a number of others which could be said to fall into the same category—where it might be possible to release expensive and expert police resources for more useful work. They would, by definition, be areas of activity where no great technical expertise was demanded or fairly straightforward supervision jobs. Before anyone says that escorting an abnormal load requires expertise, I must point out that it is a discrete skill and it may be possible with such activities to obtain a more rational deployment of services. If so, we would be keen to do so.

Ms Walley *rose—*

Mr. Miller *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I will give way first to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North as a matter of protocol.

Ms Walley: I have listened carefully to what the Minister says. The important point of principle in this instance is that the police have the power to stop vehicles on the road. That power needs to operate in conjunction with safety checks carried out on vehicles or in respect of any other problems that may arise. Is the Minister saying that he does not foresee a continuing role for the police with regard to their stop and search powers?

Mr. Norris: Of course I foresee a continuing role for the police in respect of stop and search powers, the Vehicle Inspectorate and traffic. The hon. Lady will know that in Northern Ireland Vehicle Inspectorate officials as well as the police have the power to stop. It provides an interesting opportunity to see what happens when one extends the principle. There may be merit in it and, if so, we should explore the notion further.

Mr. Miller: I am sure that the Minister will be aware that professional drivers of abnormal loads are deeply worried about the proposal that has been floated to remove police officers from escort duties as they feel that it would further the tendency described by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) in her peroration about motorway madness. Does he accept that solving the problem mentioned by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant)—taking breath tests at the scene of all deaths on the road—will have resource implications and can be dealt with only by involving more police officers?

Mr. Norris: Let me make it clear that I am not suggesting—nor has it been suggested during the consultation—that there should be no escorts for abnormal loads. That is not the issue. It is perfectly proper for people to express their concern. It is part of the innate conservatism of this country that the minute one suggests any change, people rush to defend the status quo. It is important that one always ensures that a change is for the better before one makes it. It is clear that there are some advantages to be gained from at least considering the proposal and the caveat mentioned by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston is sensible. In contrast to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North, he made a useful contribution to the debate on the issue of prosecution policy. I do not accept that there is evidence that it is a question of police resources. I gave the House some impressive statistics—I shall not repeat them—about police stops where breath tests are administered. The hon. Gentleman's point is a serious one and I may touch on it in a second. I do not think that the resources issue is the key to it. The key to it, as he quite rightly said, is how one reconciles the principle of consent, which neither he nor I would willingly set aside, with the important benefit that might be derived from a change. He expanded on that point very well.

[Mr. Norris]

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North mentioned bull bars. I was grateful to her for that, as it is an important point. As I am sure she knows, the technical position is that, unfortunately, some vehicles which have bull bars fitted as standard have European type-approval; there is also the question of after-fitting. I am afraid that it is not easy to take immediate action, as she suggests. Although in theory great danger could arise, we are concerned to be sure of the effect of bull bars in practice. The first question I asked when the matter was put to me was whether we could relate bull bars to a given number of additional accidents. The evidence is not great.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North is right to say that it is a real irony that although manufacturers have made great progress with crumple zones and soft fronts to reduce the impact of accidents on pedestrians, one sees fitted to vehicles, often for purely cosmetic reasons, as the hon. Lady said, pieces of equipment that have no practical use. In practice, such vehicles are unlikely to encounter a bull; we can be reasonably certain of that. Most bull bars are fitted to vehicles which are capable of driving up the side of Everest, but which scarcely ever leave the metalled road.

Ms Walley *rose—*

Mr. Norris: Does the hon. Lady want to say something? Incidentally, I know that she cannot be here for all my remarks and I quite accept that.

Ms Walley: Certain organisations, such as the Staffordshire Ambulance Trust, have voluntarily withdrawn bull bars from their vehicles. Would it be possible for the Minister to devise a way in which to redefine bull bars that were not being used for the purpose for which they were specifically designed—that is, for off-road vehicles? Would that be a way in which to deal with the problem? That would mean that fewer people would be likely to be involved in serious accidents caused by collisions.

Mr. Norris: I understand the hon. Lady's concern to try to seek a solution to the problem. As I said, there is the difficulty that certain vehicles have European type-approval for the fitting of bull bars. As with seat belts in coaches, one can make progress only at the rate that the Community allows. In some countries in the Community, there may be a more genuine need to have this fitment than there is in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle), when Minister for Roads and Traffic, took action because he was especially concerned about the issue. I erred in not referring earlier to his contribution at the Department. He contacted the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and pressed upon it the desirability of not fitting bull bars as standard. In general, there has been a good response from manufacturers, though sadly not a unanimous one.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, especially as I have had to flit in and out of the Chamber all morning. While he is on the topic of European directives, could he say a few words about the Government's intentions as regards the proposed directive on the design of coaches? I have had a letter from a Mr. Masterton of Delta Coaches in Elderslie in my constituency who is concerned that the directive will greatly endanger road safety.

Mr. Norris: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern, and that of coach operators and coach builders. We intend to be scrupulous in examining the details of the proposed directive to ensure that it is compatible with sensible construction and use regulations and will not unduly hinder the operations of responsible coach operators. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has written to me about the matter. That is excellent, and I will ensure that he receives a prompt reply to his constituent's concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) was right to invite us to engage in some lateral thinking and it is an invitation that I willingly accept. Several hon. Members have made suggestions on which I shall reflect seriously. When my hon. Friend said—it was a phrase that I shall use on other occasions—that we are looking for fewer bad drivers and fewer bad cars, that summed up exactly what we are trying to derive from the debate and from our current thinking.

My hon. Friend rightly said that it is a scandal that perhaps nearly one in 10 motorists may not be properly insured. His argument that an insurance certificate should be displayed on the windscreen is a serious one. There is a case, too, for an MOT test certificate to be displayed more obviously, when appropriate. I undertake seriously to consider the proposition.

I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind my saying that it is not the first time that I have heard the argument that insurance certificates should be placed on windscreens. However, there are factors to be taken into account such as the need to show that vehicle excise duty has been paid, clutter on the windscreen and difficulty of enforcement, for example. If I may, I will write to my hon. Friend to tell him about the recent work that we have undertaken. Perhaps I shall be able to discuss the matter with him on another occasion. He has raised a serious proposition.

My hon. Friend's point about the progressive deterioration of eyesight was extremely well made. The deterioration takes place one day at a time. It is only when circumstances such as my hon. Friend described come about that we realise that we shall not live for ever and that we are deteriorating day by day. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his contribution to the debate.

The arguments that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston advanced about statistical analyses of convictions and prosecution policies were well made. They raise complicated matters and we must take account of issues such as a reluctance to convict and the implications of the tariff system before we take action.

I undertake to draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary because I think that they merit that referral. I am grateful to him for what he had to say.

Mr. Miller: I hope that I made it clear in my earlier remarks that we have just passed the closing date for consultation with the Law Commission. I understand that the commission, as a matter of course, will read the report of what we have to say on these issues when framing its

recommendations. As for the motor manslaughter charge, it would be helpful if the Minister would put his views on record.

Mr. Norris: I do not want to be drawn into a debate on that issue at this stage, for several reasons. First, we are coming to the end of our allotted time, and the matter was not raised earlier. It might be an abuse—

Mr. Miller: I raised it.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is right. I withdraw what I so recently said. He raised the matter, but not specifically in terms of addressing the Law Commission.

Secondly, the matter is not exclusively the responsibility of the Department of Transport. It comes within the responsibilities of other ministerial colleagues. Thirdly, I would want to reflect carefully on the precise form of words that one might want to use to make a submission.

Mr. Miller: Ducking.

Mr. Norris: Those who suggest that the absence of one clear statement is ducking away from a problem tend to be the sort of people who always assume that there is a straightforward answer to all life's great and complex issues. That is invariably the wrong answer and I fear that that might well be the case here if we were to respond intemperately.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) raised several points. With regard to photographs on driving licences, let me make it clear that we propose no alteration to the arrangements whereby an individual may or may not carry a driving licence. As is the case now, a licence will be required to be produced in appropriate circumstances. The important point is that there is an issue about impersonation in driving tests and when specific licences, such as HGV, PSV and taxi licences, are being sought. It has been acknowledged that photographs would go a long way towards dealing with those problems. Some 85 per cent. of respondents to consultation on the proposition have already said that they believe photographs would be a great asset.

The use of cameras at pedestrian crossings is entirely consistent with our thinking. The use of cameras in relation to bus lane enforcement will increasingly become necessary because, as our traffic system becomes more sophisticated and, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North said, as police resources are stretched, we will have to consider how we can use technology to help us maintain a proper system of enforcement.

I have an important point to make about traffic lights. I am aware of the "amber flash to proceed with caution" system and the discreet left turn when the lights are at red. One of the features of the systems in the United States is that they generally work on fixed-time traffic lights whereas we tend to have vehicle-sensitive systems so that the lights change only when vehicles approach. Therefore, there would be few gains from the American system in this country.

I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind me saying that I slightly disagree with him about frustration. I fear that my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) got it exactly right when he questioned why a driver who is prepared to go through a red light now—and who one presumes at least bothers to stop and look both ways first—will be less safe if he drives on, perhaps without bothering to look both ways, because having seen the proceed with caution signal, he assumes that he can proceed without taking the elementary precautions.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire for his suggestions. He did say that he did not expect everyone necessarily to agree with him, but that his comments would be thought-provoking and worth while and that they certainly were.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) referred to the greatest epidemic of our time—a timely phrase. He mentioned the reissue of the "Highway Code." My hon. Friend might be interested to know that when we reissued the "Highway Code" recently after updating it, the demand from ordinary members of the public was quite extraordinary. One million copies were issued in the first month after the new "Highway Code" was issued. That illustrates the fact that my hon. Friend's point was common sense. We believe that there is merit in people reacquainting themselves with what is nowadays a more complex road safety situation than it was hitherto.

I noted what my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South said about issuing the "Highway Code" to the 25 million drivers in this country and the many more people who should be aware of it. That would obviously be a significant exercise. However, I hope that my hon. Friend is encouraged by our experience.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South made a good point about cut-and-shut cars and we will keep that issue under review as there are some worrying aspects. However, the fact that a vehicle has previously been seriously damaged does not prevent it from being perfectly safe provided that the repair has been carried out expertly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) carried on from his successful ten-minute Bill and went into some detail on the advantages of the Daylight Extra campaign. I will not repeat the point that I made. One of my colleagues was kind enough to say that I had acknowledged that there is a technical advantage which is simply undeniable in relation to road safety and I am happy to confirm that. I noted my hon. Friend's points about his scheme in relation to the A27.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth made several worthwhile points. The cones hotline number is 0345 504030. This is a good opportunity to make one point absolutely clear. The other day, I read a wonderful article by Richard Littlejohn. It was the usual wonderful trenchant stuff with which squire Littlejohn normally regales us, saying, "It can't be any use; they have moved the cones only three times." That is the classic misapprehension of what the system is designed to do. It is designed to explain precisely why the cones are present, rather than to move them. The three occasions on which we have had to say, "Goodness, we have obviously got it wrong," were the failures of the system. The success of the system is that many people who ring the hotline receive a good response, and they acknowledge that the cones are there for a reason.

On distance-measuring technology, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth will be pleased to know that the Prometheus project is going on in Europe, in which Jaguar is playing a part—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Points of Order

2.30 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will recall that, at the height of the cash-for-questions sleaze controversy last month, a number of Conservative Members, not least among them the Prime Minister, accused Mr. Al Fayed, the chairman of Harrods, of attempting to blackmail the Government by threatening to reveal ministerial impropriety. You will recall also that the Prime Minister referred those allegations to the legal authorities.

Your duties in the Chair this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might have prevented you from hearing that the Crown Prosecution Service has stated that Mr. Al Fayed has been cleared of those allegations. In fact, according to the Crown Prosecution Service, the meeting between the Prime Minister and an intermediary did not disclose

"the commission of any criminal offence by Mr. Al Fayed"

and

"further police investigations were not warranted."

In the light of that, should not Mr. Al Fayed be given the opportunity to give evidence to the Privileges Committee, so that the truth about that squalid scandal can be revealed to the House and to the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is a matter not for the Chair but for the Privileges Committee. The Chair has now ruled on it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a different point of order.

Mr. Skinner: It is a different point of order, because I am not going to deal with the Select Committee at all. What concerns me is that, as the charge of blackmail has now been found to be untrue and the Tory paymaster has been let off by the Crown Prosecution Service, it seems necessary for the Prime Minister to come to the House and make a statement—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is the same point of order, and I have already ruled on it.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Mr. Madden: I am afraid not, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will know that, as a result of statements made in the House, the Prime Minister has refused to answer parliamentary questions on those matters. Is it now in order for hon. Members to table questions concerning the Department of Trade and Industry report into the House of Fraser? I should like guidance from you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on whether questions about those matters are now permissible. As you know, they have been blocked for a considerable time. If it is possible for such questions to be tabled, I seek your guidance, as I believe that it is very important indeed that Mr. Al Fayed now has an opportunity of giving his version—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can deal with that point. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has been a Member for a long time. He knows that, if he supplies his questions to the Table Office, it will advise on whether they are in order.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CONSOLIDATION, &c., BILLS

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Bates be discharged from the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills and Mr. Hartley Booth be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

DATA PROTECTION

Ordered,

That the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Sir George Young relating to the salary and pension of the Data Protection Registrar.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

Legal Aid

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

2.33 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): A year ago, I was approached by a constituent whose story portrays the other side of the legal aid coin which has been much in the news and which has been roundly condemned. There is no need to repeat the well-known scandal, which was universally condemned, of some of the richest families receiving millions of pounds of legal aid. The only official reply we received was the statement that "rules are rules and are the same for rich and poor alike". Thus I understood the Lord Chancellor to explain the position in a recent Radio 4 interview. I hope that he will not respond in the same way to what I will reveal to the House today. I have every confidence that the Lord Chancellor's long tradition of equity will allow him to see the merits of the argument which I respectfully put before the House. I hope that he will change some existing rules to assist people.

The aspect of the legal aid scheme which I raise today needs urgent attention. It is illustrated by the case of my constituent, Mrs. A, who came to my surgery in Finchley. She was a teacher who had suffered an unfortunate injury at school which had been compounded by medical negligence in hospital. She had apparently been close to appointment as a head teacher, but as a result of her injuries her promising career was ended. I am told that the evidence of medical negligence in her case was quite strong, with doctors prepared to testify in her favour, and because of the loss of future earnings the damages could have been substantial. However, she was not able to claim legal aid benefit as she was just over the means threshold and her husband earned too much. Her problem was made more acute by the difficulties and costs associated with caring for a disabled dependent family member.

Thousands of people suffer from this predicament: their income is just too large for them to receive legal aid. My constituent was denied the chance to sue the perpetrators of her injuries because she received state invalidity benefit of just over £4,000 a year, which took her over the income threshold of about £7,500 per year.

The rules for calculating disposable income in order to establish eligibility for civil legal aid are set out in schedule 2 to the Legal Aid (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1989, which is statutory instrument 1989/338. According to paragraph 5 of the statutory instrument, all applicants who are in receipt of income support are eligible for civil legal aid regardless of their capital costs. In calculating a person's disposable income, it is important to note that payments of disability living allowance, attendance allowance, constant attendance allowance and payments from the social fund are disregarded under paragraph 6. However, the same is sadly not true of payments of invalidity benefit, which count towards a person's disposable income.

My constituent's case throws up a number of anomalies that should be addressed. First, it is crazy that one arm of the state is providing benefits which prevent a member of the public from going to court when, with the help of that second arm of the state, she could gain damages to pay back the state.

Secondly, it is wholly anomalous and unjust that some allowances are disregarded for the purpose of means testing, but that invalidity benefit is not.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): Invalidity benefit is treated differently because it is not means-tested. It is no sign of anyone's wealth by way of income or capital; a millionaire can receive invalidity benefit. It is not means-tested and, for that reason, it is treated differently from the other benefits that my hon. Friend has mentioned.

Mr. Booth: I understand about the means testing of benefits, but to a member of the public—we are dealing with members of the public—it seems wholly inconsistent and, in administrative law terms, one aims to have consistency. The policy appears to the public to be inconsistent.

Thirdly, it is wrong for our judicial system to have rules that take no account of the merits of a particular case. This was a disabled person looking after a sick dependent child but, although some costs were allowed, the total costs of looking after that dependant could not be taken fully into consideration. It is difficult to allow discretion in our judicial system, of which the legal aid system is a part. We should be big enough to allow relevant discretion in appropriate cases of hardship.

Fourthly, the legal aid system would, under the clawback rules, ensure that any damages obtained would be used to repay the state the money granted for those very legal fees.

Fifthly, the case is one more example of the state penalising marriage. The husband's income should not have been taken into consideration. The Lord Chancellor has personally been a great crusader for marriage, so I hope that he will want to change that aspect of the rule.

Last but not least, the claim needs redress. It is a classic case where the litigant cannot appear in person—she is unwell. She cannot be expected to summon medical evidence in the witness box. The courts must be open to the likes of Mrs. A, otherwise justice is denied. It might be asked why the lady does not forgo the small amount of benefit she receives so that she can receive the legal aid she deserves. That would be a cruel suggestion because she needs that money on which to live. She cannot simply forgo that benefit.

It may be said that thousands of people are in the same position as Mrs. A, but it is not a typical case. It is an unusual and particular case which, as I have argued—although I understand my hon. Friend the Minister's comment—is inconsistent with the social security system.

The legal aid fund has received considerable attention during recent years. Indeed, the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee last year even held a seminar entitled "Reinventing Legal Aid". Criticism has been defended by his Department on the basis that it has been increasingly generous in funding law suits and it points to the fact that rises in legal aid payments form the largest increase in Government spending since 1979. Apparently the result is that more solicitors are doing legal aid work, contrary to public perception. The Lord Chancellor has announced plans for this year to increase payments by 3.8 per cent., which is almost 1.5 per cent. above inflation, while the fee income for solicitors and barristers has risen by more than 16 per cent.

[Mr. Booth]

I call on the Government again to review the workings of the legal aid scheme. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister who, a couple of years ago, was prepared to meet me to discuss some administrative proposals. What I suggested would have helped the administration of the legal aid system. I was grateful for the co-operation and help that I received from my hon. Friend at that stage. One proposal, for example, was to fax the relevant legal aid offices—a modern facility that, even now, is not permitted.

I call on the Lord Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Minister to reconsider and change the rule that denies constituents such as mine the ability to take their grievances to court because they are in receipt of invalidity benefit. There are other faults with the legal aid system that should be rectified. If someone such as Mrs. A ever managed to get to court, the position could well arise that the clawback would eat away every penny of benefit she had ever received. There should be a minimum amount of benefit that should never be taken away under any circumstances.

The level of contributions has been found irksome and onerous by some. A Mr. M, a chef of a cruise ship, had a negligently performed hernia operation—a case that eminently should come to court. As a result of his application for legal aid, he was asked for a contribution of £91 per month. He was unable to pay it, so the case could not go to court.

Another lady—a Mrs. N, who is a housewife—was involved in a road traffic accident. At the end of the process of trying to get legal aid, she was required to pay £49 a week, which she was unable to manage. That denied her access to the courts. It may be argued that there is no money to spend on bringing such cases to court. There would be money, if sensible and fair reforms were implemented.

In another life, when I worked in government and was charged with producing policies, I was always told," If you propose a policy, bring us some savings to pay for your expensive policy proposal." That is what I hope to do.

For hundreds of years, we have saved costs by using the simple principle of caveat emptor. Thousands of potential court cases have been avoided because the courts imposed on ordinary people and their lawyers the duty to be careful and watchful. The Government must apply the same thinking in other parts of the law.

The second largest category of legal aid bill is for boundary disputes, which are costly, time-wasting and usually caused by people who fail to pay proper attention to fencing their land. Huge savings could be found there, which could help us all and could help Mrs. A in her predicament. I hope that in time the Law Commission or the Lord Chancellor's Department will give my proposal adequate consideration—not this afternoon, as it is a big proposal.

I call for those changes for all the above reasons, but most particularly because a failure to change the rules would be administrative nonsense. It would be unfair to the taxpayer, who would stand a chance of recouping social security money, and most of all it would be unjust to the victim of negligence.

It is true that legal aid was never there for every conceivable case, but it was always there for people such as Mrs. A and I urge you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to agree that she should receive legal aid to bring her case.

2.46 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) on securing the debate and thank him for the unfailing courtesy that he has shown in our correspondence on legal aid matters. I am sorry that my hon. Friend has become concerned about the financial eligibility limits for legal aid and I hope that today's debate will go some way towards removing some of those doubts.

My hon. Friend began by mentioning some cases that have recently received considerable publicity because the recipient of legal aid was apparently wealthy. I know that he does not want me to concentrate on those, but I want to reassure him that the general problem is one that the Lord Chancellor and I have taken very seriously and we shall shortly be issuing a consultation paper. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend is sent a copy at the outset and would be delighted to receive any suggestions or comments that he may have.

I am sorry to learn of my hon. Friend's constituent's injuries and I hope that she has made as full a recovery as possible. As he is probably aware, I am prevented by the Legal Aid Act 1988 from intervening in any way in individual cases, since those applying for legal aid are entitled to their privacy. My comments on financial eligibility should not, therefore, be taken to refer to the way in which the rules were applied in particular cases and I hope instead to explain why the rules are as they are.

It may be helpful if I explain how financial eligibility for civil legal aid is calculated. Those with disposable incomes below £2,382 per annum pay no contribution. In most cases, the upper qualifying limits are £7,060 for disposable income and £6,750 for disposable capital. However, in view of the costly nature of personal injury cases, the Government consider that the limits should be higher to bring more people within the scope of the scheme. The limits for those cases are £7,780 and £8,560 respectively.

The key point is that we are talking about disposable income. People are not assessed on their wages, or even on what they take home in earnings or benefits, but on the income that they have left after a wide range of allowances have been made, including rent or mortgage and work expenses. My hon. Friend commented that there should be discretion within the legal aid system to take account of particular circumstances. The assessment officer can already make allowances at his own discretion, depending on the case.

My hon. Friend is particularly concerned about the eligibility for legal aid of those people who receive state benefits. Setting the eligibility limit is never easy and it may be inevitable that there will always be hard cases falling just outside it. However, the Government have tried to remove the most pressing difficulties. For example, in April last, the eligibility limit for green form assistance was raised by 15 per cent.—several times the rate of inflation—partly because those on the lower levels of invalidity benefit were not being covered by the scheme. However, some of those receiving larger amounts of invalidity benefit may still not be eligible for green form assistance. It would not be right to make invalidity benefit a passport to full civil legal aid as it is not

means-tested. It would clearly be wrong to grant legal aid to an applicant who may have significant other sources of capital or income.

My hon. Friend referred to the clawback of benefits from awards of compensation. The principle behind that is that people who receive damages for injury should not be compensated twice for any earnings that they may have lost—once in the form of state benefit and once as part of the damages award. The point that my hon. Friend has made—in effect, that if legal aid were to be extended, the recovery of benefits would be increased to the benefit of the Exchequer—is one that has been put to us before and is one that we shall think about further. However, I am bound to say that so far we have not been convinced that any extension of legal aid would, overall, result in a net increase of income to the Exchequer. In any event, the Lord Chancellor is shortly to introduce conditional fee arrangements that will provide a method of funding for those outside the legal aid limits, and I shall return to that point later.

More generally, my hon. Friend has mentioned that the income of the partner of the applicant is taken into account in the means assessment process. That provision includes not only married couples, but people who live together as if they were married. The thinking behind it is that a couple who live together will normally share their resources as well as their home. While the extent of that will vary between couples, joint income is frequently volunteered in means assessment in other areas such as mortgage requests, and is used in social security applications too.

The allowances made against expenditure in calculating eligibility for legal aid are also aggregated, so that, for example, when the partner who is not applying for legal aid is the one who pays the mortgage, the cost of that is none the less taken into account. It is also the case that, if individual means were assessed separately, it would be difficult to settle the ownership of the assets involved, which would open the way to abuse of the scheme. The means of a couple would not of course be considered together if they lived apart or there were a conflict of interest between them.

My hon. Friend considers it an injustice that, through a mechanism known as the statutory charge, money spent by the Legal Aid Board on a particular case must be repaid from any winnings—I am afraid that I must disagree. My view is that the statutory charge is fundamental to the justice of the legal aid scheme.

Mr. Booth: Does my hon. Friend accept that that was not part of my case? I was not criticising the court or the state for clawing back that money, but was arguing that it was nonsense for the state not to draw back that money when it could do so.

Mr. Taylor: In view of my hon. Friend's clarification, for which I am grateful, we may not be far apart.

I believe that the statutory charge is fundamental to the justice of the legal aid scheme. One can draw the parallel that someone paying privately must pay his lawyers as he goes along. If, at the end of the case, costs are awarded in his favour but his opponent does not pay up, he is obliged to pay his solicitor himself. After all, the solicitor has done the work. The effect of the statutory charge is to ensure that a legally aided client finds himself in the same position. If it did not exist, the legally aided client would in fact be getting a considerable bonus from the state, which is not available to those paying privately. Just as the private client must deduct the possible cost of the action from the potential winnings when deciding whether the litigation is worth it, so must the person receiving legal aid.

The aim of legal aid is, as far as possible, to prevent lack of funds from becoming an insuperable obstacle to access to the law. That is not easy. Those who are unable to obtain legal aid must consider how important the matter is to them. Everyone, in everyday life, must balance his priorities and decide what to do with the money he has and what, perhaps reluctantly, he must relinquish. I can see no reason why taking legal advice or legal action should be immune from such discipline.

Legal aid eligibility is by necessity determined by set financial limits. As my hon. Friend is aware, there are many calls on public funds to widen the proportion of people or types of case eligible for legal aid and, more widely, in many other aspects of our lives. The public purse is not bottomless and the current eligibility limits are therefore determined against a background of competing priorities for Government expenditure. I believe, however, that the scheme is still a generous one.

My hon. Friend may also be interested to know that the Lord Chancellor will shortly be implementing the conditional fee provisions of section 58 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. That will allow lawyers to take cases on a "no win, no fee" basis, with the lawyer receiving an enhanced fee if the case is successful. Those arrangements will be available for personal injury cases, and will provide another means of financing legal proceedings for those who are ineligible for legal aid.

My hon. Friend also criticised the increase in legal aid fee income to the legal profession. The Lord Chancellor has long felt the need to secure better control in this sector and has progressively introduced prescribed hourly rates, and he is keen to extend standard fees still further.

My hon. Friend may also be aware that my Department has been engaged in a fundamental review of publicly funded legal service. It has been examining the principles behind the operation of the scheme and what it is that we are trying to achieve through legal aid. It will build on a number of recent initiatives such as franchising. We are likely to be seeking views on the proposals emerging from the review in the early part of next year.

We are also looking at the problem from a broader perspective. Lord Woolf is conducting a review of procedure in the civil courts, which was announced by the Lord Chancellor on 28 March, and it is to last two years. Lord Woolf's objective is to ensure that the civil justice system provides remedies that people can afford, within a reasonable time. In particular, he is looking at ways of making costs in smaller cases proportionate to the amount in dispute.

While I do not accept all the criticisms my hon. Friend has made of the legal aid scheme, I hope I have at least made clear the reasons behind various aspects of it. I hope also that he is reassured that some of the problems most commonly associated with the scheme are being re-examined from first principles.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 28 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Inward Investment

1. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to visit north America to discuss inward investment in Wales.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): There has recently been a large mission to the United States led by the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales tourist board and the Cardiff Bay development corporation. I myself have no immediate travel plans, as I think that my presence is required in Parliament.

Mr. Fabricant: A few weeks ago, I visited an electronics company in Maine, in the United States of America. Is my right hon. Friend aware that that company now plans to invest in south Wales? It intends to produce a new company—not just because of low inflation, sustained growth and good economic relations but because of the good labour pool that exists in south Wales.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as looking to Germany and the European Union, we should look to the United States? The Americans like doing business with us, and we like doing business with them.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right. Of course we are looking to the United States, and my hon. Friend may be reassured to learn that we have been extremely successful. Between April 1983 and October 1994, we received 55 per cent. of all the money invested by overseas companies from the United States of America. We are very proud that, over many years, companies such as Ford, 3M, General Electric and British Alcan have made many substantial investments and now have many thousands of employees in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the Secretary of State agree, however, that the benefits of inward investment from America can be destroyed when a United States company can steal 900 jobs from the Raytheon plant in my constituency? I still look to the right hon. Gentleman—I thank him for the assistance he has already given—to enable my constituents to meet the company's chairman and make their case.

May I also remind the right hon. Gentleman that Airbus announced the loss of 200 aerospace jobs in my constituency last week? I ask him to use every resource at his disposal to ensure that our Government order the future large aircraft and that Hercules aircraft are not ordered from America.

Mr. Redwood: First, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall use whatever powers I haye to try to influence the company—even at this late stage, after it has made its decision. I shall intervene again to see whether any more can be done. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have met him, the company's work force and other hon. Members who have taken up the issue. I have assured them that I shall do all that I can to persuade Raytheon to create or maintain more jobs in Wales, where it has been well served by the work force to date and could be well served again.

As for the other matter, the Government will make a decision when we have all the necessary information. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that his points will be taken fully into account.

Mr. Brandreth: May I echo the question asked by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones)? This matter deserves real priority, not just in north Wales but across the border in Chester. I urge my right hon. Friend to do what he can to intervene positively in the case of Raytheon Jets and the proposed transfer to the United States of America.

Mr. Redwood: I entirely agree. Let me repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and also pay tribute to my hon. Friend: he has been equally assiduous in pursuing the interests of his constituents and people in Wales who want such jobs.

Mr. Ron Davies: Given that much American investment comes to Wales so that America can get a foothold in the European Union, will the Secretary of State confirm that he is a less than enthusiastic supporter of the European Communities (Finance) Bill, which will increase Britain's contribution to Europe by more than £1 billion over a period? Do the right hon. Gentlemen and his Cabinet colleagues feel any surprise at the contempt and derision in which they are held by the people of Britain, when the only way in which they can suppress their party's schizophrenia over Europe is to threaten collective suicide? Does the right hon. Gentleman draw any conclusions from the fact that, if his Government were to be defeated in the Lobbies this evening, the cheer that would go up throughout the country—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is Question Time, but we seem to be already engaging in an Adjournment debate. I want to hear brisk questions; I have a number of Back Benchers to call.

Mr. Davies: Does the Secretary of State draw any conclusions from the fact that, if his Government were to be defeated in the Lobbies tonight, the roar that would go up would be greater than the roar that would have gone up in Cardiff on Saturday if we had beaten the Springboks?

Mr. Redwood: The Government will win the vote tonight and the hon. Gentleman knows that well. I am proud that, when the proposals were put to him, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiated down the first demands of the European Community and he reached a much better deal than that suggested by the European Commission. We accept it. I am proud that it is this Government who have campaigned against waste and

unnecessary expenditure and who, through the member states, have given new powers to the auditors to root out the fraud. I am proud that we shall unite in confidence behind the Government tonight.

Local Government Finance

2. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to ensure that local authorities in Wales are able to meet their financial obligations in 1995-96.

Mr. Redwood: I shall announce my proposals for 1995-96 total standard spending and aggregate Exchequer finance for local government tomorrow after the Budget statement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Michael: Does not the Secretary of State realise that we shall be looking for an assurance that he will do better next year than he did this year, when he tightened the screw so tightly on the three counties of Glamorgan that a crisis exists on the streets of south Wales, not only because of the high level of crime but because of police underfunding to the tune of about £2.5 million? Having accepted that his capping criteria apply to the police as much as to any other local government services, does he realise that it is his responsibility to put matters right? Will he agree to meet the Home Office and to find some way of putting matters right in the South Wales police area?

Mr. Redwood: It is south Wales local government that has let the police down. The hon. Gentleman might be surprised when we introduce proposals that will do much better by the police than those introduced by local government. Since 1991-92, spending on local government has increased by about a quarter, allowing for functional changes. That is a big cash increase, giving local government plenty of scope. Its priorities, however, are not the same as those of many people in south Wales, which is why they feel let down by Labour local government.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Secretary of State accept that, despite sound financial management, Powys county council and possibly other local authorities have had great difficulty in meeting their financial obligations in relation to care in the community? Does he further accept that the people who are most likely to suffer from that difficulty are those in the most vulnerable group, who will need some nursing care, even when the programme is complete? Will he ensure that care in the community is taken fully into account in his financial settlement for the coming year?

Mr. Redwood: Of course, that will be taken fully into account, as it has been in recent settlements, with large increases in money from the DSS general transfer and from the general grant to reflect the personal social services element in local authority spending. I look to local government to have some discipline in that spending. The other day, I was disturbed to read a copy of a letter from Tom Davies, the director of education and cultural services for South Glamorgan county council. Written on county notepaper, it was addressed to all Labour governors and it suggested that perhaps ballots were not a good idea for grant-maintained schools. Expenditure on that sort of thing should be stamped out and Opposition Members should get in control of their party when it goes about that sort of activity.

Mr. Ron Davies: May I take the Secretary of State back to his earlier reply when he seemed to imply that he proposes to ring-fence police expenditure? Will he confirm that that is his intention? If it is, will he reflect on the fact that, by ring-fencing one area of expenditure, of necessity he will put a squeeze on other areas of expenditure? In the current year, care in the community has been underfunded by £38 million. That is why we have mentally ill people walking the streets. Do the Government have that sort of attitude and do they want to create that sort of society?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has got his facts wrong again. Care in the community funding is up massively, as it should be, because it is an important new policy. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the proposals on spending generally and on the police. I still believe, however, that south Wales Labour authorities have let the police down.

Mr. Wigley: This autumn, the Secretary of State transferred over to local government certain responsibilities in relation to loans and to some grants which were previously exercised by the Welsh Development Agency. What assurance will he give that every local authority in Wales exercising those powers will have additional money available to provide the grants, additional loan sanctions, where loans are necessary, and increased money to cover the interest on such loans? Will he give a categorical assurance that that will be the case next year, otherwise our work to attract industry will be seriously undermined?

Mr. Redwood: Of course extra provision and extra money are being made available, as I promised the House. That will be reflected in next year's settlement in the way that the hon. Gentleman wants. During the period when we were not making payments in the mid-Wales area, unemployment fell from 6.7 per cent. in May to 6.2 per cent. in October. The hon. Gentleman will be relieved to know that no damage was done, but I will honour the promise that money will be made available for the grants.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I, too, have seen a copy of the letter from South Glamorgan's director of education and cultural services. My right hon. Friend will appreciate that, apart from not being a legitimate expense, the action proposed by the director was to thwart parental balance for grant-maintained schools. Does my right hon. Friend think that action was right?

Mr. Redwood: I am disturbed about a number of aspects of that letter—not least those that my right hon. Friend mentioned. I am worried that well-known Labour governors were identified and a letter circulated to them by someone who, as a director of education, should be neutral. Labour is always saying that there should not be political appointments to such bodies. Now we know that a director of education with a Labour authority is circulating a letter to Labour governors—and Labour governors alone.

Channel Tunnel

3. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for passengers to and from Wales to benefit from the channel tunnel.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced the channel tunnel services between the continent and locations beyond London on 14 October.

Dr. Marek: As I thought, the Minister knows that he cannot announce any good news until the year 2004; meanwhile, the average speed of trains from Folkestone to London is 47 mph and passengers to Wales will have to change at Waterloo or face a tortuous journey around London. Can the Minister assure the House that when the new infrastructure proposals are presented at the European Union meeting in Essen in December, he will not be outsmarted by the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—and that the line from London to Holyhead, which is the best route to the island of Ireland, will remain and enjoy the priority for development and electrification that it deserves?

Mr. Jones: All main railway lines in Wales are included in the proposed trans-European network. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's negative attitude to the opportunities presented by channel tunnel services. Everyone should pull together to serve that great opportunity. I have already taken advantage of the services—when I was in Paris 10 days ago, to speak to industrialists in promoting the interests of Wales.

Mr. Nigel Evans: In welcoming the new channel tunnel passenger service, does my hon. Friend agree that it presents a great opportunity for people from the rest of Europe who want to visit the United Kingdom to marvel at the beauty of Wales as they wend their way up the Ribble valley in north-west England?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right to promote his part of the world. In all seriousness, the west coast main line which he has in mind is very much a feature of the service to the north and mid-Wales and increasing opportunities will be taken to use it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has described the through service that will come about in a little over one year's time. We should dwell on the positive.

Mr. John D. Taylor: In view of a negative question asked earlier, and recognising the importance of transport communications between Wales and the island of Ireland, will the Minister confirm that he will do nothing to damage the important link between the island of Ireland and Great Britain through the port of Larne, which is the second largest roll on, roll off port in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Jones: I have no intention of damaging the link to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. I look forward to the greatest opportunities being taken of the opening of the channel tunnel. As to the link across north Wales, when I recently met Mr. Horton, chairman of Railtrack, we had the opportunity to discuss improvements to be made to the Holyhead line, which should bring 90 mph running in the next two years.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Minister take this opportunity to squash the rumour circulating throughout Wales that when the Christopherson group makes its announcement today, to be confirmed at the Essen conference in mid-December, the north Wales route will not be a priority link for electrification? We need a categorical assurance that the Welsh Office will stand up for the interests of Wales in such matters.

Mr. Jones: I am rather surprised by that statement, because I thought that the hon. Gentleman had been on the media last Friday trying to spread that very rumour himself. I can tell him that all the main railway routes in Wales, particularly the line from Holyhead, are included in the proposed trans-European network.

Grant-maintained Schools

4. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales have so far applied for grant-maintained status; and what steps he is taking to encourage more schools to do so.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): Some 18 schools have applied, of which 16 have been approved. A number of measures in the Education Act 1993 make it easier for schools to become grant maintained. We have made booklets available to all schools about grant-maintained status and are providing grant aid to enable the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation to establish an office in Wales to provide information to schools.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the successes achieved by the schools that have already acquired grant-maintained status in Wales, it is very important that the Government give every possible encouragement for other schools to apply? Will he join me in condemning those Labour placemen who are appointed by Labour-controlled education authorities and who are only going through the motions of considering grant-maintained status for their schools each year, rather than making serious recommendations to the members of those schools?

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Conservative Members are interested in giving choice to parents and in raising standards in education. The Opposition are interested only in political dogma, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales demonstrated a moment ago in relation to the disgraceful letter from the director of education in South Glamorgan to all Labour governors. May I remind my hon. Friend of some of the benefits of grant-maintained schools? A recent survey showed that, in 10 of the 16 grant-maintained schools in Wales, there are a greater number of pupils; in 11, there are more teachers; in 14, more money is being spent on books and equipment; and in 12, more money is being spent on music.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Can the Minister tell us, then, why less than 1 per cent. of all schools in Wales are grant maintained, despite eight years of continuous propaganda from his Department, and why in his own county the worst-performing school—by the Government's

standards—is, in fact, a grant-maintained school? If we are to regard the Welsh Office as the marketing department of Government for grant-maintained schools, with its record of the past six years, should those people not all resign or be fired?

Mr. Richards: Well, well. I hear all about new Labour; it looks like old hat to me. Last week, when the tables for the GCSE results were announced—grant-maintained schools had done very well—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the shadow education spokesman, wished to be identified with them and said that Labour party policy would also be to publish tables. However, when the friends of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) in the National Union of Teachers heard that, they instructed their puppet in Bridgend to change the Labour party's education policy and he appeared on television and said exactly the opposite to his hon. Friend the Member for Brightside. Would an incoming Labour Government publish tables or not? Which is it?

Adoption

5. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children are adopted in Wales each year.

Mr. Richards: The number of adoption orders made in Wales by the county courts and the family proceedings courts in the years 1992 and 1993 was 709 and 620 respectively.

Mr. Thurnham: Perhaps I should declare an interest as an adoptive parent of a boy born in Wales. Does my hon. Friend agree that the whole process of inter-country adoption should be much improved? Is he aware of the good work being done to set up the new agency, Families International, to help couples adopt from abroad and give a loving home to children who would otherwise be without a family?

Mr. Richards: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government are preparing legislation in the light of the White Paper "Adoption: the Future", published in November 1993. It is hoped to introduce legislative proposals when parliamentary time permits. Our proposals would impose a duty on local authorities to help parents seeking an overseas adoption.

School Sport

6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what extra provision he plans for school sport.

Mr. Richards: May I first congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the performance of his countrymen on Saturday, when they defeated Wales at the national stadium?

The revised national curriculum will strengthen the place of sport within the curriculum. It will ensure that games are taught to all pupils of compulsory school age including, for the first time, pupils aged 14 to 16. Substantial support for the introduction of the national curriculum, including physical education, is being provided through grants. Sport is not confined to the statutory curriculum. Good schools provide pupils with opportunities for sport outside lessons.

Mr. Hain: I remind the Minister that my countrymen lost on Saturday, although the Wales team played very well.

With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, I shall refer briefly to the fact that one of my constituents is struggling for his life as a result of a vicious racist attack. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to my request for an official inquiry into the rising tide of racist and Nazi violence in south Wales.

The Minister speaks with a forked tongue on school sport. The Government, through the Prime Minister, apparently wish to boost school sport. However, the number of physical education teachers in Wales has been cut by 500 in recent years, as the Government's own figures show—a saving of £12 million. How can we expect to produce world-beating rugby, soccer and other sporting sides when the Government are savaging school sport, reducing teacher morale and cutting education provision? It is not possible. The Minister should respond by providing extra funding for school sport.

Mr. Richards: We wish the hon. Gentleman's constituent well in light of the alleged attack on him.

The hon. Gentleman should try to interpret rather more intelligently the statistics which he has been bandying around the media for some time. In Wales, the reduction in the number of PE teachers almost exactly reflects the proportionate reduction in the number of pupils. In January this year, there was only one vacancy for a PE teacher in a secondary school in Wales.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the importance of sport to schools in Wales. Yes, the Government attach great importance to sport in schools in Wales, because games teach young people how to work together as a team, how to co-operate with each other, how to strive towards a common goal and how to be magnanimous in victory and gracious in defeat—all attributes that are absent in the Labour party.

Employment Opportunities

7. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase employment opportunities in Ceredigion.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The responsibility of Government is to create the right conditions for the economy to grow. The latest index of production showing that Wales has gone ahead by 8.3 per cent. in the 12 months to August and a continuing fall in unemployment in Ceredigion demonstrate that our policies are succeeding there and in the rest of Wales.

Mr. Dafis: Having directly caused the loss of 60 well-paid and secure jobs in the Aberystwyth area by the removal of the Welsh Office agriculture department from Trawsgoed to occupy space that happened to become available in the Cathays Park Welsh Office in July, will the Minister undertake to look carefully at a report being prepared by a local campaign group on the future of ADAS—the Agricultural Development Advisory Service—with a view to making Aberystwyth the Wales headquarters of ADAS, an organisation whose future is under review? Does he accept that that would be some

attempt at recompense for the damage he has done by the closure of the office of the Welsh Office agriculture department in Trawsgoed?

Mr. Jones: Much as I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern, I remind him that we have a duty to husband the taxpayer's money as carefully as possible. To indulge in other office accommodation when there was vacant office accommodation would have been a rather ungreen gesture and I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman in that respect. I shall study very carefully any report about ADAS, although, of course, its use for offices and laboratories is essentially its own responsibility.

Regional Policy

8. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the Government's policy on the concept of Europe of the regions.

Mr. Redwood: Diversity is Europe's strength. We believe that that can best be enhanced by leaving as many things as possible to local and national decision taking.

Mr. Jenkin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his Department disbursed some £6.4 billion throughout Wales last year while the European Community disbursed only £50 million? Is it not worth remembering that the European Community is seeking to harness regional sentiment against national Governments so as to centralise power and not necessarily to improve the condition of the regions?

Mr. Redwood: It is very important that that should not be the aim, although I think that there are probably some in Europe who are centralisers rather than having a sincere belief in more regional and local independence and autonomy. We should resist that very strongly, because diversity and choice are crucial to successful trade, friendship and co-operation. It would not be helped by the latest Labour proposals for a senate for Wales, which again would probably end up taxing people for the privilege of being Welsh, spending more of their money and asking them to obey more laws for the privilege of being Welsh.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Secretary of State confirm that if he is to maintain his credentials as one of the Cabinet's leading Euro-enthusiasts, at least relative to his hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), he will provide the funding for research back-up for the Welsh Euro-forum, which he and his party helped to set up, and for the six members and alternates from Wales on the European Committee of the Regions?

Mr. Redwood: I cannot make that promise. The reporting-back system has been set up by Welsh local government. I and other hon. Members hope that invitations will be forthcoming to some Members of Parliament and to Members of the European Parliament because we think that that may help their deliberations. However, it is a local government initiative and therefore can be paid for out of the very generous total funding and grant from the Welsh Office to local government.

Local Government Reorganisation

9. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest estimate of the cost of the reorganisation of local government in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The local authority associations have asked my right hon. Friend to make a provision of £49.5 million in 1995-96 and he will announce his decision very shortly.

Mr. Hanson: Does the Minister think it fair that charge payers in Clwyd and, indeed, other counties in Wales, should have to bear the burden of local government reorganisation when counties in England, such as Cheshire and Shropshire which border my county, will retain two-tier government? Is it not a scandal that £49 million has had to be requested to cover the cost of reorganisation? Will he make strenuous demands on the Treasury to ensure that additional funding is given to local authorities to meet the cost of a reorganisation which is not happening in England?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman's hypothesis anticipates the result that he has not yet heard: I suggest that he should remain patient.

Drugs

10. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the resources made available to combat the drug threat in Wales.

Mr. Richards: It is a high priority of Government to combat the misuse of drugs. The provision of services is the responsibility of the relevant local statutory agencies.

Mr. Anderson: The Minister suggests that it is a high priority, but it is clearly a lower priority than cutting the number of customs offices and a lower priority than preventing the South Glamorgan police from having adequate resources to do their job. Will the Minister consider in particular the proposed withdrawal by the Home Office of the grant to the west Glamorgan drugs prevention team at the end of March? It is the only such initiative in Wales. If it is transferred to the Welsh Office and reinstated, will the Minister give an undertaking that this will be done without taking money from other Welsh Office initiatives in the county?

Mr. Richards: The team in Swansea is part of a Home Office-funded pilot project. Funding for that pilot comes to an end in March 1995. I know that the team has done a lot of good work in Swansea, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is looking to the new Welsh drug and alcohol unit to replicate that good work throughout the whole of Wales.

Inward Investment

11. **Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the adequacy

of the arrangements and incentives for attracting inward investment to Wales and for encouraging indigenous businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I can reassure my right hon. Friend that we intend to continue the vigorous promotion of Wales as a first-class place in which to invest.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In complimenting my right hon. Friend on the record number of applications for project grants in 1993-94, a total of 314, and the fact that a high proportion of them have been processed as far as the offer stage so that 8,000 new jobs have been promised and nearly 5,000 safeguarded, may I nevertheless urge my right hon. Friend to preserve the top priority that I know he gives to the development of the Welsh economy and to disregard the carping criticisms which masquerade as Opposition policy?

Mr. Redwood: Winning for Wales is the No. 1 objective of the Welsh Office, and we intend to carry on winning. I am delighted that unemployment is down to 9 per cent. and still falling, with a very large fall in October. I hope that Opposition Members will have the courtesy to acknowledge that that is good news.

Mr. Llew Smith: Does the Secretary of State accept that his policies have failed dismally in south Wales, especially when we consider the report sponsored by the Government's research council which shows that male unemployment levels in former coalfield areas are now running at 33 per cent. rather than the 16 per cent. that is published—and fiddled—by the Department of Employment?

Mr. Redwood: I agree that there are still pockets of unemployment which we intend to tackle very vigorously. However, the overall totals are coming down and the overall percentage is much more reasonable, although of course we want to get it much lower. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will co-operate in the big task that I have now set for the whole of Wales—to raise the private finance to add to the public money that we are spending so as to finish the job and ensure that the towns and valleys are regenerated.

Mr. Gill: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the constituency of Ludlow adjoins Wales. He will also be aware of the many representations that I have made to him and to his predecessors about the unfairness of the grants available to companies operating in Wales which are not available to companies operating in Shropshire. What has been the effect of the Welsh Office moratorium on grants in aid through the Development Board for Rural Wales? I am sure that the House will be interested to know what my right hon. Friend's experiences have been in that direction.

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted to report to my hon. Friend that unemployment continued to fall rapidly in mid-Wales even though we were not paying grants, although the grant system has now been restored through local authorities.

Town Centres

12. **Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance his Department is giving to regenerate town centres in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A range of Welsh Office responsibilities in conjunction with local authorities, development agencies and other public bodies are being used to promote the successful regeneration of Welsh town centres.

Dr. Howells: Is the Minister aware that many towns in Wales are suffering very badly as a result of out-of-town shopping developments? Welcome though the employment is in many of those developments, they are having a very serious effect on town centres and the commercial hearts of towns. In Bridgend, 37 shops have closed, in my constituency of Pontypridd 12 have closed, and 27 have closed in Tonypandy. That experience can be replicated all over Wales. What does the Minister intend to do to provide a strategic lead to ensure that local authorities have some sense and to make it clear that the Welsh Office wishes them to look after the commercial hearts of our towns and to stop that rundown going any further?

Mr. Jones: I must direct the hon. Gentleman to planning policy guidance note No. 6, which relates to the provision of town centres. I can also point to an announcement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made on 21 November when he repeated the advice in planning policy guidance and expressed the desire that there should be restraint in granting planning permissions for out-of-town food supermarkets. If the hon. Gentleman considers our strategic development scheme, he will find that £10 million—17 per cent. of the total—has been allocated to assist with the regeneration of town centres, and similar schemes will continue to receive a significantly high priority in next year's round.

Unemployment

13. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current level of unemployment in Wales; and what was the level in October 1993.

Mr. Redwood: In October 1994, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Wales was 9 per cent., compared with 10.2 per cent. in October 1993. That represents a reduction of 14,700 or 11.4 per cent. in the number of people unemployed in Wales, and is most welcome.

Mr. Coombs: Perhaps my right hon. Friend will confirm and buttress that good news by telling the House how many job vacancies there are in Wales, as that is another good indication of the progress being made. Also, how many of the jobs created in the past year were as a result of European funding and how many jobs might not have been achieved in the past year and previously if Wales had not been a part of the United Kingdom and of the European Union?

Mr. Redwood: I think that that would require a little research, encyclopaedic though my knowledge may be of the unemployment figures in Wales. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that a lot of the jobs came because of inward investment from England as well as from overseas, and a lot came from indigenous investment and the

growth of small businesses. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that there were 12,400 more full-time jobs in manufacturing in the year to June 1994, which is a most welcome development.

Mr. Llwyd *rose — [Interruption.]*

Mr. Rogers: That is four out of four.

Mr. Alan W. Williams *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) should keep his temper—I do not want it. I call Mr. Alan W. Williams.

Mr. Williams: What does the Secretary of State have to say to creamery workers in west Wales? On 1 November, 156 workers at Whitland creamery were made redundant. Last weekend we heard that in Newcastle Emlyn the Dansco plant, which employs 73 people, is up for sale. There are also some doubts about the Llangadog and Haverfordwest creameries. All those are the results of the Government's reorganisation of the milk marketing scheme. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the chaos at the creameries and in the dairy industry?

Mr. Redwood: I am concerned, and I have asked the Welsh Development Agency to see what can be done to help in those cases. I will, of course, take up the matter further following the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Mr. Rogers *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman has any complaint about the number of hon. Members I am calling, I invite him to put a substantive motion on the Order Paper, and I shall see that it is debated.

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order are taken after Question Time.

Mr. Rogers *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name him."] I do not wish to name anyone today. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. I am sure that he will do that.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Finance

28. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners how much per capita giving by church members is taken into account when the estimates of the Church Commissioners are made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Church Commissioners' forward estimates relate only to their own investment income, but their stipend allocations to dioceses take account of the special needs of poorer dioceses, including potential income from church members in those dioceses. Giving is the largest and most important source of funding. In 1992, giving through parishes amounted to about £274 million. Covenanted giving amounted to about £4.10 per subscriber per week.

Mr. Greenway: Has my right hon. Friend seen statistics in the newspapers indicating that church membership is now at its lowest level ever? Will he comment on that? Does he agree that church membership and giving depend crucially on the leadership given by the Church and its priests? Does he share my concern that a Swaffham vicar is not following the Church's teaching in the way he is behaving and will my right hon. Friend support the actions of the Bishop of Norwich?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend referred to an individual case in a certain parish with which the Bishop of Norwich is dealing and it would be quite outside the scope of my responsibilities to comment on that. The donation figure that I cited of £4.10 per subscriber per week to the covenanted giving system of the Church of England is a sum which could probably, without great difficulty or pressure, be greatly increased. Appropriate and convincing leadership of integrity in the parishes will undoubtedly be able to exploit the scope for giving which exists.

Redundant Churches

29. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what evidence he has that redundant churches are being converted to commercial use.

Mr. Alison: By the end of 1993, 78 redundant churches had been appropriated for storage, light industrial, office or shopping uses and 160 churches had been appropriated for residential uses. The commissioners' latest annual report—a copy of which is in the Library—contains details of the many and varied uses found so far for no fewer than 742 redundant churches since 1969.

Mr. Fisher: The right hon. Gentleman knows of the case of St John's church, Hanley, in Stoke-on-Trent—a fine church which a commercial company wishes to turn into a climbing centre. Will the right hon. Gentleman and his fellow commissioners agree to meet interested local residents, the diocese and the local planning authority to discuss the well worked out and costed plans of the local action committee to save the church? Does he agree that it is not good to encourage the conversion of churches for commercial use when there is keen local interest in saving them for worship and other community uses?

Mr. Alison: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am familiar with the case of St John's, Hanley. Although the friends of the local parish church offered an alternative proposal to the projected climbing enterprise, it seemed to the diocese and to the commissioners that the climbing enterprise idea was a firmer proposition. However, it has not yet received planning permission. If the climbing centre scheme does not proceed, the commissioners will look forward to the diocese's further recommendations, which I am sure will include the friends' alternative use to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would meet a deputation of interested parties. I shall be glad to talk about the practicalities and the usefulness of such a visit with an open mind.

Pensions

30. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what guarantees of pensions are being made to serving and retired clergy and employees of the Church of England.

Mr. Alison: The security of existing clergy pensions is not at issue as the value of the commissioners' assets comfortably exceeds the accrued pension liabilities for retired clergy and those currently in active service. Separate funding arrangements are in place to pay the pensions of lay employees in the Church of England.

The commissioners and the pensions board are discussing with dioceses proposals for funding pension liabilities arising from the future service of clergy on a more sustainable basis involving contributions. This will help to secure the commissioners' continuing ability to help the Church in other ways.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is a great deal of concern about the amount of Church Commissioners' assets that were lost due to unfortunate property speculations in the past few years? There is a danger that this will impact on the pension funds and therefore affect not just the ability to pay pensions in the near or foreseeable future but the ability to increase pensions at least in line with average earnings. Many clergy and staff of the Church are deeply concerned about this matter. Can the Minister assure them not only that pensions will continue to be paid at existing levels, but that they will be increased in the future?

Mr. Alison: Yes. The answer that I gave to the hon. Gentleman that the value of the commissioners' assets comfortably exceeds what is needed is based on our past performance. We have increased pensions at a substantially higher rate than the rate of inflation—indeed, at levels almost approaching earnings—and we hope to be able to do that using existing assets for the categories that I have described. It is precisely because we want to make certain that future pensions can be increased in a way that is desirable and for which there are precedents that we are moving to introduce a contributory base through the dioceses.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the loss of assets due to property speculation. In fact, the value of the portfolio is rapidly increasing again with the change in market values, and we have complete confidence that we shall be able to sustain the level of pensions.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Privity of Contract and Estate

38. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor intends to introduce legislation to implement Law Commission report No. 174, on privity of contract and estate.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): My hon. Friend is entitled to return to the charge in this matter. I personally wish to make progress in this area. I shall be meeting some of the leading representatives of the interests affected to discuss possible ways forward and I think that there may be more news on this subject shortly.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Law Commission produced its report as long ago as 1988— indeed, I asked my hon. Friend a question about it as long ago as May 1993, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) tried to introduce a private Member's Bill on the subject? Is he further aware that there are some cases of real hardship? Several lease assignments ago, people were called on to meet obligations involving rent increases of which they were not even aware. Will my hon. Friend pledge the Government to support any amending legislation, from whatever source it might come?

Mr. Taylor: I am aware of the hardship and I take no pleasure in the fact that my hon. Friend has had to ask the same question twice. I admire the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who is sitting behind my hon. Friend. The Government would certainly help any private Member's initiative to deal with the matter.

Legal Aid

39. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he intends to broaden eligibility rules for legal aid.

40. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to assist those on low incomes to gain access to legal aid.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Almost half the households in England and Wales currently qualify for civil legal aid. In serious criminal cases, anyone who needs help meeting the costs may qualify. The Lord Chancellor reviews legal aid financial limits each year and will shortly be considering what changes he should make in April 1995.

Mr. Bayley: Is the Minister aware of the rapidly increasing number of people on low incomes who now find that they cannot obtain legal aid and therefore cannot obtain access to the courts? Only this morning I learned of a woman in my constituency whose only income is invalidity benefit and who has lost her job through ill health. Her marriage has broken up and she has been asked to contribute £90 per month under the legal aid scheme for legal representation in the divorce proceedings. She cannot afford that money, so she is not represented. What plans do the Government have to re-widen the scope of legal aid so that people such as my constituent are properly represented in the courts?

Mr. Taylor: The legal aid system in this country is a generous one. Hon. Members do not have to take my word for that. The Labour spokesman in the House of Lords said it recently on the record. In Britain, 48 per cent. of households are eligible. The point about invalidity benefit is simply that although some welfare benefits enjoy an automatic passporting into legal aid, invalidity benefit does not because it is not means-tested. If the hon. Gentleman would like me to have a look at the case to which he referred, I will certainly do so.

Mr. Flynn: When will the Government end the generosity and scandal of a legal aid system which allows millionaires to loot huge sums of money on the pretext

that their financial assets are temporarily frozen when Ray Murton, a low-paid labourer living in a council flat, was denied legal aid in a case of alleged medical blunder in which he lost a leg? Why is it that 75 per cent. of households enjoyed legal aid in 1979, but more than half the households in Britain are now denied access to justice in a system that is increasingly discredited, wasteful and unjust?

Mr. Taylor: I am pleased to be able to tell the House that the Lord Chancellor is shortly to issue a consultation document called "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy". Hon. Members who have misgivings on the matter can certainly register their views. I imagine that they would like to register their views.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does my hon. Friend accept that disabled people on low incomes are particularly disadvantaged in sustaining their legal rights? If we are not to have a disability rights commission, an omission which I would regret, will my hon. Friend consider sympathetically and constructively the case for extending legal aid to enable disabled people to avail themselves of the new rights that the Government propose to establish for them in employment and other areas?

Mr. Taylor: I will gladly discuss the matter personally with my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). There is an extremely complicated set of interrelationships between the welfare system and the legal aid system. A fundamental review of the legal aid system is going on now. We shall consider all these things and I shall remember what my hon. Friend has said.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend accept that the vast majority of my constituents are perfectly happy to pay for the half of the households in Britain who are eligible for legal aid, but far from happy to have to pay for legal aid for illegal immigrants? We are the only country in the world that would dream of paying legal aid for such persons.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend's constituents have many reasons to be extremely happy with their lot. She mentioned one way in which they are not. That matter would come squarely within the ambit of the Lord Chancellor's consultation document, "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy". I remind this honourable House that in this country all people are equal before the law courts, even if they are foreigners.

Mr. Boateng: No Opposition Member would describe the legal aid scheme as generous—on the contrary. How does the Minister justify the fact that people whose immense wealth is shielded by family trusts continue to receive legal aid while many people of modest means are denied it altogether, such as the pensioner on £343 a month who lost his voice box as a result of medical negligence at St. Mary's hospital and is required to pay an additional £44 a month towards the cost of legal advice and assistance? How can that be just? When will the Government understand that the people of this country do not want more consultations, reviews and Treasury-led solutions, but justice?

Mr. Taylor: Let us keep the record straight: I did not describe our legal aid as generous—the noble Lord Williams of Mostyn said it in another place, speaking for the Labour party.

Sir Anthony Grant: In any changes that he may make, will my hon. Friend bear two things in mind? First, there is far too much litigation in this country; we do not want to go down the same road as the United States. Secondly, will he bear in mind the risk that a recipient of legal aid can, by blackmailing, spell ruin for people who are just above the level for receiving such aid?

Mr. Taylor: I certainly agree that there is too much litigation and that it is too complicated. I shall bear my hon. Friend's remarks closely in mind.

Crown Courts

41. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the scheduling of cases in the Crown courts.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no plans to review the scheduling of cases in the Crown court. Cases are listed by court staff working under judicial guidance, within guidelines approved by the Lord Chief Justice.

Mr. Dowd: Does the Parliamentary Secretary share my extreme concern at the experience of a constituent who, on arriving home on a Monday evening, found a message on her telephone answering machine saying that the extremely serious case that she was pressing was to be heard the following morning at the Old Bailey? It is not surprising that she felt so pressurised and ill prepared that she was unable to continue with it. Does the Minister agree that the court's decision was intolerable and inefficient, not to say callous? What is his Department doing—with the Attorney-General and the Home Department—to ensure the sensitive and efficient administration that is necessary to retain public confidence in the criminal justice system?

Mr. Taylor: A scheme of plea and directions hearings in all cases is being planned for all Crown court centres, starting in January next. Meanwhile, the House should know that court listing is very difficult. It is only as precise as the information received from the parties involved. Sometimes a civil case scheduled for a five-day trial will settle on the court steps. In criminal cases, a defendant who says that he intends to plead not guilty all too often changes his mind at the last moment—that happens in 50 per cent. of cases.

Immigration

43. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the waiting list for the processing of non-asylum applications to the immigration appellate adjudicator.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Once the parties have indicated readiness to proceed, the average waiting time for a non-asylum appeal to be heard by an adjudicator is nine weeks.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful. Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that, although that is the average, many take

much longer and that every time there is a delay it also affects the families abroad? Can he ensure in the coming year that additional resources are made available to deal with the backlog without prejudice to present applicants?

Mr. Taylor: Waiting times have come down in the past two years, but not so much as the hon. Gentleman or I would like. We are taking a number of specific measures. Five are listed in my brief. If the hon. Gentleman would like, rather than gabbling them into the microphone I will write to him to tell him what they are.

Judicial Studies Board

44. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the work of the Judicial Studies Board.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Judicial Studies Board is to conduct an internal review of its structure and resources, the activities to be undertaken, and the priorities to be accorded to them.

Lady Olga Maitland: As the Lord Chancellor's Department spends nearly £1 million on race awareness courses for judges, does my hon. Friend agree that it is plain common sense to merge the main points of those seminars with the annual judicial studies which take place every Christmas? That would save the Government a lot of money, and end that political incorrectness.

Mr. Taylor: The vast majority of those who have taken part in the programme so far have found it valuable to them in their work as judges. Racial awareness courses are extremely important if we are to assure the minorities within society that the judicial system is fair to them as well as to us.

Legal Aid

45. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what further consideration he has given to the reform of legal aid.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A number of initiatives are currently in hand for making improvements to the legal aid scheme. The most significant of these is a fundamental review of the scheme.

Mr. Enright: Can the Minister understand the extreme bitterness of my constituents who are refused legal aid, even though they are on poverty wages, while people such as Ernest Saunders, Asil Nadir and other wealthy crooks are given massive help by his Department and while barristers go on day after day spitting out their profits?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman will take only modest comfort from the fact that we are to issue a paper entitled "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy", as I said earlier. The issues involved should be looked at from first principles, and my efforts will join those of the hon. Gentleman in that spirit.

Sir Donald Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that many people come to my advice centres complaining that the people who are proceeding against them are on legal aid, and that they therefore cannot hope to fight successfully against the weight of the state's money?

Mr. Taylor: A possible part of the original sin of the legal aid system is that there are civil cases in which one party receives legal aid and the other does not. If I had a remedy for that this afternoon, I would certainly offer it to the House. I am well aware of the point that my hon. Friend makes.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We are about to have what the Prime Minister has styled a confidence debate. If you in your wisdom select an amendment for that debate, presumably we shall have a confidence vote later this evening. If we go on to vote on Second Reading, there will be another confidence vote. In the later stages of the Bill—since the Prime Minister has said that he requires it in all its essentials—we might have yet more confidence votes.

I am anxious not to miss any of those confidence votes, and this is uncharted territory. Would it be in order to introduce a procedure whereby a member of the Government can come before the House to say formally each and every time that the suicide pact is in operation?

Madam Speaker: Our procedures have stood us in good stead so far, and we shall continue today's debate as we have always done on such matters. I shall put the Question on the amendment at the appropriate time, and then the main Question. After that, as someone very famous once said, "Tomorrow is another day".

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on motion No. 4 on the Order Paper, which refers to the Scottish Grand Committee, which will be meeting in Edinburgh on Monday 5 December at 10.30 am. I understand that the Committee will be debating the Children (Scotland) Bill, and that that will in fact be the Second Reading of the Bill, although there is no indication on the Order Paper that that is the case.

If that is the case, the Committee will get four and a half hours to debate the Second Reading of a Bill for which we in Scotland have waited for five years. That seems inappropriate, because we would have six and a half hours for debate if Second Reading was debated on the Floor of the House. Four and a half hours is a totally inadequate time, and I would ask for a ruling that we should have more time to debate the Second Reading of such an important Bill.

Madam Speaker: The solution to the hon. Gentleman's question is that when the motion is put this evening, he and any of his colleagues will be allowed an opportunity to vote against it. They will therefore be able to seek the changes which the hon. Gentleman wishes to see.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I seek your reassurance, Madam Speaker. I see that a coach belonging to you is in Westminster Hall. I should like you to reassure us that the rumour we have heard that those of us who should in any way contravene one of your rulings would be expected to drag you through the streets in that coach is totally unfounded.

Madam Speaker: The rumour is not totally unfounded, but that must be done by reindeer.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understood that, once elected to the House, hon. Members can vote according to their judgment, but obviously with guidance from their Whips. If, at the end of a debate, they decide to vote independently, however, they are free to do so. What worries me, hence my point of order to you, Madam Speaker, are the stories in the newspapers of intense pressure and even intimidation being placed on Conservative Members to vote in a certain way tonight. Their constituency associations have also been telephoned. Such practice seems to undermine hon. Members' independence to apply their conscience to how they vote. Do you agree, Madam Speaker, that should those Conservative Members vote under pressure and intimidation, that undermines the whole concept of parliamentary democracy?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is probably verging on the question of privilege. If he is serious about that matter, as he appears to be, he should put his concern in writing to me and I shall certainly consider it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that I have written a long letter to you on this very issue.

Madam Speaker: That is why the hon. Gentleman should not raise the matter with me at this stage.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That letter refers to a conversation that took place between a Central Office official and the chairman of the Billericay Conservative association. When can we expect to have a ruling on privilege?

Madam Speaker: I have not yet had the opportunity to see the hon. Gentleman's letter, but I know that it has been received by my office. I shall deal with it at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I spent part of this morning at the Royal Courts of Justice listening to what the Press Association has described as "a landmark legal victory", which severely criticises the Home Office. One of the cases affected concerns Mr. Paul Malone, about whom I have spoken on many occasions and asked numerous questions. Have you, Madam Speaker, received any requests from Ministers to make a statement on that judgment? Can you further assist me by telling me how I can deal with that matter properly, given that the Home Secretary, with the support of the Prime Minister, refuses to meet me to discuss the case?

Madam Speaker: I have not heard that any Minister is seeking to make a statement today on that matter. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows how to use our procedures well by this stage, but he can table questions, seek Adjournment debates and use other procedural means to raise that issue.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I hope that I shall not appear discourteous to you, because that is not intended, but I want to know what will happen to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland. According to press reports at the weekend, he has succeeded to a peerage. I understand that he issued a press statement this afternoon that he has disclaimed the peerage, if he has inherited it. Apparently it is not clear whether he has inherited that title because it is a matter for the Lord Lion court of Scotland. In a modern Parliament, we should have absolute clarity about who are and who are not Members

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

of Parliament. I am told that there is no documentation available in this Palace to check whether the hon. Gentleman has renounced the title or succeeded to it. We need clarification on that. Can you confirm, Madam Speaker, that that matter will be reported in the Journal tomorrow?

Madam Speaker: The House should be aware that on the death of the Earl of Selkirk, which took place on Thursday, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) accepted advice to the effect that if he thought that he was the heir to the earldom, he should cease to sit and vote in the House until he had reached a decision on whether to disclaim the title. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) should not always follow newspaper reports.

The House has been officially notified today that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West has disclaimed the title under the provisions of the Peerage Act 1963. The hon. Gentleman is now therefore once more able to sit and vote in the House.

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Finance) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Because of the interest in this debate, I have had to limit speeches to 10 minutes between the hours of 6 pm and 8 pm. I ask other hon. Members who speak outside that time to be courteous to their colleagues by restricting the length of their speeches.

3.39 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill will ratify the highly successful deal negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, at Edinburgh in 1992. The new financial decision that emerged from Edinburgh will add about £75 million a year to our net contributions to the European Union in the next financial year, and that sum will increase to about £250 million a year by 1999.

That increase in the contribution is an increase in the price that we pay for the undoubted benefits of membership of the European Union. Our economic well-being is dependent in huge part on our membership of the single market. We pay for a seat at the table to enable us to influence the political and commercial character of that market. We use our membership of the European Union to increase our influence in the world and to give added clout to our worldwide foreign policy.

The Edinburgh deal paid a fair price for those benefits and it also achieved other things in the financial area. It took the United Kingdom down the league table of contributors to the European budget. As a result of the Edinburgh deal, not only Germany, which has always paid more than us, but the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Austria and—if it joins—Norway, will all in the future make a bigger net contribution per head to the Community than do we in the United Kingdom. The deal will also continue to reduce the proportion of the total budget devoted to the common agricultural policy as a result of the mechanism of so-called agricultural guidelines.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall in a second.

The Edinburgh deal also preserved the British rebate. So far, that has been worth £16 billion to us, and that rebate has been preserved until the end of the century.

Mr. Marlow: When the right hon. Lady, the then Prime Minister, came back with the rebate on 27 June 1984, she said:

"this system can be changed only by a unanimous decision by all member Governments and ratified by their Parliaments. The benefits

for the United Kingdom will continue unless and until we ourselves agree to change it."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 993.]

Was she right or was she talking nonsense?

Mr. Clarke: She was perfectly right. If my hon. Friend will restrain himself at this stage, the rebate was negotiated at Fontainebleau in 1984 and unanimity is required to change it but, as I shall explain in a moment, usually a large number of issues are on the table at Councils to revisit those financial deals; countries pursue a variety of objectives; and each country puts into issues the subjects that it wishes to reopen.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the subject of the British rebate is reopened by our partners at every possible opportunity and it was on the table at Edinburgh, but my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stuck to his guns and insisted that the British rebate should remain part of the financial arrangements. As a result of the Edinburgh deal, it is now preserved at least until the end of the present century.

Before I discuss the Edinburgh deal in detail, we must first be sure about the present level of our contributions to the European Union. Last week, it was plain that there is still, in spite of the copious document that I produced, a certain lack of clarity. The contributions that we are paying this year are based on the framework that was agreed by the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in 1988 at the Brussels summit, the last time that a financial framework was negotiated before 1992.

Margaret Thatcher had a tough time at Brussels in 1988, and it is worth remembering what the financial picture then was. The Commission and most of the other member states wanted the ceiling to go up to 1.4 per cent. of Community gross national product. Eventually, they revised their proposals downwards and she was asked to accept 1.3 per cent. of GNP as the ceiling. She still said, on behalf of the British Government, that that was too high. Jacques Delors then proposed 1.2 per cent. Chancellor Helmut Kohl was alarmed by the effect that that might have on German farmers. Chancellor Kohl wanted to go to 1.3 per cent., but Margaret Thatcher stuck to her guns and she settled at the Jacques Delors compromise of 1.2 per cent.

Five years later, at Edinburgh, when the matter had to be reopened, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was still, in the end, not taken anywhere near the figures that Chancellor Kohl and others had been demanding five years earlier. Not by the end of the century will we reach the figures that others were demanding of the British Government in 1988. The Edinburgh settlement will move our contribution to 1.21 per cent. in 1995-96, and to 1.27 per cent. by 1998-99.

What of today's figures, which result from the Margaret Thatcher settlement and the 1.2 per cent. of gross national product to which the Edinburgh deal will be added? What about the billions of pounds whose payment, and forecasts of which, now appear to cause some of my right hon. and hon. Friends such concern? Since 1988, there has been a history of very erratic figures. The highest net public sector contribution that we have made so far is the £2.4 billion paid in 1989-90; the lowest is the £943 million paid in 1991-92. There is a genuine reason for that: technical factors make the figures veer about unpredictably from year to year. The timing of our receipts and payments is unpredictable, and difficulties are involved in calculating the rebate.

The legal basis of the payments is certain, settled by the financial framework, but the timing in any British financial year from April to April is notoriously difficult, given that the rest of Europe and the Union work on a calendar year. There has always been uncertainty: if right hon. and hon. Members look back, they will see that forecasting has been difficult under every Government of every complexion in every year of our membership of the Community and, subsequently, the Union. One thing we do know is that the figures tend to rise in cash terms over the years; that is the inevitable effect of inflation and the overall growth of our GNP, and that is why we have reached the £3 billion figure that has been debated in the past week.

As people continue to be alarmed by such figures, let me make it clear that there is nothing new about them. We have always known that our net contribution would eventually exceed £3 billion: we have always said that it would do so in the end as a result of the Margaret Thatcher Brussels summit deal, if it had never been altered.

Let us take the current year—the year over which there was so much fuss last week when I produced the figures a week earlier than I would normally produce the latest forecast so that we should be better informed today and, I hoped, engage in an intelligent discussion about the cost to the country of the European Union. The first forecast for 1994-95 was made in the Treasury's 1991 autumn statement, and amounted to £3.3 billion. I do not recall the slightest fuss being made at the time. In the 1992 autumn statement, the forecast amounted to £3.1 billion; again, no one raised a murmur. Last year, the autumn statement forecast had come down, because—trying to predict our payments and receipts—we expected this to be a particularly low year: we made a forecast of £1.7 billion. Last week, I announced our latest forecast of £2.4 billion.

Those forecasts show the difficulty of forecasting, which no one has ever claimed to be an exact science. They show either a rise of £700 million or a fall of £900 million over the past few years, according to taste. What matters about the figures—

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: I can think of no other hon. Member to whom I should make this point more clearly than my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash)—the man who has chosen not only to show the uncertainty of the figures, but to suggest that there is some untruthfulness or deceit behind them. He has rejected my allegations that he was talking alarmist nonsense, as indeed he was, a fortnight ago. Those figures have nothing whatever to do with the Edinburgh deal, or with the Bill.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, when he came to the House last week and produced the revised figures, he was obliged to do so? What I said was not rubbish, as he said on a radio programme the other day. I said that there had been a serious omission of enormous proportions from the letter that he sent round, and that that was unacceptable.

Mr. Clarke: I most definitely was not obliged to produce those figures last week. My hon. Friend was utterly amazed that I did so last week. He would have produced his figures and carried on making mischief with them if I had not produced my figures last week. Those

[Mr. Clarke]

figures would normally have been produced at the time of the Budget tomorrow. Had I produced them tomorrow, I predict that we should have had the same nonsense surrounding them as last week. As my hon. Friend knows, my letter set out accurately and clearly the financial consequences of the Edinburgh summit and the financial consequences of the Bill. That has been incontrovertible throughout. The forecast that I gave last week of this year's contribution, which has nothing to do with Edinburgh, is lower than some forecasts that we have given and higher than other forecasts that we have given. I think that the outturn will show this year to be a fairly normal year.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer clear up this matter once and for all? Given what we know of the European Community—that it thought that the figure was higher than £1.7 billion since January—when did the Treasury first calculate that the figure would be higher than £1.7 billion? Was it last week or was it a few months ago?

Mr. Clarke: As far as I am aware, the European Union does not calculate in advance the net contribution from particular countries. It knows what the legal obligation is. For our public spending purposes, we produce forecasts of receipts and expenditure. We produce net contribution figures and we produce them annually. We are for ever altering the forecast. We produce the figures at the time of the Budget. As far as I am aware, no Chancellor of the Exchequer has produced the latest forecasts a week ahead of the Budget. I did so in order that the debate should be better informed. I thought that it was a useful exercise in open government, but not everyone is ready for open government in this country yet.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the issue is not really whether there are different assumptions and different ways of calculating, although there certainly are and all hon. Members can honourably and in a friendly way disagree about them? The difficulty is this. When the measure was first proposed, it was presented as being for £75 million. At a later stage, it appeared that the first year's contribution might be a lot larger. Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends say that, of course, it was first of all presented as being a little measure. Then, when it became necessary to bash it through with a quite unnecessary element of confidence added to it, and the country began to ask, "Why are you blackmailing your Back Benchers over £75 million?" it became necessary to say that the measure was for a larger sum.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend and I have conducted this debate, or variants of it, with respect and in a friendly spirit for many years. He appreciates what the issue is, although I was not sure about that from his intervention. The reason why I produced the figures last week, ahead of when I had to, was to demonstrate the latest forecasts of the underlying pre-Edinburgh contribution. As he knows, there is a legitimate issue of what the consequences are of moving from a ceiling based on 1.20 per cent. of our GNP, in steady steps to 1.27 per cent. of our GNP by 1999. The figure that I first put forward—the figure in the letter that I sent to every Member of Parliament in an attempt to make the debate better informed than I feared it might otherwise be—remains accurate. The consequences of going from 1.20 per cent. to 1.21 per cent. are about £75 million next year—a sum on which Parliament must obviously vote and approve or not approve. Similarly, going to 1.27 per cent. by 1999 will have a £250 million consequence. That is the issue before us. To be fair to my hon. Friend, he has never traduced my efforts to make that clear.

I should not seek to blackmail my hon. Friend, but I wish to persuade him of the merits of the deal—to which I shall return when I resume my speech—and that his conscience, lifelong commitment to the Conservative party, sense of proportion and of his country's duty of keeping its word when it enters into commitments with our partners in the European Union, should lead him to support the Bill tonight, with no question of having his arm twisted.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor answer my question? Did he know of the Treasury forecast revising the contribution upwards from £1.7 billion when he wrote his letter to Members of Parliament?

Mr. Clarke: I honestly cannot remember. [*Laughter.*] My letter to Members of Parliament was based on the consequences of the Edinburgh summit. When one prepares a Budget, forecasts and tables flow through the Treasury, normally to be produced on the day of the Budget in the Red Book. I do not normally trail in advance tables that are to appear in the Red Book or any part of them. I prepared a letter about the Bill containing the figures that I gave a moment ago. Only when confusion arose about the figures and a date was set for this debate did I decide that one line of those figures—the forecast of our EU contributions—should be abstracted and given to the House.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) supports the Edinburgh deal, so he must find it difficult to know which issues to raise in this debate. He can only trawl about, joining some of my hon. Friends in trying to obscure the real issue behind the Bill. I fear that he is somewhat scraping the barrel.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is my right hon. and learned Friend telling the House that he cannot remember the advice of his Treasury officials when he took the most unusual step of writing a round-robin to 651 Members of Parliament in advance of this debate? That letter conveniently referred to the extra amount that would be paid over and above the sum predicted, rather than to the net contributions that our people will have to pay.

Mr. Clarke: I wrote about the Bill's financial consequences and the amount of money riding on this evening's vote. I did not write about the forecast contribution that would arise this year from the 1988 settlement long ago ratified by the House and now utterly beyond its control. I wrote about the issue before us tonight. The attempt to make a great issue about the forecast of this year's contribution, which is £900 million lower than that which we made two years ago but

admittedly £700 million higher than the one that we made 12 months ago, is an attempt—with the greatest respect to my hon. Friend—to introduce a complete irrelevance.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay) *rose—*

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to both my hon. Friends, but as I am sure that they both want to speak, perhaps they will allow me to make a little progress first.

Around £75 million is therefore the correct figure for the effect of the Bill next year. The issue that we should address is why it was necessary, given that large underlying net contribution to which we were already committed, to agree to give anything more at the Edinburgh summit. That is a serious question.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: No, because that would be unfair to my other hon. Friends.

Why was it necessary to add anything to the £2 billion to £3 billion, which I have just been talking about, and which flowed from the Brussels summit in 1988? The first thing to understand—it is rarely understood by anybody discussing European Councils of any kind—is that we were pursuing a package of aims at the extremely important Edinburgh Council. We had to help the Danes to obtain Maastricht opt-outs similar to our own to keep them in the Union as our decentralising and anti-federalist allies. We had to secure the completion of the single market as we wanted it to be. We had to turn subsidiarity into a more concrete form to get something to flow from it, and we had to secure agreement to enlargement so that Austria and the Scandinavians might join.

It was a very tough agenda, and it explains the context in which the decision was reached, which the House is being asked to endorse two years later. We had all those highly important political aims. The danger for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as anyone who has been to any Council of Ministers will readily understand, was that he had to pursue those four political objectives. The danger was that the high spenders in the Union would demand in return too high a price in the new financial arrangements in exchange for our British objectives. The danger of not agreeing any of those things and not having a settlement at the Edinburgh Council would have been that it would all have passed on to the next presidency—it was out of our hands in the British presidency—which might have been less sympathetic.

At Edinburgh, my right hon. Friend succeeded in every one of the political objectives that I have set out: he secured the Danish opt-outs and the completion of the single market, subsidiarity was turned to concrete form, and there was the agreement to enlargement, which is now taking effect—and still at a modest cost, which kept the British abatement intact.

Why, after all that had been secured, was there an unavoidable need for any increase in the new financial arrangements? That is the only key question. Why, even when he pursued and got those four key British objectives, did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have to concede any more money? That, in my opinion, is about the only sensible question to have been raised in the debate in the past week.

More money had to go into the structural and cohesion funds to provide the less-developed regions of the Union with the infrastructure and other investment that they required to accept the single market, and certainly to accept enlargement. There are hon. Members who welcome the objective 1 status that the highlands and islands, Liverpool and Merseyside, as well as Northern Ireland, now have. Principally, the money was needed by Spain, Greece and Portugal to accept what we wanted: that they would compete with German, British and French industry in open trading conditions.

In 1992 we also needed money to give European aid to countries in central and eastern Europe, for example, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Russia. I still debate, in the Council of Finance Ministers, the aid that we give to those countries—countries in which we need to see liberal, democratic government and free market economies and whose stability is vital to European security. More money was inevitable because those were new developments. The question was how much. When one looks at that alongside the political achievements, it is my opinion that the Prime Minister returned to the House with a considerable triumph.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way. Does not he agree that most people in this country are concerned about the money that we are already giving, which, as he just pointed out, amounts to 3½p in the pound on the basic rate of income tax? The constituents whom I represent do not worry too much about putting money into roads in Portugal or into massive irrigation schemes in Spain. They are at a loss to understand why our Government should give priority to the needs of our European partners while neglecting the increase that the taxpayer in this country will have to contribute, which is not a small sum, but which almost amounts to the equivalent that we are trying to raise on VAT?

Mr. Clarke: The case that I have tried to make so far is that we have, under the existing arrangements, been paying between £2 billion and £3 billion a year to bring the undoubted benefits of the single market and of the European Union to this country. Whatever views people have on Europe, very few have demanded that we leave the Union. That level of net contribution has prevailed for years and years, and has not been debated in the House because it has not been a serious issue since the 1988 settlement arose.

Another £75 million will be added to that amount next year and I have given two of the reasons why it needs to be added. That £75 million, for the reasons that I have just given, was a virtually unavoidable increase because there were commitments that had not been there before. That was a very, very good settlement given that the main things that people were concerned about at that Council were the opt-out for Denmark, the enlargement to Sweden, Finland, Austria and Norway, turning subsidiarity into something other than a phrase in the Maastricht treaty and the other benefits that I have just described my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister coming back with from the British summit.

Mr. Barry Porter: I largely accept my right hon. and learned Friend's argument. I represent myself, totally unelected, as somebody from the centrist tendency. We are not much bothered about the odd percentage here and

[Mr. Barry Porter]

there of gross national product. What we are bothered about, I think—and I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will come to this point—is that he should satisfy us that the Government have some policy under which something will be done about the fraud and corruption that have been brought to our attention, not for the first time this year, but in years before. Thereafter, let us get the woods from the trees. We can go forward with this matter perfectly happily, as other hon. Members on both sides of the House can.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), not for the first time, speaks for the voice of common sense. I certainly intend in due course to deal with the extremely important question of how we stop fraud and how we stop the misuse of this money. If I have time, I should like to go on to the far more important question of how we get better value for the money that we spend, which is an important issue highlighted by the Bill. I shall deal with those questions and try to explain why I believe that the present situation is not the same as the past. Very much more is being done, although I believe that we must ensure that more is achieved to get a grip on the issue.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I will not give way yet, if my hon. Friend will forgive me.

As the Bill is concerned with these figures and as we are voting on our increased contribution, I shall conclude my arguments about why I think that the Bill, in terms of the figures, represents a good bargain that the House should approve. I shall then turn to how we can be sure in future that we get much better value out of what we are already paying, as well as the addition that we are talking about this evening.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Before the end of this debate, shall we have an idea of when the Chancellor of the Exchequer first became aware that the estimate of £1,714 million was an underestimate of about £730 million? More importantly, on the accuracy of the £75 million, as the Chancellor has said, that depends on all the guidelines being met. Does not it worry him that, as my photocopy shows, the 1995 budget of the EC states clearly and precisely that in agricultural spending, the budget will be exceeded by £1 billion? That will be done by accountancy devices in exactly the same way as happened when, unfortunately, Lady Thatcher got agricultural guidelines and they were broken through by having a metric year. How can we stop such a thing, when the figures are written clearly and precisely?

Mr. Clarke: Throughout the public spending round, various estimates of expenditure are produced; quite a lot are negotiated. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that European contributions remain a pretty uncertain feature throughout most of a public spending round until, eventually, the Treasury experts go nap on the best figure they can do for the coming year on the forecast then coming in. Those forecasts emerge in the Red Book at the time of the Budget, so at the time of writing the Budget, one becomes aware of them. I should not normally look at them in close detail until we were finalising the arithmetic in the last week or two.

Those figures were not in my mind at the time of the letter; they had nothing to do with the letter. A complete red herring has been raised in seizing on the changed estimate—changed from when I produced it last year. Hon. Members know that the figures that I gave in my letter were precise, accurate and unchallengeable, yet some of them have chosen to go off on to another field.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall conclude my point and then I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

I shall conclude the judgment of the deal at the Edinburgh summit. I have described the political background. This judgment is what, two years later, has given rise to this so-called "crisis debate". *[Interruption.]* Good heavens. Sudden noise reminds me that some members of the Labour party are here. I do not know why they have come to this debate as their participation in supporting the Edinburgh deal is somewhat difficult to understand. Let me—*[Interruption.]* Let me just give some objective judgments of the deal at the Edinburgh summit. It was described in the following terms by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames, the then Chancellor:

"I think it has been an outstandingly successful summit, I can't remember one that has been so successful for many years. I think this is very much due to the negotiating style, the quiet determined diplomacy of John Major, he absolutely excels in this sort of forum and he has delivered a very good deal for Britain on almost every issue."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I do not say this to embarrass my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames. He has supported the deal throughout, but he keeps being prayed in aid by those who do not.

My right hon. Friend went on to say:

"The overall financing agreement is one that is affordable and is much more modest than the highly ambitious plans the Commission put forward which have been scaled back."

He even said:

"Everybody had to make some compromises, but at the end of the day, by making switches from one item of the Budget here to another item there we achieved a result which actually goes ahead for seven years on the future finances, it takes us right up to 1999. That's why it was very good news that we succeeded in preserving our rebate, because that is now guaranteed into the next century. Now that is excellent news."

That is what my right hon. Friend said and I agree with it—*[Interruption.]*—and there were others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford rose to ask a question during the statement after my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had returned from the Edinburgh summit. At column 29 of *Hansard* on 14 December 1992, he asked about the Danish opt-out. At that time, my hon. Friend did not utter one word of complaint about the own resources deal. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) rose to his feet immediately after the Prime Minister had said that the Edinburgh summit had decided that it was not

appropriate to increase expenditure by a substantial amount, even over the coming years. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had just reminded the House that

"At present, the United Kingdom's net contribution is about £2 billion a year. It would be £4 billion but for the rebate, which remains and—lest there be any doubt—is extended to cover the fresh areas of expenditure that were agreed at Maastricht. In the case of the cohesion fund, for example, that means that we would pay only 5 per cent. of the total cost."

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South-West rose shortly after that. At column 32 of *Hansard* he did not demur from a word of that. He asked a question about the need for any future ratification of the treaty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) intervened, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner). Neither raised the slightest murmur about the financial deal. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) intervened at column 39.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hooray!

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, who had the courtesy to rise and to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his negotiating skill.

Mr. Walker: I meant what I said, as my right hon. and learned Friend believes, and I said what I meant at the time. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I still mean it and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister knows that. May I draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to paragraph 5 of the explanatory and financial memorandum? It says:

"The new Decision has to be approved by all member states in accordance with their national procedures before it can enter into force. It will take effect as from 1st January 1995."

What we are doing in the House is pursuing our normal procedures. Since 1992, there have been changes as a result of our economic difficulties, 17.5 per cent. VAT on fuel and many other aspects. Exposed Community fraud, as a result of what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister achieved, has been demonstrated. People such as my constituents and I are concerned about what we shall do about the fraud. That is why they are taking a stand. We are following our normal procedures.

Mr. Clarke: With respect to my hon. Friend, that really will not do. When the Government of this country enter into political commitments with their allies in such Councils, it is known that the Government will come back and follow our normal parliamentary procedures and seek approval from the House. That is how our parliamentary democracy works. The normal procedure for an hon. Member who supports the Government is to support a settlement upon which he congratulated the Prime Minister at the time he brought it back.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way in a moment after I have referred to one more of my colleagues.

One Euro-sceptic Member of Parliament queried the cost. Only one Member of Parliament in the entire House cast any question on the financial deal at the time. That person was my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). She was the only person to complain about what she called

the massive increase in taxation . . . which will be necessary to pay for that money".—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1992; Vol. 216, c. 31-35.]

She complained at the time, so it is to her, the only person to see anything wrong at the time, to whom I turn to continue to explain what I hope are her last doubts about the £75 million next year that she objects to paying.

Mr. Shore *rose—*

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a second. I give way to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) first.

Mr. Shore: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will realise that the arithmetic in this matter is pretty important and his credentials in this matter are not exactly improved by the correction of £732 million that he had to make to this year's estimate. However, whatever the right hon. and learned Gentleman may argue and reason in claiming that this year's additional expenditure is likely to be only £75 million, what assumptions has he made that lead him to the derisory figure of £250 million in six years' time? What assumptions has he made, crucially, about United Kingdom and Community growth rates during that period? The whole own resource ceiling is based entirely on the percentage of achieved gross domestic product.

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman was in government long enough to know that when we look back at the history of predictions of net contributions to the European Community, it is clear that they veer about, year in and year out in the Red Book, as I have described. That is not usually put down to the individual Chancellor of the Exchequer having changed the figures. In fact, the estimates that I produced last week are lower than the estimates that we gave in 1991 and in 1992, as I have already described.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney that the arithmetic matters. The certainty is that the ceiling will move in steady stages from its present 1.20 per cent. of gross national product to 1.27 per cent. of GNP by 1999. The assumptions that we have made in trying to put a cash figure on that, to make it comparable with other public spending figures, are 2½ per cent. inflation and 2½ per cent. growth in GNP. At the moment, we are becoming more prosperous more rapidly than any of our partners in the European Union. As our GNP goes up, that has the effect of putting up our contributions.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. and learned Friend appreciate how much we enjoyed his knock-about performance on the announcement at the Edinburgh summit? Does he appreciate that he has already demonstrated that the figures are very complex and that there are a number of different assumptions about them? It was silly for some people to greet them with sycophantic approval. It would also have been silly to greet them with open disapproval without knowing what they were. Surely, on reflection, my right hon. and learned Friend will agree that it was better simply to wait until the full figures emerged and to hope at least that the rights of

[Mr. Budgen]

Members of Parliament would be respected when Members of Parliament were trying carefully and sensibly to analyse what was done and what was asked for.

Mr. Clarke: I really must put it to my hon. Friend that we have got into the debate now, and so far, it seems to me, no one has challenged my figure of around £75 million for next year. It remains absolutely incontrovertible. My hon. Friend at least, I certainly agree, understands the Red Book when the Chancellor produces it, so he would understand the figures when they are produced. He really is being disingenuous in saying that we would have avoided this confusion if I had saved them until tomorrow as opposed to producing them last week. My hon. Friend knows perfectly well that, had I produced them tomorrow, he and his hon. Friends would have gone straight to them and again done what they did last week—tried to pretend that a totally different figure about a totally different estimate casts doubt upon my wholly accurate figure of £75 million for next year.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Should we add the name of the right hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) to the list of Conservative dissidents? In 1988, when a very similar Bill was before the House, the right hon. Gentleman tabled a series of wrecking amendments. The right hon. Gentleman is now a member of the Cabinet. Is he a member of the Cabinet because his views on European finance have changed, or is he a member of the Cabinet because his views on European finance have not changed?

Mr. Clarke: In 1988, we had a different Bill and a much more expensive deal; a much more significant increase in the British contribution than the one in 1992 that we are now facing. I say to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), as I say to most members of the Labour party, that I continue to wonder what irrelevances they are going to introduce to intervene in the debate. The truth is that they are cynically listening to a debate on a Bill which they support, and whose objectives they have never demurred from, but which they intend to vote against, presumably because they have tabled a wholly wrecking amendment at the request of whichever of my hon. Friends they can get to vote against it.

Mr. Rowe: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: Let me proceed a little.

Let me refer to the doubts that have been raised by some of my hon. Friends about, perhaps, agriculture and, perhaps, fraud and poor value for money, which, certainly, it is sensible for the House to address at a time when we have the chance of considering the overall cost by way of net contribution of our membership of the Union. Agricultural spending is referred to in the Opposition's amendment, although, as far as I can see, with no proposals for reform put forward by them.

Agricultural spending still covers about 50 per cent. of all European spending, but, since 1988, it has been declining. We have a so-called agricultural guideline, which certainly should not be broken. I agree with my hon. Friends who say, "Well, we wait to see what happens." *[Interruption.]* Spending is in the control of Finance Ministers. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East that Finance Ministers are keen on the Edinburgh ceilings and keen on the agricultural guideline. That guideline has already ensured that agriculture is taking a steadily declining share of the total. It took 70 per cent. of the total in 1988, it takes 50 per cent. now, and that proportion will fall, making room for the structural funds and the third-country payments to which I have already referred.

The proposition on the table about agriculture at the 1992 Edinburgh summit, and again under discussion during 1993, was that the agricultural guideline should actually be increased by 1.5 billion ecu. That proposition was rejected by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and was successfully fought off by him. Because of GATT and the reforms of the common agricultural policy in 1992, agricultural policy will be less dependent on export subsidies and storage costs. Those are the sectors that have been notoriously vulnerable to fraud, and the future shape of agricultural policy should lessen itself to fraud. However, fraud is an extremely important and serious matter.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I give way to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), because he is usually critical of the common agricultural policy and its expenditure. So am I and so are the Government. We had an important reform in 1992. We are now seeing a decline in the agricultural budget, and we are shall tighten up on fraud in that budget, as I shall explain in a moment.

Mr. Stevenson: I am grateful to the Chancellor for giving way. In that context, will he confirm that between 1992 and 1995 common agricultural policy expenditure under his Government has increased from £21 billion to almost £27 billion—an increase of 25 per cent?

Mr. Clarke: That is part of the 1992 reforms, which reduced the surpluses and the costs to consumers and, I agree, certainly gave rise to some compensatory costs for farmers. I must confess that I have no idea what the Labour party's policy on common agricultural policy reform is, but I assume that Labour's spokesperson in 1992, whoever it was, accepted that the very substantial reforms which my right hon. Friend, now the Secretary of State for the Environment, took through during our presidency were a considerable net economic benefit to this country. We must continue to go down that road, and the present guidelines reduce the proportion of the total that is likely to go on agriculture.

Mr. Rowe: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that in the last year for which we were solely responsible for agricultural support, the cost was about 1.2 per cent. of our gross national product, and it is now well under 0.5 per cent.? Is not it also true that we are having so much difficulty with the figures now because the enormous potential increase in our contribution stems exactly from the very success of the club for which this is the subscription?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend on his second point and I am grateful to him for the figures that he gave, which I shall check. He is certainly correct.

Some of the recent publicity about the so-called cost of the European Union has included calculations that assume that we should not have any system of agricultural support

if we were not a member of the European Union. My hon. Friend and I are just about old enough to remember that we had a very bad and expensive form of agricultural support before we joined the European Union. He and I both represent farmers in our constituencies and we are committed to a continuing element of agricultural support in the future. I have described how that support has been reformed and improved and how it is now reducing as a proportion of total expenditure.

I shall move on to the subject of fraud after one more intervention.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): If the Chancellor is so confident about the case that he is putting about the Edinburgh summit, why did the Government feel obliged to make this an issue of confidence? It was the Chancellor who raised the stakes in the debate in a quite spectacular manner—of course, no doubt in a totally loyal fashion. If there is a separate vote next week about VAT on fuel, will that also be an issue of confidence and if not, why not?

Mr. Clarke: I shall come to the question of confidence and the stakes of this bet, which it is a certainty we shall win, in a few moments. If I have to address the hon. Gentleman about the British constitution and our perfectly commonsense interpretation of it, I shall do so in due course.

I shall deal first with the question of fraud that my right hon. and hon. Friends have raised. We have been giving the highest priority to tackling fraud and getting better value for money—an even bigger problem— over the past year or two, and we have made substantial progress.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way when I have explained our current position. The House must understand that we are not the only member state concerned about fraud. The fact is that our Danish, Dutch and German colleagues, to name but a few, are equally aroused about it. It is as important to their political debate as it is to ours, as I know from the frequent discussions that we have on the subject when I attend the Council of Finance Ministers.

But it is the British Government who have made most of the running in recent years and it is the British Government who have contributed the most tangible changes that will produce an improvement inside the Union. A great deal has been done, but there is a great deal more to do.

Any fraud is unacceptable when public or any other money is involved. The present level of fraud is excessive, but I say again to the House that it does not improve public debate or the appreciation of what can be done to whip up the debate on the subject by way of the grotesque exaggeration that we have heard in the past week. The ridiculous figure of £6 billion worth of fraud is bandied about in the BBC and sections of the press, and by some of my hon. Friends. As far as I am aware, it has not the slightest factual basis.

There was once a German academic who tried to produce the figure as a result of a study that he had done of the beef regime. It does not stand up to the slightest examination. I trust that when we debate the matter today, people will not exaggerate the extent of fraud by at least 10 times.

As I said, no fraud is acceptable. All fraud is serious. So let me refer to what has been done in the past two years or so since the ratification of the Maastricht treaty. The Maastricht treaty has so far made the biggest changes.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend was not the most famous supporter of that treaty, but I shall give way to him.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House why he allowed the Italians to get away with the milk quota scam, which cost £500 million? They grossly exceeded their milk quotas deliberately and then blackmailed the Community, saying that they would not implement the Edinburgh summit proposals unless we gave in. Why, if my right hon. and learned Friend and Her Majesty's Government are so keen on eliminating fraud within the Community, did they give in in that way?

Mr. Clarke: It is untrue that I gave in. I shall deal with Italian milk quotas, in which suddenly everyone has taken a great interest in the past fortnight. Most of the people who talk about milk quotas have not the first idea what they are talking about. I shall deal with the Italian milk quota settlement before I sit down because I have had enough of the allegations made about it both by my hon. Friends and by the press. The allegation that I backed down on that matter is as untrue as the ridiculous £6 billion figure for fraud that I have just described.

I shall first deal with the Maastricht treaty changes and what is happening now. The treaty gives the Court of Auditors greatly increased status and powers compared with those that the body previously had. The irony is that the new, stronger Court of Auditors, which produced last week's report on the 1993 budget, gave the opportunity to every enemy of the European Union suddenly to claim that it was corrupt to the core because at last they had the material, which they then grossly exaggerated. That gave rise to the allegations.

The Court of Auditors now has the power to take the Commission or other institutions of the Union to the European Court of Justice if it needs to do so to get action taken on its reports. The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament have also been given extra powers to hold the Commission to account for the defects disclosed by the Court of Auditors reports. The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament are now doing that for the 1992 budget.

The British took the lead at a Council of Finance Ministers, which demanded that, in the light of the 1992 report, in future we should have prior approval of projects, target setting for results in terms of value for money, monitoring and evaluation of spending. That put in place the type of procedures that accompany good government in this country. The European Parliament is demanding action on milk quotas, tobacco and the use of anti-fraud staff. It is also getting a response.

Since 1992 there has been a Commissioner personally responsible for action against fraud. It is at present a German Commissioner and is soon to be a Swedish Commissioner. Both come from countries as keen to cut fraud in parts of the Union as we are in the British Parliament. There is now a unit that deals with fraud—

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the so-called flying squad—currently headed by a Dane. That so far is good enough, but the British Government wish and intend to go further.

Both the British Government and the Commission have made further proposals for Community-wide action and stronger criminal penalties for those who are guilty of fraud involving Community funds. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has put forward the British proposal that member states should tighten penalties for Community fraud and that it should be a criminal, imprisonable and extraditable offence. The Commission has responded with, if anything, even stronger suggestions of its own. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend or another Home Office Minister will discuss the matter at the Council of Interior Ministers later this week and that proposals will soon be put in place.

Fraud is a serious matter. That is not anything that divides any Members in the House one from another. At last—especially since 1992, Maastricht and Edinburgh—we have in place the necessary structures to tackle fraud. The British Government will remain among the most determined to ensure that the structures are acted on and produce results.

More proposals will be put forward at the next European summit in Essen. For example, we might propose independent inspection of the vetting of claims by some national agencies because some member states are not good at vetting the claims that they put forward.

I hope that when we make those proposals and when we strengthen what we have done in the past two years, no Members of the House will say that we are allowing European interference in this country, appointing Euro-snoopers and making Euro-laws. We are strengthening the action that can been taken against fraud because it is absolutely essential that we get value for money out of the budget.

Mr. Cash: I must ask my right hon. and learned Friend, in a friendly spirit, whether he intends to make a statement on the proposal in my amendment, which has not been selected, that the Public Accounts Committee could take a greater interest in the issue, given the fact that, under the Maastricht arrangements and previously, it was stated that Conservative Members wanted greater enhancement of the powers of national Parliaments.

Mr. Clarke: I am not sure whether the Public Accounts Committee and the Comptroller and Auditor General have access to information that the Court of Auditors, the Commission and member states receive. The PAC does a very good job, but I am dubious about how much information it would have about the Yugoslav maize scam, which was detected in Greece some time ago. A serious point lies behind my hon. Friend's amendment—how we tackle fraud.

I was describing the way in which we are putting into place in Europe—largely at Britain's behest, as was the case when we negotiated Maastricht—the sort of arrangements that British politicians would recognise as likely to detect fraud at member state level, or when there is carelessness at Commission level.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: May I keep my promise to return to the subject of the Italian milk quotas? The basis on which the own resources decisions proceeded was finally unlocked at the Council of Finance Ministers, when I settled a series of actions that turned around the Italian and Spanish milk quotas from 1988 onwards. The British Government had participated in those court actions precisely to ensure that people were not allowed to escape with the underpayment of penalties, which might otherwise have occurred.

The Italians and Spanish had exceeded their milk quotas for a number of years and had not collected the penalties from their farmers, as other members, such as the Germans, Belgians and British, had done. When the matter finally came to a head, the Commission purported to backdate the quotas to those member states, because many Agriculture Ministers agreed that mistakes had been made in calculating the exact milk production of those countries. The Commission calculated how much Italy and Spain should pay to the Union and tried to backdate the increased quotas. I have put those facts on the record because some factual description of the saga is required.

What did the various court actions lead to? The Commission proposed to sort out the problem by making the Italians and Spanish repay 2.1 becu—£1.6 billion—as a penalty. They said no, went to court and said that they should not have to pay anything as it had all been a mistake and they were not liable for £1.6 billion. The British went to court to argue that the Commission should not backdate the quota and that the two countries should pay more penalties.

When we discussed the matter, the first question was who would win in court. I have been involved in enough court actions to know that no one can be certain of that, least of all in the European Court of Justice. Had we gone to court and won the point of principle, we should still have left the Commission to calculate the penalties. There was no reason at all to believe that had we won the action, the Commission would have assessed the penalties at anything more than the 2.1 becu, or £1.6 billion, which it was already happy to take. The settlement that we got obliged the payment of penalties of 3.2 becu, an increase above the Commission's statement of 1.1 becu. The British action in court and our position at the Council of Finance Ministers increased the penalties by £860 million, over and above anything that would otherwise have been achieved.

We took that action because we insisted that the penalties should not be waived by the Commission in those circumstances. My Italian and Spanish colleagues had to go back to their Parliaments and explain why, between the two of them, £860 million had been added to the penalties imposed upon them for failing to enforce milk quotas. That £860 million was a cost imposed by the British Government for their seeking to evade the operation of milk quotas that other people had.

That action, which gave rise to the biggest penalties in the history of agriculture in the European Union, is typical of the action that the Government will take on fraud in the future. That is why I suggest to the House that the addition to our net contributions is a triumph of negotiation. It is a contribution that we should pay on top of our existing contributions to continue to get benefits from the Union.

I have been asked why that is a matter of confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: No, with the greatest respect to my hon. Friend. I am now about to conclude. It is time for us to find out what the Labour party is here for.

On the question of confidence, I repeat to the House what I said when I was giving a press conference about the figures that I produced last week. It seems to me to be plain and obvious that any Government who give a solemn undertaking in international negotiations, enter into political commitments and require money to support those commitments, must come back and ask the House to endorse that. If the House will not vote in favour of that money, the Government will have lost the confidence of Parliament. *[Interruption.]* It is not a ploy, nor a policy decision. It is plain and obvious common sense.

The role of this Parliament will be diminished if a new rule is invented for the short-term and expedient reasons given by some Opposition Members that the Government can be defeated on a major international obligation and then carry on with a reshuffle as if nothing had happened. It is precisely the power of Parliament that if Parliament will not vote in favour of the money and will not enable the Government to honour their solemn international commitments, the Government will have lost the confidence of the House and they must fall. That seems to be obvious, and to take any other course would undermine parliamentary democracy and not improve it.

That is the only issue which has moved the Labour party and the Liberal Democrat party to want to vote against the own resources decision.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Hon. Members must now wait for their speeches to make their points.

The deal was not only not criticised by anybody at the time—apart from my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay—but it has been supported in full by the Labour party and by the Liberal Democrat party ever since it was entered into. If we are talking about parliamentary procedure, and if hon. Members are to raise points of order about respect for Parliament as a result of newspaper reports that they have read at the weekend, what respect for Parliament is created by the official Opposition and the third-biggest party standing on their heads and voting against every principle and statement that they have ever propounded on Edinburgh at the request of some of my right hon and hon. Friends?

I ask the Opposition to go away. They have no part to play in the debate. We know their views. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford will tell them when to come back and which way to vote. He will tell them whether they are needed or not.

The Opposition are following a totally dishonourable course in seeking to wreck a deal that was a superb negotiating triumph at the time. When the House returns to common sense, it will ratify that deal when it gives the Bill a Second Reading tonight.

4.44 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House believes that the European Communities (Finance) Bill is not an acceptable measure as it increases United Kingdom contributions to the European Union without action by Her Majesty's Government to cut fraud and waste in Europe or to reduce expenditure on the Common Agricultural Policy."

The case for the amendment has been enhanced by the muddle created by the Chancellor this afternoon over the figures which he has produced, and by his failure to convince and explain them adequately to the House. We know that the Chancellor did not read the Maastricht treaty. Now we know that he cannot remember when he read what were perhaps the most controversial estimates of his public expenditure statement. It does the Chancellor no credit to respond to his own failure by spending a good deal of his speech attacking many Conservative Back Benchers.

In the recent history of the House, there have been many votes of confidence called by Prime Ministers to determine the fate of their Government. In every one of them, the Prime Minister of the day has come to the House, stood at the Dispatch Box and spoken in defence of his Ministers, Cabinet and Government. That is until today.

The Prime Minister tells us that he attaches vital importance to the debate. He has told the House that, for him, it is a matter of confidence and that every clause is a vote of confidence. He has told the country that it is a matter on which not just he, but the whole Government would resign. No compromise, no last-minute shuffling of leaders—it is all or nothing. But the man who has asked for that vote of confidence from the House has not the confidence to stand up in the House to ask for that vote.

The House has seen many historic votes of confidence. But when the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) faced a vote of confidence over Europe, he did not delegate that matter to Anthony Barber. When Macmillan faced a vote of confidence after sacking half his Cabinet—some said the wrong half—he did not sit it out and simply call on Selwyn-Lloyd to stand at the Dispatch Box. I ask the House; would Lady Thatcher, in similar circumstances to today's, have sent along Sir Geoffrey Howe to defend her?

The Prime Minister has chosen to exercise his right to silence in the debate, and we all know the inference from insisting on one's right to silence which the Home Secretary would encourage us to draw. It is rather as if the grand old Duke of York had marched his men up to the top of hill, made his excuses and left. If I may recall a previous European encounter in which a leader sought to summon up the spirits of his country, it is as if the Prime Minister had said, "Once more into the breach, dear friends. But I am sorry, I will not be leading you myself."

We have an unprecedented vote of confidence called the day before the Budget on every clause and every detail of the Bill. There has been panic, and the ultimatum of the confidence vote. The scale of the threat and this bizarre sequence of events can be explained by one thing and one thing only; not by any reference to the national interest and not by looking at the needs of the British economy and the British people, but by the fact that it is in accordance with the imperatives exercised by the bitter

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feuding inside the Conservative party. The divisions, as we see this afternoon, are rapidly becoming irreconcilable and are now fracturing a once-great party.

Just as the imperatives arising from that disunity have forced the Prime Minister to adopt an absurd stand over the confidence vote, the Prime Minister has allowed himself to be forced into making every clause in the Bill a matter of confidence. This must be a no-change Bill; a Bill that the Prime Minister tells us is somehow beyond improvement. What a ridiculous position the Prime Minister has put himself in. He asks us to adopt a test which, if applied to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill—which the House chose to amend eight times during 12 months—would have, under the new Prime Ministerial diktat, occasioned general election after general election during the past year. If such a test were to be applied—as the Prime Minister says—to every Finance Bill, it would have meant last year alone, with three amendments to the Finance Bill accepted, three dissolutions of Parliament.

The Prime Minister should reconsider his absurd view that strength and authority would come from an unchanged Bill. The best evidence of strength and authority would be a better Bill, because I believe that a majority in the House want new measures to be included in the Bill to tackle waste, fraud and the cost of the CAP. Not only is a majority in the House in favour of that, but, as the custodian of public finance, the House has a duty to demand action as a result of the report by the president of the Court of Auditors, which was published since the Edinburgh summit.

On Thursday, the Chancellor gave the House revised figures relating to our contributions to the European Community. Last week, an extra £700 million was added to our budget contributions—not to the contributions made in 1988 or 1989, nor to contributions forecast long into the future, but to our contributions this year. Surely we deserve a better explanation than we have had from the Chancellor this afternoon, especially when we were told 18 months ago that our contributions were to be £2.6 billion, but then that they were to be halved to £1.3 billion. That reduction represented savings as vast as one third of the public spending cuts that the Chancellor announced in the Budget. Why were we not told earlier that the contribution had been revised from £1.7 billion to £2.4 billion?

I must tell the Chancellor that this is not a technical matter. It goes right to the heart of the debate about our contributions to the European Community. We are talking about the bottom line in terms of Britain's payments to the Community. It is not a technical matter, because the failure to answer our questions and the fact that £700 million more is to be paid raises questions about what the Government are doing about waste, fraud, the expenditure on the CAP and costs that continue to rise.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Talking about the bottom line, can the hon. Gentleman confirm that if he had his way, the one thing that we could be sure of is that our contributions would be far higher because of the massive spending demands of the Labour party? Whatever the contributions made by a Labour Government, they would be infinitely higher than the figure given by the Chancellor.

Mr. Brown: We have never supported the increasing costs of the CAP, which have risen under the Government. The hon. Gentleman will have a difficult job explaining to his constituents that he opposed an amendment that called for further action on waste, fraud and the costs of the CAP. He has told his constituents that combating such fraud and waste is exactly what he would do in the House, but tonight he will vote against a proposal designed to do just that.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): If the hon. Gentleman is right when he says that the Labour party has always supported improvements to the CAP, can he explain why his party either abstained on or opposed such important reforms, and did not support them, when they were introduced in December 1991?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to know whether we abstained or opposed, but the fact is that we have been consistent opponents of the CAP.

When the former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food returned to the House after the debates on the MacSharry proposals, he commended them to the House as the proposals of the British Government. Even then, however, we were calling for continual major reform of the CAP. If Conservative Members think that the CAP, which is costing ordinary people £20 more in their food bills—it is a tax on food, unfair to the development of eastern Europe and unfair to the third world—is in any way still defensible, they should listen to their constituents, who would tell them the exact opposite.

It is important to consider the waste and fraud in the Community budget and the recent report of the president of the Court of Auditors. That report is a sorry catalogue of abuse and lack of accountability which cries out for action. However, today, yet again, the Prime Minister has set himself against any amendment that would give the House greater powers of accountability to consider such waste.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a lack of manpower resources in the Commission to investigate such fraud? Does he agree that the effect of his amendment, if passed, would be to wreck the Bill and deny those resources to tackle fraud?

Mr. Brown: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that not enough work is done in the Community to combat fraud, which undoubtedly exists. Let me remind him that on 1 September 1993 a Treasury Minister said:

> "It is correct that the UK does not take up all the money that the Commission allocates us for anti-fraud work."

The hon. Gentleman may wish to allocate responsibility to the European Commission, but mistakes made by the Treasury have prevented us from taking up the money available to deal with fraud.

The intervention from the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) is extremely helpful, because, yesterday, I was given figures about the take-up of money by Britain for anti-fraud work relating to the CAP. In 1991, the European Community made available to Britain 1.5 million ecu for anti-fraud work, but the British Government took up not a penny; in 1992, 1.4 million ecu

were available, but 80 per cent. of that sum was not taken up; in 1993, 92 per cent. of the available money was not taken up. In total, just 11 per cent. of the amount available to deal with anti-fraud was—

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): We are more honest than others in the Community.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman has raised another issue, but I have already pointed out that we do not take up the money available for anti-fraud work. The hon. Gentleman should criticise the Chancellor for that. I accept that Britain is not the worst when it comes to fraud, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not read the Court of Auditors report, because the president was not entirely pleased with what was happening here. He noted that mechanisms were not in place for dealing with both the audit and the monitoring of customs fraud. The hon. Gentleman may wish to direct some of his questions to the Chancellor concerning the failures of the Government, as reported by the president of the Court of Auditors.

Let us be clear about the waste and the fraud and why the Government should be criticised for failing to act. We know about the celebrated incident of the £1 billion wasted on digging up vineyards, only to find that, at the end of it, the output of wine in the Community had increased by 20 per cent. The Court of Auditors also reported that one department had been giving grants to dig up the vineyards while another had given grants to replant them. We also know that grants were made to start projects that had already been completed; that grants intended for redundant workers went to people whose jobs were not at risk; and companies which were given other grants for a particular job were then given a grant for auditing their own accounts. I believe that the majority of hon. Members would want more done to combat such fraud.

When the Foreign Secretary praised the Court of Auditors for the report, perhaps he already knew about the high standards of hospitality offered by its president at its launch. Journalists and officials discussed the waste and corruption in the Euro gravy train while they were served caviar, smoked salmon, canapes and pâté de foie gras washed down with champagne. No doubt each and every guest was determined to do as much as possible in the time available to diminish the salmon mountain and the champagne lake.

Is not it absurd that a reasonable amendment, which gives the House more power to monitor such abuses—something that Conservative Members believe is necessary in principle—will not be accepted by the Prime Minister because he has made a test of strength not out of getting the best Bill, not out of answering the real needs in relation to the European Community, but out of getting the Bill through unchanged, no matter the opinion of the House?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is giving the impression that his amendment is merely designed to cut down on the quantity of canapes consumed and to cut agricultural spending a bit. I trust that he will accept that his amendment would wreck the Second Reading of the Bill; stop it from proceeding and prevent us from being able to endorse the Edinburgh deal. That would put us in breach of our treaty obligations to other members of the European Union. Why is he putting forward an amendment that does that when he supports the deal that we have done?

Mr. Brown: Of course the Government could bring the Bill back with the amendment that we put forward, but it is the Prime Minister who has made this evening's vote a vote of confidence. It is the Prime Minister who is trying to dragoon his troops into the Lobby. It is the Prime Minister who is responsible for the issue becoming more controversial than it need be. However, if he is seeking to pass an unchanged Bill through the House, he does not understand the feelings of the country about waste and fraud, and about what is happening to the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Has my hon. Friend noted that the Chancellor has just claimed that failure to pass the Second Reading tonight would be a breach of treaty commitment? Does he share with me the impression that the Chancellor admitted that he has not read it, because is it not a fact that article 201 of the union treaty gives this Parliament an explicit right to agree or disagree with the provisional agreement made in Edinburgh two years ago?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose erudition in those matters is well known. I heard the Chief Secretary to the Treasury yesterday repeating the words that the Chancellor said today: that we had to honour obligations that were made internationally and we could not be put off by a minority of dissidents in the House. The very Chief Secretary who says that this year was the person who voted against an analogous Bill as recently as a few years ago. *[Interruption.]* He does not seem to understand that that was also a negotiated treaty that he was asking the House to vote against.

What about the role of the House?

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know on which side of the debate the hon. Gentleman is, but I will give way to him because of his well-known interest in agriculture.

Mr. Davies: Is it not a fact that neither the hon. Gentleman nor his party said a word against the Edinburgh agreement when it was concluded? Is it not amazingly cynical to come to the House with an amendment designed to prevent the Government from implementing an international obligation to which the hon. Gentleman never objected at the time? Will not that be regarded as utterly cynical throughout Europe?

Mr. Brown: But if I may say so in language that I think that the hon. Gentleman would understand, we have always called for a fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy. I think that the hon. Gentleman, with his specialist knowledge, understands that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Brown: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have made it clear from the Opposition Benches that amendments that deal with the problems of waste and fraud in the European Community can, I believe, command a majority throughout the House and that it is ridiculous for the Prime Minister to demand an unchanged Bill when, by

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debate and discussion and by the House performing its proper duties supervising the finances of the Government, we can obtain a better Bill. We not only—

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way because of seniority.

Sir Terence Higgins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Will he make it absolutely clear to the House that, if his amendment is carried, he believes that the Bill will have obtained a Second Reading? Secondly, since he argues for amendments, can we understand that he proposes to table amendments in Committee, both on agriculture and on fraud, which would have any effect in reality on those two problems?

Mr. Brown: The Government could accept our amendment now and let us deal with the questions of waste, fraud and the common agricultural policy. *[Interruption.]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government can accept our amendment. They could bring back the Bill after they had debated it this evening. It is not I but the Prime Minister who has made it an issue of confidence to be dealt with at 10 o'clock this evening.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is important that the hon. Gentleman knows what he is voting about. His amendment would delete everything after the word "That" and would deny the Bill a Second Reading. It would substitute for it his form of words about fraud and agriculture, but the Bill would be defeated. It would not be possible for the Government to bring back the Bill in the same Session of Parliament. The hon. Gentleman is voting to defeat a Bill whose objectives he supports, and he does not even seem to realise that that is what he is doing.

Mr. Brown: I repeat, it is the Prime Minister who has made that an issue of confidence this evening. The Government could bring back the Bill, with the changes that we are recommending in it, if they chose to do so, but it is the Prime Minister who has chosen to make it an issue of confidence, and it is the Prime Minister who would pay the price as a result.

I shall now discuss the common agricultural policy. When even the National Farmers Union now calls for fundamental reform, when the Country Landowners Association has recently submitted a document calling for reform, when the wasteful CAP is a tax on food and a barrier to fair trade—since 1979, the cost of the CAP has increased dramatically—I ask Members on the Conservative Benches how they can vote tonight for no further action against a system of open-ended state intervention, the export subsidies that go with it and its inviolability.

The Prime Minister is elevating into a vote of confidence the lack of amendment to the Bill. Since the Edinburgh summit, what has happened to the Community agricultural policy and why is action now needed? Expenditure on the common agricultural policy continues to increase—despite the impression that the Chancellor gave—and in order to meet the guidelines, we are witnessing what the Senior Controller of European Spending, in talks that he has had, has called, "creative accounting". The only way that he could meet the ceiling, as he said himself, was by what he called "certain budgetary devices"—counting the 1994 payments against the 1993 budget, closing the budget a year early or further delaying payments of credits to member states in one year. Having failed to condone the profligacy, we are being asked to condone the rigging of the balance sheets of the common agricultural policy, yet the Prime Minister would countenance no amendment related to that in the Bill.

What of this year's budget for the common agricultural policy? Of course there are now budget corrective measures if there is an overspend; of course the Commission cannot switch resources between sectors; but was not "Anglo Europe" right to report, on the use of budgetary devices for this year's budget:

> "The figures in the official draft budget are merely juggled under the new rectifying letter"?

Surely it is right that the House should insist, when agricultural spending continues to increase—it will increase by £3 billion in coming years, a 10 per cent. increase despite all the reforms that have been made—that the House should be in a greater position to scrutinise the Executive with regard to that matter.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way again.

Let us consider the tobacco regime, costing more than £1 billion a year, while we spend little on health education. In a previous debate, the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said:

> "It is not feasible to end tobacco production and support for it".

We are entitled to say, about something from which we obtain no benefit, when are talking about the uneconomical production of the most unsmokable and the most unhealthy cigarettes, that the Prime Minister is wrong to elevate the sanctity of the Bill, without amendment to tackle those abuses, into a vote of confidence.

Despite everything that the Chancellor said this afternoon, this is the Government whose proposals on waste, on fraud and on the common agricultural policy cannot command the weight that they need and the influence that they should have in the European Community, because all political credit is being used up by the Government in fighting the social chapter, fighting for opt-outs, fighting European integration and losing influence in Europe as a result, simply because of the divisions in the Tory party.

The Government are fighting battles in Europe that they cannot win. Following battle after battle over the social chapter, they have persuaded no other country, no other entrant country, no other right-wing leader in Europe except Monsieur le Pen and not even many Conservative Members of the European Parliament. They now find that more than 50 of the top 100 British companies are implementing the social chapter anyway.

A no-change Bill, this vote a day before the Budget, the nature of the vote itself—a confidence vote without the Prime Minister being willing to appear in the House—and the edifice of absurdity that the handling of the Bill now represents, is predicated on the utter precariousness of the Conservative party's leadership and its control of the party.

What is the Prime Minister asking us to have confidence in? What is the Government's European policy now? What is their ability to handle the issue of Europe on its merits? What is that European policy? The Conservative party has a vice-chairman who has to resign for attacking our European neighbours in the most infantile of terms, who says he wants Britain out of Europe. It has a deputy chairman who states explicitly that every European decision must involve not examining the national interest, but appeasing party dissidents: the party must therefore remain more Euro-sceptic than Labour—as the deputy chairman has said—simply to achieve unity.

We are asked to have confidence in the Government's European policy as a result of all that. Their Chief Secretary, a signatory to the Bill, spent most of the 1980s opposing the very measures for which he now asks us to vote. Divisions on European policy are at the very heart of the Cabinet. The moment the Chancellor calls for convergence in Europe, the Secretary of State for Employment says that important national differences must be recognised; when the Chancellor says that he favours co-operation on exchange rates, the Employment Secretary wants to call for free floating; when the Chancellor says that he favours monetary union in principle, the Employment Secretary and a substantial section of the Cabinet say that it will mean "giving up the government" of the United Kingdom, and that that is the impossible.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way once more.

Mr. Cormack: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us, very simply, whether he agrees with what was agreed at Edinburgh in 1992?

Mr. Brown: We made our position absolutely clear at the time. We made it clear that we supported the Edinburgh agreement. What we will not support is a failure on the part of the House, and an unwillingness on the part of the Prime Minister, to consider any amendments to the Bill that deal with fraud, waste and the common agricultural policy. I think that, when he returns to his constituency, the hon. Gentleman will hear very clearly from his constituents that they, too, want action against waste, fraud and the CAP.

Where is the Prime Minister in all this? Sadly for the Prime Minister—sadly for the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) thinks that I have nothing to say about the Prime Minister; he is mistaken.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I will not give way—although I am interested to note that the Maples memorandum, which was supposed to menace and threaten the Labour party, and suggest ways of shouting us down and silencing us, is now being used to get Conservative Back Benchers into line.

Where is the Prime Minister at the end of all this? The authority of the Chancellor has been strengthened for a minute, while the authority of the Prime Minister has diminished. The dissidents in the Conservative party began by planning to challenge the Bill; they have ended up planning to challenge the Prime Minister, this year or next year. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) says that he is not leading the challenge, but I note a great deal of silence on the Bench beside him.

The Prime Minister has come to the House today in his customary capacity as head of the Government. True to form, he has turned up in person but he is no longer in charge. Once more, he is an onlooker of the great debates that are taking place. When Lady Thatcher resigned, the Conservatives believed that they had ordered the "New Statesman"; instead, they have got the "Spectator".

In similar circumstances, after meeting his Back Benchers in 1922, Bonar Law said of them:

"I am their leader; I must follow them."

The Prime Minister has added another pathetic dimension to his leadership: "I am their leader; I cannot make up my mind which faction to follow."

In the Conservative party, all options to negotiate in Europe, to influence events, to co-operate for the benefit of Britain and to be genuinely at the heart of Europe have been sacrificed to the overriding pressures of party strife. We have a Chancellor who cannot give us the exact figures in relation to the budget, a Prime Minister who now tells us that we cannot vote for amendments to deal with waste, fraud and the CAP and Conservative Back Benchers who spend all their time talking about the problems of waste and fraud but who will join the Government in the Lobby to vote against an amendment that raises those very issues.

Such is the tyranny of the factions within the Conservative party, and such is the impotence of the leadership, that the only European policy on which the Conservatives can now agree is to stand apart from Europe. Such is the weakness at the top that the only posture left to the Government in European negotiations is hovering between semi-detachment and complete isolationism. Such is the depth of disunity that they cannot understand that true patriotism—standing up for Britain's interests—means not opting out but co-operating, winning influence and leading to secure the best deals for Britain.

The Government can no longer speak with a united voice; they can no longer speak for Britain. Their divisions are irreconcilable. They are intellectually bankrupt and politically exhausted. They should go, and go now.

5.15 pm

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): I am told by those who know more about it than I do that the issuing of suicide threats is a classic cry for help. It is in that spirit that I wish to help the Government tonight. In such cases, the key is to keep the potential victim talking, to prevent his mind from turning to any untoward action. Well, there has been a good deal of talking—rather too much, some might say. I am told that the Prime Minister is thinking of reintroducing Budget purdah.

I am grateful for the effusive thanks delivered by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the role that I took in the Edinburgh negotiations. After the summit, I was happy to commend the deal to colleagues: it was a good deal, and I commend it again.

The Bill is, essentially, the price that we agreed to pay the Spanish for agreeing to enlargement. The danegeld—if that phrase can be applied to the Spanish—was kept to

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relatively modest proportions. I believe that it would have been difficult to secure a better deal. In the months coming up to the Edinburgh summit, we kept being told that if we did not achieve a new financial perspective, the Community would come to a halt—that it would be unable to function and would run out of money. I must say that I did not find that an altogether convincing threat, and I am sure that the same thought occasionally crossed the mind of the Chancellor when he was dealing with the question of Italian fines on milk quotas.

The issue that I want to discuss is not the extra cost that the Bill imposes. I want to deal with the question to which my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) referred: what is the true, underlying financial and public expenditure cost of our membership of Europe? What real figure represents the cost of our membership of the Union?

I want to discuss that matter because I believe that, even after 20 years, our membership of the European Union ought still to be able to be subject to rational analysis and ought still to be discussed in the light of the costs and benefits that result from it.

Conditions are now very different from those that obtained 20 years ago, when we joined the European Community. We live in a world of very low tariffs. The external tariff of the European Union is less; I believe that the arguments about access to the market, and about inward investment, therefore have much less impact and are less persuasive than was the case 20 years ago. All the time, however, the cost of our membership has been rising.

People could be forgiven for being confused when they are given so many different figures about both the Bill and the cost of our membership. My good friend Sir Leon Brittan tells us that the cost of the Bill is only the price of a newspaper a day. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury would regard £75 million as something that should be described in quite those terms.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has referred to the cost of our membership as being £75 million—he reconfirmed that figure today—rising to £250 million. He also referred to the real cost as being our current net contribution—just over £2 billion in 1993-94, rising to £3.5 billion in 1996-97.

Mr. Cormack: Would my right hon. Friend agree with our friend Sir Leon Brittan if he were still Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Lamont: I am coming on to what I think the costs are. I have no quarrel with what the present Chancellor of the Exchequer has said about the arithmetic of the Bill and I have not implied that I have. I wish to differ with the Chancellor in that I do not believe that the net figures are a measure of the true cost of our membership of the European Union.

It is an extraordinarily curious argument for Conservatives to say that the cost is what we pay in taxes, minus what we get back in public expenditure. After all, that is like saying that the education service, the national health service or lunch are free. It is like saying that the rate of income tax, which the Chancellor will announce for the year ahead in his Budget and which I suspect will remain unchanged at 25p in the pound—although some of my hon. Friends may hope for something else—is not really 25p but 2p in the pound because we receive a lot back in terms of schools, roads, hospitals and the NHS. As I said the other day, the argument about us getting the money back reminds me of the campaign slogan of the mayor of São Paulo in Brazil, who said:

"I steal but I give some back."

It cannot be disputed that the real cost of European-directed and sponsored programmes is, of course, our gross contribution to the European Community, minus our rebate. That cost could amount to about £6 billion this year, rising to £8 billion at the end of 1996-97. Our net contribution would represent the cost of our membership of the Community if it spent money only on things that our own Government wanted to spend money on. Of course, we know that that is very far from being the case.

The real public expenditure cost of the European Union, therefore, is somewhere between our net contribution in 1993-94 of £2.1 billion and £6 billion gross, and in 1996 it will be somewhere between the net cost of £3.5 billion and the gross cost minus the rebate of £8 billion. Throughout that period, the real cost of our membership of Europe will be much nearer the higher figure because the vast majority of European Union expenditure goes on things which we do not really want and which the Government would not have chosen to spend money on. Indeed, we know that, as a matter of principle and doctrine, the European Commission will approve expenditure in this country only on things that are additional to what the Government want to spend money on.

Mr. Dykes: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way at that point in his interesting analysis, but even his own more pessimistic figures amount to a maximum of about 1 per cent. of gross national product at the end of the period to which he referred. That is the cost of the strength that we gain from being in the European Union, with all the other sovereign countries working together on common issues.

Mr. Lamont: One per cent. of GNP is a significant sum of money which represents in excess in £6 billion. It is a much larger figure than that quoted in the debate as the cost of our net contribution to and membership of Europe.

We are told all the time that we get money back, but is that money spent on things that we want it to be spent on? The answer is, broadly, no. I am sure that I am not alone in feeling considerable irritation when I go around the country and see signs with the blue sticker and 12 yellow stars saying, "Funded by the European Union." May I make a suggestion to my right hon. and learned Friend? The Government should put a sticker underneath saying, "The European Union has decided to give you three quarters of your money back." It is absurd that we should be made to feel grateful for getting our money back through things that we would not have wanted to spend the money on in the first place.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: I want to make a little more progress.

On the subject of fraud, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to some of the new proposals in the Maastricht treaty and to the

new unit against fraud which has a Dane in charge. The Dane will have to be good because, in my experience, the European Commission is not interested in fraud and has a considerable antipathy to the Court of Auditors.

I tried to make the subject of combating fraud one of the themes of the United Kingdom's presidency of the EC. I tried to get the Court of Auditors more involved in the work of European Finance Ministers. On one occasion, I convened a special meeting to discuss the matter. We had before us a Court of Auditors report detailing various frauds, particularly in the common agricultural policy. There was a report about grain being moved from one ship to another in Hamburg harbour and about people pretending that transactions had taken place and receiving money for those bogus transactions. Quite a number of the Ministers did not turn up. I opened the discussion. A large number of Ministers just read their newspapers. No one contributed a word to the discussion and then Mr. Delors attacked me for being political by introducing the subject of the Court of Auditors.

I remember, as will the Prime Minister, who I know has been rightly concerned about the matter, as was Lady Thatcher, how decisions on aid were made in the Community. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor referred to aid to Russia and to other countries. The big decisions on aid and debt write-off are normally taken after the ECOFIN meeting in the morning, over cigars and port. Those decisions involve billions of ecus. No papers are prepared. I tried hard to take a radical and provocative initiative—to have bits of paper before we made those decisions. Again, that was turned down.

When European Finance Ministers discussed aid for Russia, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred, I remember that the attitude was that the Community had to give aid because it had to play a role in that development. Of course, aid to Russia is important, but, as time went by, there was reason to think that food aid was not necessary because no evidence existed of food shortages in Russia and there had been a good harvest. Even when statistics on the good harvest came in, could we get the European Union to reconsider the aid which had been allocated nine months previously, most of which had been lost in the distribution system or gone to the mafia and which was now unnecessary? No, we could not because Europe had to be seen to be acting and to be political.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Given that there is not much difference between my right hon. Friend and me on the things that he has discussed, I assure him that matters have moved on rather a lot since he was attending the meetings that he described. The Court of Auditors now attends the Council of Finance Ministers with the Commissioner responsible for dealing with fraud, and the Council has asked for individual complaints to be acted on and to be reported. Fraud was twice on the agenda of the Council of Finance Ministers during the German presidency. It will be on the agenda twice during the French presidency.

Only a month ago, with the assistance of my French colleague, I dropped a proposal for aid to the Ukraine, at a lunch of the kind about which my right hon. Friend rightly complains. The only difference between us is that my right hon. Friend described a situation that has improved. He played a large part in the Maastricht treaty that gave the Court of Auditors its additional powers.

Mr. Lamont: I was not seeking to argue that there was a difference between my right hon. and learned Friend and me on this matter. I wish him all the best in this new climate and new world of interest in fraud and giving value for money. All I can say is that I do not recognise it.

Value for money will always be difficult to achieve in Europe because money is politics and money is power. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, our money is used to bribe the Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese and Irish to believe in ever-closer European union.

Our money is equally used to bribe the regions of individual countries, including the United Kingdom, to believe in Brussels as the giver of aid and succour rather than the central Governments of those countries. In that way, the central Governments of those individual nation states can be made less relevant.

Europe is an issue that risks splitting the Conservative party, because the party as a whole has not yet accepted that our partners' ambitions are not compatible with Britain's continued ability to govern ourselves as an independent sovereign state. A minority would welcome that development, but for the majority of Conservatives in the House and in the country that outcome would be anathema. If Labour ever formed a Government, it would face precisely the same dilemma.

The Maastricht compromise reflected in the Bill was accepted by the Conservative party and Parliament for two reasons: it succeeded in delaying some of the most important aspects of European integration and was underpinned by the belief that Maastricht marked the high tide of Euro-federalism. That hope has proved unfounded. Only last week, Mr. van den Broek argued that the next intergovernmental conference should abolish our national veto on future treaty changes. If that were implemented, this country's sovereignty would be gone.

It is important to recognise that divisive arguments on Europe—of which the costs of membership is an important example, because money is at the heart of the development of Europe—arise from the incompatibility between what is acceptable to Britain and what is acceptable to our partners. That is why this country needs to redefine its relations with Europe on a permanent basis.

For that reason, I am persuaded that we in this country must consider all options if we cannot negotiate a special economic relationship between Britain and our partners, including even withdrawal. We should not shrink from that logic but ask ourselves what is the best way to preserve our interests and to remove the source of tension with our European partners. The risk that stems from the Government's decision to make the issue one of confidence is that it may give the impression that the Government's overriding priority will be that the House will simply rubber-stamp whatever is agreed in some European town in 1996. I hope and believe that impression is unfounded—but the Government cannot proceed on the basis that we do not know what 1996 will be about and therefore do not need to think about it.

A conscripted army never fights as well as an army of volunteers, and the Conservative party is an army of volunteers. We should have the confidence to set out the issues and to debate them before our future is thrown in the melting pot in 1996. The Bill is a good deal, but it

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obviously does not address the issues that in time will confront us all.

5.34 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) has enlarged the debate by leaning forward in time to the crucial intergovernmental conference in 1996, which will tilt the balance and either move us decisively in the direction of an unwanted federal state, of which we shall be a province, or bring a halt to the process of integration that has proceeded for the past 30 years.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke well about costs, which go far beyond the minor sums that the Chancellor mentioned in respect of the increase in own resources which is at the heart of the Edinburgh agreement. It is misleading to think that the cost to us is measured by even the so-called net cost of the budget. The net cost is bad enough, having increased from £1,500 million in 1988 to £2,400 million this year. According to the Treasury's own figures, it is due to rise to £3,500 million in 1999, which is a doubling within a decade. That is a huge and unnecessary increase in the net cost—net of all repayments and abatement.

We should be debating not a Bill to increase Britain's net and gross contributions to the European Union, but how to reduce the increasingly unbearable burden of costs that our membership imposes. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames was right to draw attention not just to net but to gross costs, which are increasing alarmingly. Again using the Treasury's own figures, the gross cost to Britain in 1990 was £6.4 billion. This year, it will be £8.3 billion, and for 1997-98 it will be £10.5 billion. That is a measure of the weight of the burden, which increases with every year that passes.

I will direct my remarks not to the arithmetic, which has been the subject of considerable exchanges, but to the significance of the Court of Auditors report. It is a long time since December 1992, when the Edinburgh agreement was reached. Not least among events which have occurred since then was the publication only a fortnight ago—unfortunate timing for the Government—of the court's report. The Chancellor claimed that it is slightly more authoritative and penetrating than any report received so far. It is directly relevant to the Bill because it occurs to everyone to question why we should pay the European Union more money before it has put right its own waste, incompetence and fraud.

The figure of £6 billion does not relate just to fraud—that is only a component—but also to waste. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) gave many examples of the magnitude of the waste involved, such as vineyards being planted and then uprooted, and all kinds of false payments being made under the common agricultural policy.

It would be a disgrace if we did not insist on remedial action before additional tax revenues for the EU are approved. It is the oldest maxim of parliamentary government that grievances should be redressed before supply is granted. The need for redress is clear, and the House should face the fact that there will be no redress unless supply is withheld.

Mr. Dykes: Obviously, fraud must be tackled everywhere, both in the Union and in the member states, but is not the right hon. Gentleman being unusually illogical? In this country we accept that there is a considerable amount of social security fraud; it is estimated at more than £4 billion annually, I believe. Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that social security payments should be suspended to all other recipients pending the resolution of that problem? That is exactly the same ridiculous argument.

Mr. Shore: No. I said that there are very great differences.

Let us return to the relevance of the Bill. The Chancellor, of course, challenges the figure of £6 billion which, if it is anything like the truth, is twice the total amount that the Community will raise—not just in Britain, but throughout the Community—from the addition to own resources. It will be an addition of some £3,000 million in increased expenditure. Many people would say that gross incompetence, waste and fraud amount to twice that figure. It would indeed be a disgrace if we did not try to put that matter right first.

Mr. Dykes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shore: No.

I now add a point about which the House has not been aware so far: the Community's reaction to the Court of Auditors' report. The Commission's reaction has been almost as remarkable as the contents of the report itself. I read now from the European Community's "Week in Europe" dated 24 November 1994:

"Commission Secretary General David Williamson has rejected media allegations that fraud was widespread in European Budgetary spending. Commenting on the recent Court of Auditor's report he said the document was not about fraud but about financial management. It mentioned fraud only once in its 484 pages referring to just one transaction in Denmark."

That was the Secretary-General of the European Commission responding to a tremendous indictment of the Community's lack of effective control over budgetary spending, waste and fraud.

What did the Auditors' report say? I quote from its introduction:

"despite repeated assurances of remedial action, the Commission has not managed to achieve the results desired by the Budgetary authorities in the field of financial control."

It goes on to say:

"member state authorities continue to issue incorrect certificates for structural funds expenditure, in some cases covering expenditure which has not really been incurred or is eligible for aid"

— to use another word, fraud. Again, the report notes

"structural shortcomings in the internal control systems resulting in lack of proper protection of the financial interests of the Community against fraud and other irregularities."

What makes the situation totally unacceptable is that nearly all of those criticisms were made not just in 1994, but time and again over the past 10 years and longer. Indeed, the report itself says:

"the audit of matters which are the exclusive concern of the Commission also reveals some of the same problems in 1993 as the Court has raised since 1983."

If any hon. Member thinks that there is something eccentric—or, dare I say, Euro-sceptic—about the Court of Auditors' report, I invite him or her to look at the 12th report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords, published on 19 July 1994. I quote from its opening paragraph:

"this is the Select Committee's fourth report since 1989 on fraud and financial irregularity in Community spending. Our 1989 report found that huge sums of Community money were lost each year because of fraud; that financial management was weak; that the failure both to detect fraud and take action when it was detected allowed the fraudsters to continue in business; and that for years there has been no political will to tackle the problem."

That point was made by the previous Chancellor. So much for Mr. David Williamson's assertion that the

"document was not about fraud but about financial management."

The sheer effrontery and negativism of the Commission when faced with such a damning report is truly breathtaking. There is not the slightest sign of repentance, nor of any will whatever to deal with the problems so well described and adequately documented in the Court of Auditors' report.

Still more revealing of the Commission's attitude was the announcement on 3 November of the distribution of portfolios among the new Commissioners, due to take office on 1 January 1995. Given the significance of the issues of fraud, waste and common agricultural policy expenditure, one might have expected that the allocation of responsibility for dealing with financial control and fraud would have been placed on the shoulders of one of the senior Commissioners. Did it go to Sir Leon Brittan, Mr. Bangemann, Karel van Miert, Mr. van den Broek or any of the men of some weight in Brussels? Not a bit of it. The responsibilities were given to number 19 in the new pecking order of 21 Commissioners—Mrs. Anita Gradin, the new Swedish Commissioner, whose portfolio includes immigration, home and judicial affairs, relations with the ombudsman and, last of all, financial control and anti-fraud measures. I have no doubt that she is an excellent lady, but inevitably she has no experience whatever of dealing with the long-term budgetary controls and fraud problems of the Community.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hesitate to argue with my right hon. Friend, but the only decent sign among those Commissioners is Anita Gradin, who is not only a very brilliant lady but one who has undertaken a great deal of careful study of the way in which the Commission works, as she did all the negotiating for Sweden. That is the only good thing to be said of the present incoming Commission. I hope that my right hon. Friend will accept that the Commission has inadvertently appointed the one person who can actually do something useful.

Mr. Shore: That would be a very welcome event. It would be a bit like the good fortune that overtook the Government when the pound was forced out of the exchange rate mechanism in the summer of 1992.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that I happen to know Mrs. Anita Gradin quite well, as she was chairman of the Council of Europe committee on migration and refugees, of which I was vice-chairman about 10 years ago? She had a very compassionate attitude towards refugees and migration problems, but I would not see her as having tremendous rigour in the capacity to root out fraud.

Mr. Shore: We shall see. I do not wish to say anything other than good words about Mrs. Gradin, but she faces a formidable task. There is indeed an Augean stable to be cleaned out in Brussels in this respect.

I come back to the point that I made at the start. Given the arrogance and insolence of the Commission, there is no way in which we shall achieve redress for our grievances about fraud and waste unless we have the resolution to deny supply. There should be no increase in own resources unless and until those reforms are carried out. That is why the Bill should be voted down today.

I now turn to what is being claimed by the proponents of the Bill.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shore: In a moment.

We are debating, as we should, the motion that was tabled by my right hon. Friends for the House to consider and vote on tonight. It is a very modest amendment indeed. It simply says that the Bill

"is not an acceptable measure as it increases the United Kingdom's contributions to the European Union"

without first dealing with fraud, waste and the common agricultural policy.

On the merits of the issue, I believe that not one hon. Member in any part of the House would disagree with those sentiments. As we all know, however, Conservative Members are to be ferociously whipped into the No Lobby, with threats of expulsion and deselection directed at dissenters. I deeply regret the fact that the Government have chosen that course and that they have sought to turn the whole issue into a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister.

It is a vast oversimplification to claim, as the Chancellor did today, that the proposals are an international treaty that we are honour bound to approve. In fact, it is not a treaty at all. It is a decision made in the Council of Ministers and it is given treaty form only by the peculiar definitions of the European Communities Act 1972. It would be entirely proper for the House to amend the Bill so that its implementation could be delayed and made dependent on effective reforms to deal with waste and fraud. Under the threat of dissolution, our debates on the Bill will be reduced to what is virtually a farce. That is a misuse of the House of Commons on what is essentially a piece of domestic and financial legislation.

As the scope of the European treaties continually widens, we find that an ever-growing area of our national affairs is being subjected to ministerial decision making without prior approval by the House of Commons. That is a threat to our democracy and it is one that all democrats in the House, regardless of party, should resolve to defeat tonight.

5.50 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): Last time I spoke in the House, I was followed by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). I do not know how long we can sustain this mutual succession of speeches. The right hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

confers distinction on every debate in which he takes part, without my necessarily agreeing with much of what he says.

One can have a claim on the attention of the House tonight only if one is brief, for the issues are of straightforward simplicity and the number of one's colleagues who wish to speak is voluminous. The laws of arithmetic, therefore, reinforce the argument for brevity.

I want to make just three points this evening, even if that is three times as many as Lloyd George urged on a new Member. Before doing so, I need to say a brief word about the speech of the shadow Chancellor, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). The hon. Gentleman is a historian and he gave us a history lesson on confidence votes. Into that history lesson he introduced the bizarre scenario of Harold Macmillan delegating the defence of the Government, on a confidence vote on the night of the long knives, to Selwyn Lloyd who had been the principal victim of that event. I realise that the Labour party orders these matters differently, but I believe that the only virtue of the bizarre scenario that the hon. Gentleman painted was that it was a harbinger for the bizarre scenario of his whole speech, in which he argued that a wrecking amendment was not at variance with the Labour party's support for the agreement reached at Edinburgh.

I said that I had three points. The first is that the principle of an international deal entered into by this country should be adhered to. Second Reading is at the level of principle. All of us know that, if the Whips Office did not exist for any length of time, the House would suffer a collective nervous breakdown. One has only to spend an evening here on a series of amendments on a free vote to recognise the force of that. There is a corollary, which is that international statesmanship, or even national statesmanship, is not possible unless it is reinforced by the disciplines of the Whip in this House. Moreover, for all the cries of "perfidious Albion", our allies have long found our word to be reliable. One might, to coin a phrase, say that it is part of the national heritage.

My second point relates to fraud. Of course we all detest fraud. For all of us, our annual reading of the report by the Court of Auditors is always among the gloomiest reading of our year. However, we have long winced at the most obvious solution, which is to give the Commission greater powers to monitor and investigate the actions of member states in the area. We in this country have confidence in our institutions and we do not see why they should be second-guessed by foreigners. I share the misgivings of some of my hon. Friends about ceding that authority, although it may be the price that we have to pay to secure supervision of the affairs of other member states, whose institutions we trust less, and thus to diminish fraud in the Union.

All of us bring our own impedimenta to the House. Before I joined the Government, I chaired a business for five years. That business operated in 12 countries, five of them within the European Union. Having lived twice on the continent, I possessed a certain scepticism about mutual accounting standards and business ethics. In the end, one had to rest, in the private sector, on employing a single firm of international auditors which applied the local standards in each country. The universality of that firm was an improvement on doing as we do now and relying on the member states' own standards.

If we wish to sleep at night on the reliability of what is done in our name, further authority may need to be ceded. Opposition Members who ask for that may approach the matter with an underlying sympathy different from that of many of my hon. Friends. I hope that I can appeal successfully to many of my hon. Friends to visit the Court of Auditors, as I have done in the past and as I hope to do again, to get at what would be the most efficacious moves against fraud.

That brings me to my third point. Conservative Members who ally themselves with the Labour party on this issue run the risk of ending up with something far worse than they currently oppose. Lady Thatcher's first Administration lost only one vote in this House. I have some reason to recall it as I was the pairing Whip. A number of my hon. Friends decided to oppose an immigration order because they felt it to be insufficiently strong. The Opposition opposed it on the opposite ground—that it was too strong. There was a non-contest on the principle of the order. I remember that event vividly because I brought my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), now the Foreign Secretary, back from a visit to Nepal for a vote that we won by 270 to nil. The event so struck my right hon. Friend that he put it into his next novel—although, since truth is always stranger than fiction, he made the majority only 17.

The eventual Division was won by the Opposition and some of my hon. Friends. This had the consequence that the Government, as they could not strengthen the proposition without risking losing the support of others of their hon. Friends, had no choice on the arithmetic but to bring in a proposal that was even less satisfactory to their hon. Friends, but which was acceptable to the Opposition. Thus do we sometimes, in the name of principle, give ourselves an outcome that we do not remotely desire.

I support the Bill and I support the negotiating skills in Edinburgh of my right hon. Friends, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), which afforded the Bill to us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I remind the House that Madam Speaker has said that from 6 o'clock speeches shall be no longer than 10 minutes.

5.57 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) has a near-impeccable reputation in the House for fair-mindedness, which was on display in his contribution. Being fair-minded, however, he would have to acknowledge that it is not a quality overwhelmingly in evidence in the Cabinet and, in particular, in the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There will be a Division at the end of the debate tonight, although there is broadly based, all-party support for the principles of the Bill, because of the thoroughly cynical decision by the Government to turn the debate away from a motion on Europe and on the Bill, into a vote of confidence in themselves.

The more significant contribution, in terms of Conservative party politics, came from the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the

former Chancellor of the Exchequer. He spoke about the way in which we now have Government by threat of collective suicide. He seemed to present himself, in that sense, as some kind of Samaritan who was there to counsel and to help. I am not sure whether the Prime Minister thinks of his former friend and Chancellor as the good Samaritan in all this. It certainly seemed to me that, although the right hon. Gentleman may not yet be a stalking horse, he made more than a little of a stalking speech. The Prime Minister will have to worry about the position in which the former Chancellor is attempting to put himself perhaps not later this week, but in one year's time.

The fact that we are at an impasse on the Bill is entirely a reflection of the "Perils of Pauline" style of premiership of the present incumbent. It has to be said, however, that to start with a Bill that, if there were a free vote on its merits in the Lobbies tonight, would command a majority of five to one, with hon. Members from all parties supporting it, and then to manage to turn that into a confidence issue on which the Government's majority will be much smaller speaks volumes for the Government's party management and parliamentary management.

The Chancellor tried to argue on European grounds and it was notable that he turned his attention to the issue of confidence only at the very end of his speech. Indeed, he was not very anxious to take too many interventions on that. That simply reveals or confirms that he knows that this is just a piece of chicanery from the Government. It is a constitutional absurdity to suppose that any Opposition party would express confidence in a Government who are regarded with utter derision and contempt by the voters of this country—as was further revealed by the leaked memorandum from their own deputy chairman only one week ago—particularly when that confidence is vested in Europe, and when the Chancellor of the Exchequer has spent an hour and 10 minutes at the Dispatch Box arguing non-stop and to a standstill with his own Back Benchers, by trooping through the Lobby in support of them. The Government do not have confidence in themselves on this issue and therefore they should not look to the Opposition parties to express any confidence in them either.

The problem throughout, of course, has been one of leadership. When the Prime Minister became leader of his party, he largely got that job because of who he was not. If he hangs on to it, he will hang on to it because of who he is not. That is the fundamental weakness of the Prime Minister's political position—not least where Europe is concerned. Indeed, his first two sound bites laid the seeds of what may well be his future destruction and perhaps even the destruction of his party. He began by saying that he wanted Britain to be at the heart of Europe. There was much talk of Helmut. We do not hear so much about Helmut these days, but it was Helmut this and Helmut that and how we were all together at the heart of Europe. The first major summit was when Helmut came to Chequers and the whole tone had changed from the days of the previous Prime Minister.

Then, of course, the Prime Minister negotiated his opt-outs and his anti-social chapter position at the time of the Maastricht treaty, and he came out with the other very revealing sound bite: "game, set and match". Those two sound bites set beside each other reveal the dilemma of the man himself. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot be at the heart of Europe and then talk of scoring tricks and deals over Europe and our supposed partners. There is no consistent leadership from the Prime Minister on the fundamental issue that is dividing his party and enfeebling his Administration—Europe.

Since the last general election, we have had the initial hesitation over Maastricht and then the trumpeting of the fact that Maastricht should be approved for what it was not going to do, what it did not apply to, and what we had managed to extricate ourselves from. The Prime Minister has sought to play the European card in a negative way and he has left all the positive initiative to his malcontents on the Back Benches who are sceptical, or opposed, or Euro-phobic, or whatever the appropriate expression may be.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): Conservatives.

Mr. Kennedy: Conservatives. I am happy to have that all-encompassing term of abuse applied if that is what the right hon. Gentleman wishes.

In the House, and as a feature of the Government, we now have a party within a party. In the 1980s, Militant Tendency may have been a problem for the Labour party, but it was as nothing compared with the Euro-sceptics on the Conservative Benches. They run their own Whip, they organise their own votes, they have significant editorial endorsement from powerful people in powerful places, they even—essentially—run their own party headquarters. There is a party within a party and that party cannot expect the confidence of the Members of this House when it is internally split from top to bottom on the issue of Europe.

We may, therefore, be about to see a historic split affecting the Conservatives. The Labour party falls out—internally—from time to time, and we have been known to have our own domestic grief from time to time as well. The thing about the Conservatives though, is that when they split, they do it in style. They usually do it for at least a generation. It does not happen very often, but it is fun to be here when it may be happening and to watch it taking place. They are really the Fortnum and Mason of party splits and I pay tribute to that.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: I shall give way to one of the English federalists as opposed to one of the Christian Democrats.

Mr. Jenkin: I take note and I take heart from the fact that the hon. Gentleman is not taking great pleasure in telling his voters why he would vote for more money for the European Community.

Mr. Kennedy: I shall happily go on to express that in a moment, but I felt that it was perhaps of more immediate interest to remind the voters of the internal agonies among Conservative Members, because, after all, they form the Government.

There will be a further implication of the way in which the issue has been turned into a vote of confidence. It will have a damaging internal effect in the Conservative party. I am not particularly bothered about that, but I am more concerned about the damage that it will do to the position of the country in the run-up to the next intergovernmental conference. The Prime Minister, having paid such a heavy price in whipping his malcontents into the Lobby tonight, is bound, in terms of his party management, to respond in

[Mr. Kennedy]

a more nationalistic and Euro-sceptical way in the run-up to that IGC. That will not be in the best interests of the country because we need to be at the heart of Europe.

We already began to see that—although the Chancellor, unfortunately, did not give way to an intervention on this matter and therefore managed to avoid clarifying his own position—at the end of last week from the Foreign Secretary, who, ever so significantly and subtly, edged the formal position of the triumvirate at the top of the Cabinet away from its downright stated opposition to an eventual referendum. I do not have difficulty with a referendum, but the Prime Minister and the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary will have to make a bonfire of their vocabulary over the past few years if that is the way in which they are to sue for peace at the IGC and on the European issue generally in their party in the context of the next general election. Perhaps whoever makes the winding-up speech tonight could take the opportunity to clarify the current stated position of the Cabinet on an eventual referendum.

Frankly, at the end of the day, the wording of the Labour party's amendment is neither here nor there. It is a vote about confidence in the Government—the context of it so decided, so put down and so phrased by the Chancellor especially, but by the Prime Minister as well. On the basis of European policy, there is no doubt that one cannot have confidence in the Government. Therefore, the argument about what will happen if the amendment is passed is largely sterile. If the amendment is passed, we know what will happen. The Prime Minister will be into his limousine and off up Pall Mall to seek a dissolution from the Queen. There will then be a general election and, undoubtedly, a change of Government.

Whatever the complexion of the Government who come in, it is difficult to envisage a future Government being more divided or more tortured internally on matters European than this one. Therefore, this measure would be reintroduced. Even if we reach the stage that we did over Maastricht, when Denmark said no on the first referendum, the European powers that be will still be able to find a formula, a means and a mechanism to sort it out eventually. So, let us not have any of this utter nonsense from the Chancellor that failure to pass the Bill tonight will mean a general election and a change of Government, which would destroy it all.

The issue is not really the Bill and its merits. Its merits are clearly shown, and it enjoys all-party support. What is at stake here is the future of the Government. It really puts it all in context when one thinks of the history of Europe and some of the famous places from Berlin to Brussels and even to Bruges. It seems now that the only person whom the Chancellor is willing to acknowledge has any consistency in his party is the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman).

If those who want to speak for little England are to be consistent, they should vote for little England at the end of the debate. The fact that they will not do so shows that they know that electoral extinction would follow. Therefore, knowing that, my unfortunate conclusion is that the Conservative Members will not be going back to their constituencies to prepare for opposition, but, by God, they should.

6.8 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): May I first declare an interest? I am a non-executive director of J. Bibby plc, a South African company which has a substantial subsidiary in Spain related to the construction industry, and one may assume that it will benefit from the Edinburgh arrangements. I wish to speak briefly about public spending in the European Union, the question of having this debate on an issue of confidence and the general election.

The House has been so conditioned by battles over public spending—involving not many of those in the Chamber now, but certainly their forebears—going back centuries, that the issue of public spending and how it is financed is at the very heart of politics. On that test, it seems to me that European public spending is flawed in its conception and execution. Everyone who is concerned about public spending as an instrument of social policy should be deeply anxious about that factor.

I will quote Nye Bevan for the Leader of the Opposition because I gather that to mention socialism in his presence will make me, as near as I can be, a yobbo. At the party conference of 1959, Bevan said:

"The language of priorities is the religion of socialism."

There seems to be a dangerous lack of focus about Community spending because, in a sense, it is a product of so many layers of authority. One is almost diffident about praying in aid the virtues of the Treasury, but wherever public spending is concerned, there is much merit in having a disciplined hand.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Biffen: I notice that the Euro-enthusiast and Treasury Minister is nodding in agreement.

I shall refer to my constituency, out of deference to my electors. The 5b area status has been conferred on Shropshire by the European Union. That is modest spending, but it has already raised an absolute hornet's nest of competing claims, local authority prejudices, delays and general condemnation of the Treasury, which has been contrasted with the more open-handedness of Brussels. It all adds up to a less effective application of public spending.

In deference to Scots Members present, I noticed an even better example of that in *The Times* under the heading:

"Hebrideans look to Brussels for £6 million bridge."

I am not saying that looking is receiving, but the article states:

"The bridge between Scalpay and Harris in the Outer Hebrides would only span 180 yards of water, a crossing that takes 10 minutes by ferry. Islanders are optimistic that funding will come from the European Union. Last year the Highlands and Islands were granted Objective One status".

No doubt the bridge will be called "Son of Humber". I do not for a moment say that the project will be landed, but it gives one an insight into the focus of spending in the European Union.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Biffen: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I must try to keep within my time limit.

Mention has already been made of fraud. I will not add to that except to say that no one knows the extent of the fraud. It is all very well to stand up and to bluster and assert that it is nothing like the figure that has been created in such and such a paper. It is generally acknowledged that fraud is substantial. I rest my case with the 12th report of the House of Lords Select Committee on European Communities.

My next point is the most unnerving point of all. There is an erosion of standards of fiscal responsibility which seems to be pervasive. The House of Lords Select Committee states:

"as in previous inquiries we detected a worrying absence of indignation at the amounts of fraud and mismanagement in the Community's finances."

All the cures and improvements, and the Court of Auditors, will falter against the difficulty of devising a system of application which does not merely take account of national culture, but which does so in a form that relates to all other national cultures, which are almost certain to be different. I am not saying that the Nordic experience is different from that of the Latin, but if one could examine the figures, I would not be surprised if there were a difference.

The Liberal party is right to argue for the repatriation of the common agricultural policy. That is a difficult objective, but ultimately the situation can be dealt with only by diminishing the basis of public spending in the Community and not by alteration of the controls. All that becomes even more imperative as we move towards the expansion of the Community to include the central European countries.

I want now to refer to the confidence motion. The Prime Minister has every authority to call a confidence motion. Such motions have often been called in the past. I particularly have in mind Winston Churchill demanding confidence after losing a vote on the Education Bill in 1944. I do not believe that that was his finest hour. Looking back, it is clear that that debate, which was about equal pay in the teaching profession, was a sign of the desire for major social change which was enthroned in the 1945 general election. Perhaps the easy recourse to a confidence motion means that one might be a little blind elsewhere in one's political judgment.

Although I will gladly conform with the confidence vote, as I have always told my constituents I would, I am anxious about it. In that regard, I want to quote Lord Howe, partly because the Chancellor of the Exchequer was his Parliamentary Private Secretary at one time. I hope that his comments will be a beneficial influence. Lord Howe said of modern authority that it was "government by explanation". That is what we grievously need over the next year and a half.

The next general election will not be fought with a parade ground as the battlefield; it will be fought over much more difficult terrain and that leads me to the attitude which must be struck if the Conservative party is to have a credible position.

The absence of confidence in the issue exists because there is ambivalence in Conservative party policy. That ambivalence exists because we cannot resolve whether we are going to move from our present position on the opt-out on the single currency. That opt-out is merely a policy of postponing what one wants to say until later in the day. It has very little by way of quality of leadership about it.

If, as I do, one takes as one's text the Prime Minister's article in *The Economist* of a while ago, one has a most comprehensive and authoritative exposition of a Tory attitude which looks to the nation state as the centrepiece of European policy. In that context, the natural corollary is a monetary policy which provides for co-operation on the basis that individual states may vary their own national exchange rates. That is the framework for monetary co-operation. It is European in character, but it preserves to the nation its own final judgment.

I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) is in the Chamber. I read with much interest his letter in *The Times* today. He got it exactly right. We need a set of principles which will complete our general attitude to the Community and to its evolution and our commitment to the widening of the Community and which will enshrine our belief that the national state is the natural fulcrum for the pursuit of that policy. In doing that, one cannot leave out, ignore or postpone the final crucial question about economic and monetary union. A party that believes in national institutions, its national heritage and its national destiny must have a national context in monetary union.

6.17 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): As the Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out, the Bill will increase the ceiling on our contributions from the original figure of 1.2 per cent. to 1.27 per cent. Whatever one says on either side of the argument, the increase in the ceiling represents a victory—perhaps a small victory, thanks to the Government's negotiating prowess—for the centralised institutions of the European state against the nation states in the continuing struggle between the centralised state in Brussels and the powers of the old nation states of Europe. This debate is about that struggle and no doubt future debates will follow that course.

The Chancellor had to concede that our contributions are going to rise. He said that that was a price that we have to pay for a seat at the table. Years ago, apparently, our contributions were a price to be paid for membership of the club.

In 1972, there was much talk about subscriptions to clubs. We now have a seat at the table. That is all very well. However, I have always asked—I never receive an answer—why most members of the club and most of the people who have seats at that table do not have to pay anything. Indeed, until very recently—perhaps it is still the position this year—only Germany, as it is now called, and the United Kingdom have to pay for a seat at the table or a subscription to the club. Hon. Members shake their heads, but there might gradually be one or two other countries. France, perhaps, is coming in, but, in general, the largest subscriptions are being paid by two countries. The argument does not hold water.

The Chancellor took us back to 1984 and the Fontainebleau agreement. I shall refer back a little further in the short time at my disposal. In about 1976, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, now Lord Healey, asked me as a Treasury Minister to try to do something about the escalating costs of the EEC budget. I do not know what crime I had committed for him to ask me to do that, but it was a frustrating exercise. As a result of the brilliant negotiations that were carried out by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and Lord Rippon, as 1979—the end of the transitional

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

period—was coming upon us, subscriptions and net contributions to the club were increasing rapidly. By 1979, they reached £1 billion or even £1.5 billion.

Of course, I like to look back and think that I laid the groundwork—all the hard work—for the Fontainebleau agreement. Margaret Thatcher, as she was referred to by the Chancellor, managed to negotiate that agreement. It was fortuitous that Spain, Greece and Portugal wanted to come in at the same time, and there was an opportunity to open matters. For a few years, there was a holding back of our net contributions, but they have gone up again—almost £2.5 billion this year and probably £3.5 billion in three or four years. The ceiling has gone up; contributions will again be increased.

The amendment, which I wholeheartedly support, in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends, calls for a cut in common agricultural policy expenditure. I wish that we could cut expenditure on the common agricultural policy. Indeed, I was a member of a Government who tried very hard to cut that expenditure. The present Government have probably done their best, but it is not in the power of Her Majesty's Government of whatever party to cut that expenditure—we need 12 countries to agree. The extraordinary written constitution that we have foisted upon ourselves means that even our legislature cannot change the constitution; we need the agreement of 12 other countries.

By all means let us cut common agricultural expenditure, but that would be extremely difficult without the consent of the others. I am told that the Poles are going to do that for us. Around the year 2000, the Polish cavalry will come in and lay about the common agricultural policy, and that will be the end of it—perhaps. Perhaps by the time we negotiate with eastern Europe, it will be possible to destroy that monstrosity. It will certainly take a long time.

My constituency is in west Wales—one could say west Britain. Some of my constituents are a little concerned when they look across the Irish sea and they discover, apparently, that the moneys that come back to the south of Ireland now represent about 6 per cent. of the gross national product of southern Ireland. They ask, "Why should we in Wales contribute that £2.5 billion or £3 billion a year when, across the water in Ireland, in many areas incomes per head are higher than in some parts of south Wales?"

Let us consider an even smaller country, Luxembourg. It has the highest income per capita in the European Union and it is the second largest net receiver of money from the European Union. Again, my constituents ask, "Why should that be so? Why do we have to pay the price for the seat at the top table and the subscription to the club?"

There is a contradiction. Tomorrow, the Chancellor will announce, so we are told, £4 billion or £5 billion cuts in public expenditure. Of course, those reductions in public expenditure will not fall upon our contributions to the EEC. Those contributions are outside the PESC—the Public Expenditure Survey Committee—as it used to be called. It does not matter whether the Chancellor knew what the forecasts were, because, in respect of the expenditure round, the contribution had to be made. But the £2.5 billion to be paid this year will have to come out of the rest of public expenditure.

There is no free lunch. In modern jargon, it is known as disinvestment. We invest in one sector and we have to disinvest in another. We invest £2.5 billion in the public expenditure of the European state and we disinvest £2.5 billion in the public expenditure of the United Kingdom. My right hon. Friends, when they form a Government, will face that problem. The cuts that will have to happen will, as usual in terms of public expenditure, fall on the needy, the old and the unemployed.

There is a contradiction on Maastricht, too. I hate to bring up Maastricht again, but I know that the Chancellor has now read the treaty. Maastricht imposes clamps. It imposes restrictions on public expenditure and the public borrowing of nation states. We are not supposed to spend too much, we are supposed to spend less, yet, of course, we can spend money to hand it over to Brussels, because Brussels can spend more. That is part of the struggle—it is part of what is actually happening. The Chancellor talked about subsidiarity. Apparently, the money also was to enable one word in the treaty to be turned into a brilliantly illuminating paragraph describing subsidiarity. The very payment of £2.5 billion—the very raising of the ceiling—is contrary to the concept of subsidiarity.

The Government are concerned about subsidiarity. They wish to reduce rather than increase the ceiling, just as we wish to do away with the common agricultural policy and return to a system of national aims for agriculture. That would be subsidiarity.

The Chancellor wrote me a letter. I gather that all hon. Members received a letter from the Chancellor. It started, "Dear colleague". I really thought that that letter should have gone to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whose last name is Davis and who has one of my first names. I sometimes receive his correspondence and I always scrupulously turn my head the other way and put it back. When I saw the Chancellor's "Dear colleague" I almost did that, but then I thought, "No, perhaps it has a wider circulation." Lord Healey, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, had his problems between 1966 and 1968—we all did—but I do not remember our problems being so great then that he had to write letters to the then Opposition, asking for support to spend more public money. That shows the measure of the panic which appears to be at the heart of the Government when it comes to Europe.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The Chair has a problem now; I must stop the right hon. Gentleman.

6.27 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I can remember Lord Healey, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, having problems of his own in turning back from the airport. Other hon. Members will remember that, too.

One of the interesting points of the debate is the lavish attention that is being paid to the Public Accounts Committee and the effort to control fraud and waste. I do not think that I have ever heard so much attention being paid to it. I was a member of the PAC for 20 years. At that time, our debates took place on one day late in the Session. There was never a Whip, of course. Our debates were badly attended and only members of the PAC were present. I suppose it is an advance to have so much attention paid to the PAC, particularly by Opposition Members.

The amendment, in drawing attention to public waste in the European Union, is very important and it needs to be debated. I am grateful for that. However, it seems that the issue of public waste was raised in the amendment merely as a peg on which to hang a reason to vote against the Government in a most important vote of confidence.

I think that the European Communities (Finance) Bill appears to be quite reasonable. Two years ago the Prime Minister came to the House to make a statement about the legislation. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said earlier today, at that time there was only one voice against it on the Government side; nobody else objected to the increase in expenditure because it was very modest.

Much more attention has been paid to the fact that the arrangements for financing the Community, which were made under the 1988 agreement, have been very erratic. It is true that the expenditure of extra money—some £750 million—comes at a time when it is convenient for the critics of the Bill to lump it together and say that the situation is out of control. It is uncertain because it involves forecasts which are based on future estimates of gross domestic product. The reason why it appears that we are having to pay more this year is that our GDP has risen at a faster rate than that of other members of the European Union. So I do not think we can use that argument in objecting to the increase in payments. In any case, the amount of subscription to the European Union was set in stone many years ago and was passed by the House.

The increase in expenditure which was decided upon in the Edinburgh agreement is only £75 million in 1995 and £250 million in 1999. I think that the Edinburgh agreement has other advantages, too: notably, we shall no longer be the second-largest contributor of funds to the Union. France, the Netherlands and, per capita, Austria and Sweden will contribute more. It is also a real advance that future contributions will be related to proportion of GDP rather than VAT contributions. That is the right way to go.

All in all, I do not believe that the Bill places a substantially greater burden on this country than that which we carried before. However, there are other burdens in all the nooks and crannies through which the European Union and the Commission, in particular, can get involved in our national life. The burden comes in the European Commission's essentially corporatist approach, its social chapter and the existence of the cohesion and the structural funds.

Yet I cannot help but wonder how many Members of the House would wish us to leave the European Union, for all its faults, after 20 years of membership. Our whole trade and investment system is deeply embedded in the European Union. At a purely practical level, if we were outside the European Union, how could we influence it about landing rights at Charles de Gaulle airport, for example, which Air France is trying to prevent British Airways from using?

There are other reasons for our remaining in the Union which have been gone over many times. This country has acted as a magnet for overseas investment and it is plainly in our commercial interests to remain a member of the Union and to have an influence over the future pattern of Europe.

Meanwhile, we have to deal with the current imperfections of the European Union. I am privileged to have been the chairman of the Public Accounts Commission for the past five years. In that capacity, I have seen a good deal of the Comptroller and Auditor General and we have had a number of discussions about fraud and waste within the European Union and how we might be able to combat it effectively. I have corresponded with both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the matter.

I think that right hon. and hon. Members are perfectly correct to point to the scandalous imperfections and examples of fraud and waste within the European Union and its total failure of will to deal with these problems. However, if we are to deal with fraud and waste effectively we will have to give the European Commission and the European Parliament more power than they have at present. There is no way that we, as a nation, can affect European Union spending; that is an inescapable dilemma.

The European Parliament has useful powers in relation to the European Commission. But hon. Members who have served on the Public Accounts Committee will know that it all depends on how these powers are used. They will recall that if a permanent secretary was due to appear before the Committee, he would take a week off work to prepare. I would like to think that some Commissioners at the Berlaymont building would miss even a lunch in order to prepare before appearing before the budget committee. It would do them no harm to miss a few lunches.

The European Parliament is not sufficiently addressing the powers that it has to tackle the European Commission about waste and fraud. However, not even those extra powers will be sufficient in themselves to address the problem. Ultimately, the European Union should not allow funds to go to a member state for any purpose—cohesion, structural or agricultural—until the frauds and waste which have been discovered have been properly reimbursed and penalties have been imposed.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary wants member states to pass the appropriate laws. That is a matter for them to decide. They may agree to do so, but I wonder whether the pace of legislation to deal with fraud and crime in Greece or Italy, for example, will be as rapid as it is in this country. I rather doubt that it will. Therefore, the only satisfactory way in which to deal with these problems is for the European Commission to withhold its funds.

Sir Teddy Taylor: It cannot be done.

Sir Peter Hordern: My hon. Friend may say that, but it can be done, and I have it in writing from the Chancellor to say that that is the case.

It might help if the United Kingdom PAC were to meet the PACs from other member countries. I think that the incidence of fraud and waste brings the European Union into contempt, and the European Parliament and the Commission must come to grips with the problem. It is far and away the most important duty of the European Parliament.

[Sir Peter Hordern]

Whenever I mention the matter to my friends in the European Parliament—as, I dare say, my hon. Friends have done—I see their eyes glaze over. They like to debate these matters, but they do not like to do the invigilation and investigation.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Peter Hordern: No. I am sorry, but I am very short of time. Many improvements need to be made.

Unfortunately, fraud and waste have an effect upon the regard in which the European Parliament is held. The voter turnout at the European elections demonstrated a lack of confidence in Europe. It is always very dangerous to depart too far from our democratic roots and support. Whatever Europe thinks of us, national Parliaments are democratic institutions which enjoy the largest measure of popular support. That is certainly true in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member's time has expired.

6.38 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), who spent his 10 minutes reminding the House, rightly, of the important and different traditions by which parliamentary sovereignty and accountability have developed. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that it is a rich irony that in this parliamentary Session we celebrate the tercentenary of the parliamentary Session of 1690 to 1695 which basically invented democratic accountability as we have come to know it.

Accountability was invented using financial control of the Administration of the day, through the first Public Accounts Committee, which was directly elected by the House in the 1690 Parliament. The parliamentary Session of 1690 to 1694 saw the first annual estimates presented to the House. Those changes to procedure ensured the continued stability of parliamentary institutions. Exactly 300 years ago this Session we established the principle of annual Sessions of Parliament. Before that, even in the British tradition, the House of Commons was more a matter of occasion than an institution. It could go for years without even sitting.

That position is fundamentally different from what happened on the continent and that is why our definition of sovereignty is different from that of any other country in Europe. We define loss of sovereignty as loss of parliamentary control over our financial affairs—rightly so, because that is the basis on which we have conceived the idea of sovereignty. That interpretation cannot be found anywhere on the continent. The Spanish Cortes, the Bundestag, and the Greek, French or Italian Parliaments do not have that sense of continuity. Nor have they defined sovereignty in institutional terms, as we have. It is richly ironic that we are debating a Bill which will again transfer significant sums of money outside the control of the Public Accounts Committee and outside any form of scrutiny.

I listened with interest to the speech of the shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). He has to admit, as we all do, that we no longer have control over the money that we agree to pass to Europe. It will not be subject to Public Accounts Committee scrutiny. It cannot be subject to a minute from some permanent secretary such as Sir Tim Lankester which said of the Pergau dam affair, "I do not believe in and do not underwrite this type of expenditure." There is no such equivalent procedure in Europe. Therefore, we are abrogating a measure of parliamentary sovereignty if we support the Bill.

I should like to demonstrate the point. Where will the money go that we are supposed to vote to transfer? It will go to one form of expenditure that I should instinctively support. The financial perspective for 1993 to 1999 shows an increase of more than 42 per cent. in EC overseas aid programmes. I have examined the management and financial accountability of such programmes. I am talking not about fraud but about the processes of ensuring financial accountability. One reads report after report. The House of Lords has submitted reports and the Court of Auditors has reported on EC overseas aid expenditure.

I find it impossible to accept the line, which I think the right hon. Member for Horsham tried to persuade us to accept, that we should continue giving the money in the hope that it will some day be made more accountable. I cannot see how a 42 per cent. increase in a budget which already cannot easily be accounted for and which is riddled with waste and duplication of administration will improve the programme. Every investigation has emphasised the waste in European overseas aid programmes. I do not understand the logic of increasing the budget. I do not understand how, if the budget is increased to that extent, we will manage to make it more financially accountable and less wasteful and gain control over the fraud and mismanagement. It is a large aid budget and it is not working effectively, as anyone who has examined it agrees.

If one wanted an example of how parliamentary sovereignty has been eroded, overseas aid expenditure is as good as any. As a result of the increase in overseas aid expenditure in Europe and elsewhere, next year more than half the budget of the Overseas Development Administration, a major part of a Government Department of the British state, will be outside the scrutiny, power and responsibility of the House of Commons and its Committees. More than 50 per cent. of the budget of one major agency will be spent by agencies outside this country which are not subject to the Public Accounts Committee, to estimates or to control by the House.

I came into the House more than 25 years ago believing in the concept of parliamentary sovereignty. It may sound old-fashioned, whiggish or whatever one may like to call it. I still believe in it. I have watched the erosion of parliamentary sovereignty. I have to confess to the House that I have condoned it. I did not do very much on the Single European Act. I looked up the debates on the European Communities (Finance) Bill in 1988 and I took no part. I scarcely voted, but nor did the House. The Committee stage was cleared in one evening. The Third Reading was nodded through without a debate.

Half the Chancellor's case was that we did not oppose the Edinburgh summit agreement in 1992. All right. We are waking up fast. The likes of me are waking up and are no longer willing to support and condone the loss of parliamentary sovereignty represented by the Bill. Therefore, I shall not only vote for our Front-Bench amendment but vote against the Second Reading of the Bill.

6.44 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Over the years, I have had a few rows with my Front Bench about the European Community. I remember resigning from a Conservative Government—probably before you were born, Mr. Deputy Speaker—because they decided to join the EC. I remember exchanging rather tough words with a lady for the first time when the previous Prime Minister was in office. It is unfortunate that in the debate tonight an enormous number of people will vote for what they consider a load of rubbish. We have enthusiastic Euro-supporters who will vote against the Bill tonight. That seems silly. I know that a substantial number of my hon. Friends who are opposed to what is happening feel obliged to vote for the Second Reading of the Bill.

I shall be in trouble because I am afraid that I cannot support the Government in the Lobby tonight. All that I want to do is say a few things to my colleagues which I hope that they will remember. Unfortunately, I shall be in great trouble. Happily, I have a splendid constituents association which supports me. However, no one is safe, because we have a regional chair of the Conservative party who has all the management skills of the late Robert Maxwell and all the charm and good humour of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown). In that situation, we have to worry.

However, I am not worried. We have to ask ourselves what people should think about this evening. First, I plead with colleagues to consider honestly whether they are not losing every battle on the EC. If they do so, they will see that that is what is happening. Let us take the repeated statements year after year that agricultural reform is coming, something is around the corner and spending is falling. Please look at the financial papers and see what has been happening. My colleagues will see that expenditure is increasing.

The Government say—the Chancellor said it today—that our proportion of the total budget is going down. My hon. Friends should ask him what is happening to domestic spending on agriculture. There has been a shift of expenditure from the EC to member states. Sadly, it breaks every record. The Government say, "Please vote for us because now we have control. We have budgetary limits." My colleagues should look at the budget for 1995. They will see precisely and clearly on page 13 that spending will bust through the legal limits by more than £1,000 million and that it will be done by means of accountancy devices. That is exactly what happened the last time that we had limits.

I ask my colleagues please to stop thinking of controlling European legislation. I had the pleasure only this week of meeting representatives of Thamesway, my local bus company, a super bus company which runs buses all over the place. Colleagues should ask local bus companies what will happen with the EC construction directive on buses and coaches. It will make massive changes. It will make the use of double deckers impossible. It will insist on all sorts of extra exits. It will involve massive spending. It is a load of nonsense. When we ask the Government what they can do, they say that, sadly, it is a majority vote issue.

I appeal to my hon. Friend the Paymaster General, who is one of the most honest and accurate Ministers, to remember the issue of freedom of trade. Does he remember PMS, one of my local firms? It is a super firm employing 200 people. It made £2 million profit last year. I received a letter from it only today, which says:

> "It would appear that the EC is determined to destroy our business."

It had been told that it had to reduce its business by more than 50 per cent. It imports stuff and re-exports it. What can the Government do? Basically nothing, because although they voted against the relevant measure, it went through by majority vote. I plead with my colleagues to stop thinking that they are winning the battle and stop pretending. Sadly, expenditure and interference are increasing and the economic situation in the EC is getting worse. If hon. Members doubt that, they should ask what the European Community's trade is with the rest of the world.

Secondly, we must ask ourselves how on earth we can support extra funding for the EC when spending is so dreadfully tight at home. On Friday, I went to Lancaster school in Southend—I am sure that no one has heard of it—which is a school for severely disabled children. They are in wheelchairs and have appalling disabilities. A report issued in 1992 states:

> "The accommodation . . . is unsuitable for the needs of children with severe learning difficulties. The majority of classes can only be reached by external sloping pathways, 2 bases are in relocatable classrooms, toileting and changing facilities are poor, and there is little specialist therapy accommodation."

In 1994, the inspectors' report stated:

> "Problems with the school building had a detrimental effect on the pupils' education."

The Health and Safety Executive said that the paths and slopes were unsuitable for wheelchairs. Why can something not be done? For the simple reason that there is no money.

Yesterday, a lady from Cluny square visited me. Her son-in-law told me that she is desperate to get into a retirement home, but cannot do so because, sadly, Essex county council says that there is no money. With a situation like that, how on earth can any Member of Parliament in all conscience vote for extra cash to go to an organisation that wastes money as though it were water? It is not right.

In fairness, the Government fight very hard to sort things out and we know that a Labour Government would do exactly the same, but what should we be doing today? I hoped that the Government would start to tell the truth to troublesome Back-Bench Members. That is a shocking thing to have to say to any Government or Opposition, but I mean it sincerely. Unfortunately, Ministers who are Euro-enthusiasts put things one way—Opposition spokesmen who are Euro-enthusiasts do the same. For example, let us try to get across what the balance of our trade is with the European Community. What is the expenditure and how does it compare?

Unfortunately, we heard only last week that there had been some error of calculation and we had to spend an extra £731 million on the EC this year—almost as much as the £900 million that we have paid in value added tax on fuel during the year. We want to know when the Government found out about the error. The Chancellor told us, first, that he could not remember and, then, that it was not on his mind when he wrote to Members of Parliament. We simply have to tell people the facts and, once we have done so, we must ask about the options.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

All this talk of how we will stop fraud is so silly. No matter how many Euro-policemen one employs, one cannot stop fraud when one has a policy that invites it and it is absolute nonsense to say that one can. All those Members who say that we should have more Euro-policemen and open up more offices must know that that is madness and cannot work. We must decide that the common agricultural policy should be scrapped and how we should go about it.

I hope that the Government will appreciate that people's views are changing. Anyone who doubts that fact should remember what happened at the Conservative party conference in Bournemouth. It was tragic that no one wanted to talk about the European Community at the conference, but every meeting organised by the Euro-sceptics or the anti-market groups was packed out. We had to turn people away, and it was not because speakers like me were brilliant but because the average Conservative knew that something was going very wrong.

Young people are getting worried. They are worried about the threat to our democracy and they are wondering what is the point of voting for all those clever politicians at the next election when all their powers are being given away. I hope that we will think of a way of asking the people of Britain whether we should have a separate relationship with the European Community and how they would like to express a view on the subject.

I am very distressed because I am in no sense a conspirator against the Prime Minister, who is a decent and honourable man. If I have the opportunity to vote in a leadership election, I shall do so. I am not trying to rock the Government in any way, but I hope that they will accept that some hon. Members think it outrageous, impossible and wrong to vote for extra cash for the EC when it wastes so much money.

I well remember walking down Southend high street with my lovely wife on Saturday. I could not walk down that street again next week and be straight and open with people if we decided to pour even more cash into that wasteful, fraudulent and non-democratic organisation. I very much regret that I cannot vote for the Government tonight, but obviously I wish them well.

6.54 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). His remarks were obviously very sincere. He and I come to this debate from very different positions, yet we will, I hope, be in the same Lobby tonight—if the hon. Gentleman is not there, he will in sentiment be in the same Lobby as Opposition Members.

Clearly, this debate is not about European Union expenditure. It is a dry run for the intergovernmental conference debate that is yet to come and reflects the internal schism in the Conservative party. The real issues in the debate are obscured by the way in which it has been conducted.

At the risk of being unpopular with the majority of hon. Members in the Chamber, I shall say why it is essential for people to put matters into perspective. Our total domestic product is about £400 billion. We are discussing total expenditure on the European Union of about £2.5 billion. The United Kingdom has the eighth-largest gross domestic product per capita in the Union, yet we are the second-largest contributor to the budget. Clearly, that is unacceptable and it must be changed.

The real reason for the size of that contribution is not the increases that were agreed at Edinburgh but the fact that agricultural spending still takes a disproportionate amount of the European Union budget. It is not surprising that the Government are not doing anything substantial to remedy that problem because, after all, the Conservative party represents very large agricultural interests that do not want fundamentally to change the common agricultural policy, the set-aside arrangements and all the other scams and scandals that apply not only where there has been fraud but to the way in which urban working people and consumers are punished because of the interests of the agricultural lobby.

Speaking as a Member of Parliament for an urban constituency with no agriculture, I believe that it is about time that the majority of people got a better deal through lower food prices and more efficiency, which is in their interests, rather than having to pay others not to produce, or to produce alcohol that is converted to vehicle fuel and tobacco that is unsmokeable and stockpiled. That nonsense cannot go on. That is why it is essential that we reform the common agricultural policy.

On fraud and the role of the auditors within the European Union, some people in the European Parliament in Brussels are fighting very hard to get a grip on the work, led by members of the socialist group such as Terry Wynn and John Tomlinson. It is not for the European Parliament to decide what resources are required to carry out the inspections and how many people should carry out the work; that is a decision for the Council of Ministers.

My hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor said that the British Government failed to take up funding that was available for anti-fraud measures. Worse than that, the British Government have resisted efforts to increase the budget heads so that people can carry out that work. If our Government were serious about action against fraud, they would be doing all that they could, not merely on a national basis but on an international, European Union, basis.

We also have the opportunity to do something fundamental about the common agriculture policy, and all the problems associated with it, in the next few years during the debates about enlargement. I was alarmed to read in a newspaper today that one of the Commissioners is suggesting that the CAP be extended to Poland. In their discussions over enlargement with the central and eastern European Visegrad countries, the Government must be clear that we are not just going to transpose the existing CAP into 17, 20 or more countries. We must use the opportunity of enlargement to break and erode the CAP and to reduce expenditure on agriculture. We must not build in even worse problems for the future by trying to finance surpluses, overproduction and set-asides in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech republic and Hungary. I say that as somebody who is firmly committed to enlargement and who wishes all the democratic countries of Europe ultimately to be part of the same political and economic system within the European Union. Of course, we are not trying today to resolve those matters.

As long as this lame-duck Government persist in hanging on to office by threat, bluster and blackmail, they will be clearly incapable—because of their internal divisions—of doing anything constructive or on a

collective basis with other Governments or with the European Parliament to assist in making changes in the process. We must wait for a change of Government, and for a Government who are committed to reforming the common agriculture policy, to rooting out fraud and corruption and to co-operating and building up structural funds. We must shift the balance in the EU budget towards areas of need, combating unemployment and implementing proposals—such as the Delors package—which will deal with the problems that Europe is facing. I regret that the debate is not focusing on the issues. I hope that we will soon have a Government who are able to set us on that path.

7.1 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I shall refer to the first terms of the Bill, because it is on Second Reading that we shall be primarily and most importantly voting at the end of the debate.

I was closely involved with the issue as a Minister when I was at the Treasury, from the election until July this year. Given the freedom of the Back Benches and some time for reflection and hindsight, I remain a supporter of the actions that were taken by my senior colleagues at the Edinburgh summit and brought into effect by the Bill. I believe that it was an extremely good deal. My opinion was enforced by the fact that—as far as I can gather from his response to an intervention—even the shadow Chancellor thought it was a good deal. He did not criticise the deal during the whole of his speech, and that seems to be the position also of the Liberal Democrat party.

Of course, we can all imagine a more desirable deal for the United Kingdom being achieved if we did not have to reach agreement with others. That is also true of each of the other 11 countries that were represented around the table, each of which could have prevented an agreement. But we in the House must live in the real world, and the Edinburgh deal was a good deal for the United Kingdom.

As a result of Edinburgh, the total increase in European Community expenditure has been slowed down, and the proportion of Community expenditure that falls on the UK has also been reduced. As for total expenditure, there is always plenty of debate in this Parliament and elsewhere about individual programmes within the Community. But the key overall figure is the own resources ceiling which restricts the total amount that the Community can spend under every head by reference to a percentage of GNP. As we know, that proportion was 1.2 per cent. by the time of the Edinburgh summit. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that, whatever creative accounting may be attempted on individual bits of expenditure—as he suggested in one instance—the own resources limit applies in total to all the expenditure. That was the key figure at Edinburgh.

Just before Edinburgh, the Commission proposed a series of increases, starting with 1.22 per cent. in 1993 and rising to 1.37 per cent. in 1999. The Commission thought that those rises were a compromise between member states such as ourselves that were very restrictive on the amount of spending and those that wanted to spend more. If that compromise had been in place this year, the Community would have been able to spend 1.27 per cent. of GNP. In fact, we will not reach 1.27 per cent. until 1999. Of course, this year's increase is nil.

The final agreement was to reach less than half the compromise increase two years later than was proposed, but there was also hard negotiation on the various member states' shares of total expenditure, and once again I believe it to be a good deal. There was shifting of some of the weight of expenditure from the VAT resource to the GNP resource, which helps our cash flow and means that—over the term of the agreement—the proportion of Community expenditure funded by the UK will go down.

In turn, the deal means that the number of states that are serious net contributors to the Community will increase and, as we have heard, enlargement will take that process further. That will make our position in the Economic and Finance Council and in the Budget Council much easier. It is also potentially very important for the changing culture of the Community, and the Council of Ministers in particular, with regard to value for money and fraud. I observed part of that process myself before I left the Treasury. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will do all they can to build on that advantage.

I believe that, for those two primary reasons, it is a good deal for the UK. But, of course, it was a deal, and I and others believe that it depends on the belief that it is in the UK's interests to continue to belong to the European Community. I believe that because of the inward investment that has come to my constituency and to others all over country. I believe that it is also in our interests to be part of a large and prosperous home market—not to protect that market but to act as a base from which to trade around the world, particularly against other great trading blocks. It is better to work with our nearest neighbours and rivals to ensure the free movement of goods and services and proper uniform standards. Our membership of the EU also increases our leverage in world negotiations.

Above all, it is wise to have "jaw-jaw" rather than "war-war", and I am talking about trade wars as well as the shooting wars from which the European Community originated. "Jaw-jaw" can sometimes be extremely hard work in the European Community. I have represented this country from three different Departments on the Council of Ministers and a number of other Councils. I was much involved during the UK's presidency, when I was president of the Budget Council.

I know exactly to my cost—I lost sleep because of it—how difficult negotiating within the Community sometimes is. However, if we belong to the Community, it is necessary for us to take part in all its work. We must negotiate the best deals we can, as was done successfully by the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) and the Foreign Secretary at Edinburgh.

It has always been obvious to me that the Bill would be of the first importance. The supporters of the Government are expected, of course, to support all the major Bills introduced. There is nothing new in that and I was not in the least surprised when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spelt that out in the debate on the Queen's Speech. An idea has grown up, too, that because opposition to a Bill is regarded as incompatible with full membership of the Government's parliamentary party, the Opposition parties are therefore obliged to vote against it as well, regardless of whether they support its aims. In fact, the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties seem to support the purpose of the Bill.

[Sir John Cope]

That decision to oppose is a distortion of our constitution and promotes to absurd lengths the idea that the duty of the Opposition is to oppose. Of course I realise the temptation to the Opposition parties. I am cynical enough to realise that they cannot resist it. Their excuse is concern about fraud and the mismanagement in the Community, but we are all concerned about that, too. The Opposition also know perfectly well that the United Kingdom Government, of all Governments, have been the strongest in the Community in combating fraud and mismanagement. The Opposition know that that will continue to be the case.

If our Parliament can find better ways in which to scrutinise such expenditure, we should, by all means, consider them. We could, for example, consider the suggestions put forward in the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and others, which has not been selected. A change of that kind, however, should not be seen as a reason to decline to give the Bill its Second Reading. It deserves support from both sides of the House.

7.11 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): In common with the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), I must declare an interest, because I have been associated with companies that have benefited from funding through the International Fund for Ireland, which is partly financed by the European Community.

As is well know, the Ulster Unionist party has consistently opposed the integration of Europe. We are strong Europeans and believe in co-operation in Europe, but we do not believe in subjecting the United Kingdom to control from Brussels. That has been our line consistently.

What concerns us as a parliamentary party is the attitude of the Government to the Edinburgh agreement. They are treating it as though it were a foreign treaty. They argue that it represents a political commitment and has placed on Parliament an international obligation to rubber-stamp what was agreed in Edinburgh. I believe, however, that the Prime Minister went to the conference in Edinburgh and made a decision that requires the approval of the elected Members of Parliament of the United Kingdom. They are neither delegates nor rubber stamps but representatives, who have the right to express their views, yea or nay, on the Edinburgh agreement.

The agreement has two adverse effects. First, it is yet a further move in the direction of an integrated Europe. It increases the United Kingdom's contributions from own resources to the European Commission's budget. Secondly, it brings into being the cohesion fund, which benefits European regions, as well as four European nations. Some of the regions within those four nations, however, are much richer than many of the regions in the eight other countries that have been excluded from the benefits of that fund. I think immediately of some regions in Scotland, which have been denied any benefit from it. Among the favourable aspects of the Edinburgh agreement is the British Government's success in drawing attention to fraud and waste and the successful decision at least to curtail agricultural expenditure.

In the few minutes allowed to me I should like to discuss the implications of the agreement for Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland receives a considerable amount of money from the European Union, but it must be said that were we not a member of that Union, the national expenditure on Northern Ireland would be even greater than the money that we receive from Europe. That must always be borne in mind. Of greater concern to us, since we are in Europe and receive European funding, is that the funding from the Commission is politically motivated. The spending priorities are not those that we in the United Kingdom would have chosen and are certainly not those that we in Northern Ireland would prefer.

The International Fund for Ireland, for example, concentrates mainly on cross-border projects. It also spends money on some other projects that we consider wasteful, such as butterfly parks, a golfing video, as well as £40,000 on Lord O'Neill's steam engine, which closed down a few months later. The money wasted through that fund is also politically oriented expenditure. For example, 20 villages were selected to receive money from that fund, but even though the majority of villages in Northern Ireland are unionist, those selected were nationalist majority villages. That kind of policy, funded by the European Community, is creating unease and irritation among the unionist majority community in Northern Ireland. It represents an abuse of power by the European Community, through the International Fund for Ireland, and, as a result, the majority community in Northern Ireland is now losing out.

Another example of such political motivation will be announced next week, with the allocation of a further £300 million for Northern Ireland. We welcome that money, but, once again, the European Union is about to say that that money can be spent only on cross-border roads. Not a penny of that money can be spent on priority roads for Northern Ireland—for example, the Supermac junction on Saintfield road, the busiest junction in Northern Ireland, which has to deal with 50,000 vehicles a day. Instead it must be wasted on small roads across the border.

An important internal road in the west of Ulster runs from Omagh to Enniskillen. That road is especially important now that Omagh has lost its maternity hospital, which means that women must travel to Enniskillen. No money can be spent on that road from the new funding. That is the type of thing that is upsetting people in Northern Ireland.

We look forward to the intergovernmental conference in 1996. I hope that the United Kingdom Government will bring to an end the movement towards a federal Europe. That would ensure that we end up not with a Europe of regions, but a Europe of co-operating sovereign states. The Government should also, finally, commit themselves to opposing a single currency, otherwise its introduction would mean the final destruction of the United Kingdom as an independent nation. I hope that we will have some offer from the Government to the effect that, after 1996, it will be the people, through a referendum, who will have the right to decide what happens in our future relations with Europe.

We have been asked how we intend to vote tonight. It has been alleged that there is a deal between the Ulster Unionist party and the Government. Let me make it clear that there is no deal, nor is there need for one, because in the context of the developing situation within Northern

Ireland, Her Majesty's Opposition support the Downing street declaration, just as Her Majesty's Government do. Therefore, any change in Government would have no effect on the present process in Northern Ireland, so there is no need for any deal. The Ulster Unionist party is not afraid of a general election either; my party would welcome it, because, in the present circumstances, we would do well in Northern Ireland.

Our decision on the Bill will be based not on Northern Ireland politics, but on today's debate—Europe and where we are going in it. The Government may have done some bad things, but when we look at the alternatives we see a Labour Opposition, and, even worse, a Liberal Democrat Opposition, who give the impression that they would accept every demand and every expenditure call from Brussels. They would query nothing. They accept everything coming from Brussels. Until Her Majesty's Opposition take a firm line and stand up for the interests of the United Kingdom in Europe, I am afraid that the Ulster Unionist parliamentary party could not identify itself with the policies of the Opposition tonight.

7.19 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The proposition that "I know I am right" has now been elevated into a new constitutional doctrine. It whips a coach and horses through our history and traditions. It sweeps away the struggles of Pym and Hampden to establish our parliamentary rights against the absolutism of the Crown and asserts a new and dangerous concept—the divine right of Government. Then we had regicide; now we have suicide. Now the Prime Minister in effect declares that the Government can do no wrong—but he is not here today.

We have been told that the Bill is introduced and must pass as a matter of honour. We have been told that the presidency conclusions at Edinburgh amount to an international commitment, an international obligation. It has been described as a treaty obligation. That is not so; and no one seriously believes that we would have lost the rebate successfully secured at Fontainebleau.

The own resources decision became legally binding as recently as 31 October this year, but that was dependent on it being enacted in the House according to our constitutional requirements. That includes the rights of Members of Parliament.

Much has happened since the Edinburgh Council and—as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said when we were chucked out of the exchange rate mechanism—circumstances have changed. Not least, we have the compelling evidence that fraud in the European Community has not been contained. Far from it; as the current Court of Auditors report clearly shows, it has got worse in spite of the Maastricht treaty.

There has been more than enough reason not to implement the presidency conclusions since December 1992. They were concluded immediately after our ejection from the ERM, since when our gross domestic product has grown, and will grow as non-EU exports improve, as the revised figures that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has belatedly presented to the House demonstrate. He of course had to do that after having said on a radio programme that my figures were rubbish. Nothing said today alters that.

There is also the repudiation by the Court of Auditors of the accuracy of the GNP figures. Then there is the Conservative European manifesto of May and June 1994, which clearly states:

"We will resist all pressure to increase the ceiling on spending in the Community."

Why, then, did we break that commitment to our own people, our own voters—as we did over the tax promises in our general election manifesto of 1992 as a result of the disastrous experiment in the exchange rate mechanism? A mere four months later, on 31 October 1994, we broke that commitment. That itself was a mere 10 days after the Chancellor had gone to Brussels and had given in significantly to the Italian blackmail on Italy's milk quota fraud. The Bill is tainted with fraud.

The Prime Minister could, and should, have said no on 31 October, and gained the approval of the electorate. As when he refused to veto economic and monetary union, and as when the Danes first rejected Maastricht and he let them down, as when he stubbornly stayed in the exchange rate mechanism—which nearly destroyed our economy—and as when he failed to say no to qualified majority voting, the chasm between promise and performance grows wider and wider as the tectonic plates of the European issue move beneath us.

As Francis Bacon said:

"Nothing destroys authority so much as the unequal and untimely interchange of power pressed too far and relaxed too much."

My amendment would draw powers back to the House—to the democratic, independent, all-party scrutiny of the Public Accounts Committee, in co-operation, as I have always argued, with the European Parliament and in contact with the Court of Auditors, but in line with the promises of Maastricht: the Government's commitment to enhance the powers of national Parliaments, as yet ignored.

Edinburgh was a failure, as I said at the time. We gave in to Kohl's intimidation and Gonzalez's avarice, largely because of threats that we would be drawn away from enlargement. We should have stood up to them and used Edinburgh to renegotiate Maastricht. We would not be in this dangerous position, in the run-up to 1996, if we had.

So what is to be done? I will not support the Labour party, which would simply enact the Bill. Our argument is won, but the taxpayer will pay, either under the present Government or a under Labour successor. It would be worse than a pyrrhic victory to defeat the Government tonight. In "Murder in the Cathedral" we are told:

"it is the greatest treason to do the right thing for the wrong reason."

Tonight, some will do the wrong thing for the right reason.

In my constituency annual general meeting last year, I was advised to recall the words of Winston Churchill:

"Your first duty is to your country; your second duty is to your constituents; only in the third instance is your duty to your party's policy and programme."

Those people have been magnificent.

We are being whipped to do the wrong thing for the wrong reason. That is a disgrace to our parliamentary democracy, and makes more and more valid the claim of Chancellor Kohl's foreign policy spokesman, who said:

"Those who cling to national sovereignty are seeking solace in an empty shell."

We have been warned.

[Mr. William Cash]

Let us assert our confidence in the House by refusing a single currency now, by tackling fraud as my amendment proposes and by holding a referendum on this issue as a last resort—before the intergovernmental conference, and the prospect of a sell-out worse even than that at Maastricht. We could, and I would still urge that the Government do so, withdraw the Bill.

7.25 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): There can be little doubt that fraud is a justifiable cause for concern, and that it is growing. One of the main reasons why fraud is growing is the complete failure, especially by the Government, to control, let alone eliminate, it.

The Court of Auditors reports in the past 10 years or so have shown that it believes that at least 10 per cent. of the European Community budget is subject to fraud. I believe, and I think that most right hon. and hon. Members believe, that that is the tip of a very large iceberg.

I was staggered by the Chancellor's statement earlier, when he criticised the theory that fraud could amount to about £6 billion. He pooh-poohed that. He said that that was pure speculation, and completely irresponsible. The 10 per cent. figure that the Court of Auditors has identified—I repeat that it is the tip of a large iceberg—will account for fraud of £4.5 billion per year. The figure that the Chancellor so arrogantly dismissed is not too far away from the facts with which we are now presented.

The Government claim that they have targeted fraud. I want to show that their aim is severely defective. The fundamental reason for that is that the common agricultural policy system is inherently fraudulent.

In 1992, the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) came back to the House and claimed that the changes to the CAP were not only Tory-inspired but a victory for Europe, for Britain, for the farmers, for the taxpayers and for the consumers. I believe that claim to be as bogus as the claim by the Government that they are winning the battle against fraud.

We should separate the facts from Government propaganda—propaganda which, I believe, is designed to hoodwink the public further. A report published by the Court of Auditors this year highlighted a crucial element in the system of fraud—the export refund system. The export refund system is fertile ground for the fraudsters. A crucial element in control of the export refund system is accurate recording of production. The Court of Auditors report showed that two states in the European Union had a satisfactory system of production records. The Court of Auditors report also said that the records of the Netherlands, Italy and the United Kingdom were never examined. Therefore, the system of production records for export refunds in the United Kingdom—not according to the Labour party or the Euro-sceptics, but according to the Court of Auditors—was "not adequately covered".

Another aspect of the control of fraud in export refunds is the reliability of information provided by member states. Under the relevant regulations and articles, each member state is required to produce, every three months, a report notifying the European Commission of fraud cases. In three member states, such reports were not respected: those states were Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom. How can the United Kingdom Government claim to be winning the battle against fraud when, in the crucial matter of export refunds, the Court of Auditors has criticised their record so severely?

That is what the Court of Auditors said; but what is the United Kingdom's record over the past decade or so? I was interested by the suggestion of the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) that the Commission ought to stop the flow of funds to member states that are not dealing adequately with cases of fraud. That is indeed an interesting concept, but let us examine the United Kingdom's record.

Over the past 20 years or so—the Government have been in office for most of that time—5,775 fraud cases have been reported. The Chancellor said today that the Government were giving the highest possible priority to the defeat of fraud, and that they had made most of the running in the progress made towards that end; but the UK record tells a different story. The Court of Auditors report suggests that only 27 per cent. of the amounts involved in the fraud cases identified in the United Kingdom has been recovered: in other words, nearly three quarters of those amounts went straight into the fraudsters' pockets, and remains there. The Government's complacency strikes me as staggering, and the Court of Auditors has pointed out that the result is far short of what is required.

The common agricultural policy is responsible for the basic problem: until it is fundamentally reformed, fraud will flourish. It is a gluttonous creature, demanding to be fed, and the Government are instrumental in providing it with a financial feast. It was argued in 1992 that the reforms made in that year would put the CAP on a strict diet, but that cannot happen. We should not be fooled by the Chancellor's statement about what will happen by the end of the decade. In 1992, the CAP budget was £21.2 billion; in 1995—four years after we were promised that the reforms would deliver the goods—that budget will increase to £27.1 billion. That is a 25 per cent. increase since 1992, and it is not—as the Chancellor has claimed—a trifle; it is a scandal.

The Chancellor said that he must amend the United Kingdom's contributions by some £720 million. Let me give some further examples of fraud. We can remain within the CAP guideline only by ignoring the annual cost of devaluation—about £1 billion a year—by deferring olive oil payments for future years—about £900,000 a year—and by using reserve money—about £350,000 a year. That is not contained in any document, but it is outside the guideline; it is another example of the fraudulent way in which we are trying to con the public. The CAP is loaded with fraud, and another fraud is the one being perpetrated on the British people.

The Bill is not acceptable in the terms in which it is drafted, and I hope that hon. Members will support the amendment. The Government have failed to combat fraud; they have no effective policy to reform the CAP; and there is every sign that they will continue to pour more resources down the plughole that is the common agricultural policy.

7.34 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Time and again, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) called for the reform of the common agricultural policy

and I do not believe that a single Conservative Member would disagree with him; my point to him is that, in 1992, when a reform of the CAP last took place—again, I know of no hon. Member who would deny that that was a step in the right direction—his party gave the reform no support. That puts its record into context.

We have heard a good deal today—and, indeed, from the media in the weeks running up to the debate—about the iniquity and wickedness of this cruel Government, who have demanded that Conservative Members vote for the Bill's Second Reading and turned the vote into a vote of confidence. Words such as "blackmail" and "bullying" have been used. A number of my hon. Friends—a small number, usually known as the Europhobes; that is one thing that the Leader of the Opposition got right—have been going from media studio to media studio complaining about the denial of freedom that has been imposed on them. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who is not present now, even prayed in aid the glorious names of Pym and Hampden in connection with the dreadful things that are being done.

If that were the whole truth, it would indeed present a dreadful picture. The picture is giving serious concern to many people throughout the country and many members of party associations, but the reality is entirely different. As so often happens, that reality is being regularly and deliberately obscured by the very agency that is meant to bring enlightenment: the media have worked themselves into an ecstasy—a frenzy—about the whole episode, joining our party's Europhobes in whipping up a lather of indignation.

In fact, there would be no need for any of this if there were any question that the Opposition operated with the slightest degree of honesty and responsibility. As has been made clear, they entirely support the objectives of own resources enlargement; we can debate the details of that issue, but the effective debate is not on that territory.

This appears to be a debate about fraud. It is a relatively new tactic. I have good reason to believe that the Labour party, certainly, had no intention of missing what it saw as an opportunity to attack and embarrass the Government, knowing the parliamentary arithmetic which, sadly, clearly applies in the Conservative party. Labour's original tactic, or pretext, was to use the social chapter and the differences of view across the House on that subject: that was to be the casus belli of this evening's challenge. Then, riding to Labour's rescue came the report of the Court of Auditors, which was taken up on all sides—and an admirable cause it is.

One of the many ironies in the present circumstances is that the power and impact of the Court of Auditors is now greater, thanks to what was achieved by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's initiative as a result of the Maastricht negotiations. The Court is now a Community institution and the impact of its report is therefore that much greater—although it is important to retain in context what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said about the scale of fraud. Of course, any amount of fraud is too much, but the scale of this fraud has been grossly exaggerated—although we must go on working to get it right.

That is really just a question of parliamentary tactics, particularly on the part of the Labour party. It is, I think, a measure of the frenzy created by the present political climate that the spotlight is not on the total inconsistency of the Opposition's position: we are seeking to obfuscate their support for the European Community and own resources enlargement, and the pretext that they are using. The Opposition use that pretext, not least because their record in combating fraud and in seeking reform of the common agricultural policy is so dreadful. Another irony is that one or two of my hon. Friends might abstain or join the two major Opposition parties in the Division Lobby when their objectives are totally opposed.

My final point is, sadly, addressed largely to Conservative Members. Seven words in the English language are damaging at the moment to the Conservative party, to the Government and to British special interests. They are, "I am in favour of Europe, but." That attitude is sapping and damaging Britain's position in developing a Europe with which we can live and in which we can prosper.

One or two of my hon. Friends have taken a consistent and honest position on Europe—they have said from the beginning that they oppose our membership. Of course, they are wrong and deeply misguided, but I respect their opinions and the consistency of their position. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) joined that band some weeks ago at our party conference in Bournemouth. In his speech in a fringe meeting there, he seemed to accept that Britain would consistently be outvoted by 11 to one on virtually any issue. He is deeply wrong and misinformed, but at least he is now clear that he has joined the ranks of the totally negative.

We can deal with that tiny minority in the Conservative party. It is much smaller than the minority of Labour Members against Europe. The position of Front-Bench Labour party spokesmen flops and flips and it has done so eight times in the past 10 years. At the moment, the pro-Europeans are in the ascendancy, but a large minority of Labour Members are permanently hostile to Europe and we have heard one or two of them in the debate. The minority of Conservative Members who hold such a view is small. I ask them to clarify their position and genuinely to consider it.

Those Conservative Members go around constantly attacking Europe, ignoring its achievements and the vision and potential that Europe offers us, when three or four countries, if Norway gets it right, are knocking on the door to enter Europe, understanding that it is not just a free-trading area. Those three or four countries will become members when my hon. Friends are making it difficult for us to stay in Europe and, by implication, want us to get out. They do great harm not only to our party, but to our country.

The sort of Europe that most hon. Members believe in has huge potential. It is a Europe of nation states, where we collaborate, where our interests are served and where we work out our own salvation where it is most sensible—at the national level. That is the principle of subsidiarity. We have a great opportunity now and we shall have a wonderful opportunity in 1996. That opportunity, however, will be destroyed unless my hon. Friends stop saying, "I am in favour of Europe, but." They should start saying, "The sort of Europe that we believe in is . . . " Millions and millions of our fellow Europeans would share that sort of Europe with us.

7.43 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): With the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), I think that he was not totally open when he attacked the Opposition parties for seeking to defeat the Government tonight. He knows well why the Opposition parties are lined up against the Government. It is not because we are debating extra money from the United Kingdom budget for the European Union—the opposition has nothing to do with that. It has nothing to do with fraud or reform of the common agricultural policy. The opposition is all to do with confidence in the Government.

I cannot understand why, when a natural majority exists in the House for accepting the principles of the Edinburgh summit agreement, the Government have contrived to defeat themselves. I find it amazing that they have decided to make this an issue of confidence. Euro-sceptics on both sides of the House have decided to man the barricades on the issue, which, on the scale of things European, is small beer.

When one considers the decisions that were taken from 1971 to the time of the Maastricht debates, and when one considers what choices face the United Kingdom up to 1996, the possibility of having the Whip withdrawn over a measure such as this beggars belief. I do not understand why Conservative Members have decided to man the barricades.

Let us be clear about the decision that was taken at Edinburgh in 1992 and let us accept the reason why we should support the principle behind that decision. We should support it because the Maastricht treaty contains commitments on social and economic cohesion. There was an acceptance by countries of the European Union that, if they were to achieve economic and monetary union and if they were to improve their economic performance, they needed an increase in structural operations, including structural funds and cohesion funds.

Plaid Cymru agrees that the own resources ceiling should be raised from 1.2 per cent. to 1.27 per cent. in 1999 to enable peripheral and poorer regions of the European Union to benefit from Union membership. We accept that that must happen. The problem we have with the Edinburgh decision is that it does not accept Wales' particular position in the new European Union.

Hon. Members must accept that the Welsh economy, particularly the west Wales economy, has a fragile base. Many parts of rural Wales are still highly dependent on, for example, agriculture and tourism. The economy must diversify. Parts of industrial Wales have suffered from the recession and from structural changes. If all pockets of unemployment are to be reduced, the economy must diversify.

The problem is that although, under the Edinburgh agreement, resources for structural operations will increase by 43 per cent. between 1993 and 1999, Wales will not receive the real benefit of that increase. Because we have no voice where it matters in Brussels, we are denied access to funds that will improve Wales' economic performance in the run-up to eventual economic and monetary union.

Let us remember that countries that have objective 1 status and that can attract cohesion funds will be the real beneficiaries of the Edinburgh agreement. Let us remember that 62 per cent. of all structural funds will go to regions and nations that benefit from objective 1 status. Some regions in the UK will benefit. The highlands and islands of Scotland will benefit for the first time under objective 1. Merseyside will benefit. Northern Ireland has benefited for at least two periods, but areas in Wales could benefit. They qualify under any objective criteria.

Mr. Rowlands: Mid-Glamorgan is one of them.

Mr. Jones: Yes. Gwent, Dyfed and Gwynedd are others.

Because Wales lacks the political clout to secure objective 1 status from Brussels, the Welsh economy will suffer a net loss of at least £800 million between 1995 and 1999. If we had secured the sort of funding that the Edinburgh agreement was supposed to give peripheral and marginal areas, our economic base would have substantially improved.

Wales would qualify also for cohesion funds, because the criterion under the Maastricht treaty is any country having a gross domestic product of less than 90 per cent. of the European Union average. Only four countries meet that criterion—Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland. Wales would qualify. The cost to the Welsh economy of failing to attract cohesion funds will be at least £417 million between 1995 and 1999.

The failure of Wales to qualify for objective 1 and cohesion funds will cause the loss of £1.2 billion between 1995 and 1999. If Wales had a proper voice in the European Union, it could have attracted those moneys. They are not extra funds. We ask only for qualification under the existing own resources decision that increased the ceiling at Edinburgh.

We must examine the role of the Secretary of State for Wales in the damage that has been done to the Welsh economy as a result of our failing to have a proper voice in Europe. His predecessor eulogised at a Conservative party conference about what he described as a Europe of the regions. He said that Wales should play its part as a region—we would say, as a nation—in the European Union. He pioneered agreements with other European regions—Baden-Wurttemburg, Rhone-Alpes, Lombardy and Catalonia—and said that Wales should move in the same direction by having an independent, distinctive voice in the Union.

Today, we have a Euro-sceptic as Secretary of State for Wales, who gets Euro-sceptic Back Benchers to ask him questions, so that he can say why Wales should look to Westminster rather than to Europe for its salvation. This afternoon, the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) asked if it was true that Wales receives £6 billion a year from Westminster to pay its way. Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that that £6 billion comes from the pockets of Welsh taxpayers? Wales does not receive from Westminster funds to which it has not contributed.

The Secretary of State for Wales underestimates the contribution that Europe can make to the future of the Welsh economy. He denies us access to funds to improve our transport and technology infrastructure, so that Wales could play a full role on the European stage. Wales can flourish within the Union only if it continues to enjoy its own identity and breaks free of the shackles of the centralised British state.

7.53 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and

Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said that we all brought our own impedimenta to this debate. I confess to bringing my own intellectual bags and baggage. It may be that right hon. and hon. Members say that I habitually travel light. So be it. I admit, however, to a fundamental and deep preconception against the Bill

In many studios and numerous forums over the past few days, I have been asked how I will vote. I answered that I am against the principle of the Bill but would listen to the debate and make up my mind according to the arguments. Having done so, I hold to my original belief that the proposed legislation is neither in the interests of my country nor to the benefit of my constituents.

Last Wednesday, my Conservative association's executive committee wrote asking me to give an undertaking that I would support the Government in all votes which they deemed to be issues of confidence. I replied that I could only give my constituents my integrity and judgment—that I would, in the last resort, do that which I believed to be right.

The matter has been extraordinarily escalated by the Government. When I watched television on Saturday night, I saw my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). I canvassed for him at a Lambeth by-election, and at Richmond in 1983 when he just squeezed home. He is a constituent of mine and has been a friend for many years. I heard him suggest that Conservative Members who vote against the Government, abstain or even seek to amend legislation were in danger of disciplinary action, losing the Whip and, by implication, being deselected.

Being deselected is an occupational hazard—much less hazardous than some I have known in my past. In any case, it is no bad thing for Members of Parliament to be answerable to their electorate at all times, and I wholeheartedly welcome that. However, the extraordinary congruence of events over the past weeks and days has compelled me even more urgently and insistently to obey my conscience.

The Government, blithely and apparently happily, forwent the Conservative commitment to privatise the Post Office, did not press ahead with privatising national air traffic control services, and did not seem to mind that their long-stated commitment to making it easier to mobilise our reserve forces was not to feature in a Bill. Yet they chose to press ahead with this legislation which in my judgment, as I said in the letter to my constituency executive, is not recognisably Conservative.

It is with a heavy heart and some sadness that I say that my original view has not been shaken. Let us consider the financial perspective. How can it be right for a Conservative party that believes—if it believes in anything these days—in controlling public spending to allow an extra 3.3 per cent. in real terms to be assigned per annum to Brussels until the end of this decade? It goes against everything that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has suggested. As others have remarked, my right hon. and learned Friend will be seeking in his Budget tomorrow to impose cuts in future spending plans.

My right hon. and learned Friend then said, and I refer directly to his speech, that only one of his hon. Friends—my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), whose perspicacity in the matter as well as her tenacity and courage I admire—had complained about the cost of the Edinburgh deal when the statement was made to the House after the Edinburgh summit. This was hardly surprising, since at that time all our attention was focused on the fact that our Danish friends had voted no in their referendum and we were wondering what arrangement would be cobbled together to secure a different outcome for them in their next referendum.

On amendments, is it really so awful for Conservatives—honest Conservatives, loyal Conservatives, trustworthy Conservatives—to say that it is inappropriate for us to pass such an amendment as that tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition? It reads:

"That this House believes that the European Communities (Finance) Bill is not an acceptable measure as it increases United Kingdom contributions to the European Union without action by Her Majesty's Government to cut fraud and waste in Europe or to reduce expenditure on the Common Agricultural Policy."

I do not want to personalise the matter or to refer to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, but I see no way in which one could soft-shoe shuffle around this. It was put to me in a television studio this morning, "Your party, Mr. Wilkinson, are in danger of being labelled as sleaze bags." The proposed legislation does to some degree by statute institutionalise fraud. This will be the case unless efficient and effective methods to curb fraud are put in place before the Bill's enactment. So I do take the amendment seriously.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) referred to the true cost of membership of the EEC. In his speech there was no sleight of hand about what additional money over and above that previously anticipated we would have to finance. He referred to the true cost up to the end of the decade. The opportunity cost, too—inasmuch as the gross contribution—is just as important as the net cost. It is a fact, is it not, that every penny devoted to Brussels is fuel to the motor of European integration. The motor of European integration is fired and fuelled by our taxpayers' money at a time when—perhaps tomorrow it will be confirmed—our taxpayers will see VAT on domestic fuel doubled and other imposts will be applied from the next financial year. Many taxpayers have suffered deeply in the recession, which was intensified by our membership of the exchange rate mechanism.

We heard speeches from the right hon. Members for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and from the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands)—all of them honest gentlemen and all of whom were respected Ministers in Labour Administrations. They have seen over the years how the institutions of the Community work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) referred to the Johnny-come-latelys—those were not his words, but we can refer to ourselves as such—who have only recently understood how much the EEC would cost, unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who has always comprehended what the EEC was about and how much it would cost. For me, the Damascus road conversion came when, following the first Danish referendum result, I read the Maastricht treaty. It is plain to see—for all who would read it—that it is a blueprint for a united states of Europe. The more money we provide—the Bill is an example—the nearer the day will come when we are part of a super-state without our fellow countrymen ever having had a chance to express their opinion.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

I rest my case on this final point. One of the most treasured, most valued, most prized and most important responsibilities of the House is the voting of supply, which we do by tradition annually. The Bill seeks not quite to grant a blank cheque to Europe, but if the rate of growth continues to be as high as it is now—way above that predicated in December 1992, when the original decision was taken—it will mean a substantial transfer of resources from our fellow countrymen, to their detriment, not only to the wasteful and in some instances corruptly managed central institutions of the embryo European super-state but, through cohesion and structural funds, to Portugal, Spain, Greece, southern Italy, and so on, for industries to be developed there which will grow and compete and put our own people in this country out of work. In those circumstances, how can one say that we are acting as loyal Conservatives and responsible Members of Parliament if we renege on our traditional duties to our constituents and allow ourselves, as this Bill proposes, to bind future Parliaments which will succeed us?

I know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is a very nice man. I have never had cause to exchange a single cross word with him. He has always been a good listener, but that reputation accords ill with his behaviour over the proposed legislation before us. I believe that he has said that one of his great political heroes, apart from Iain Macleod, for whom I share his admiration—his rhetoric was formidable and was certainly an inspiration to many, including myself—was Neville Chamberlain. To me, and for the Conservative party, today was as climactic a moment as when the anti-appeasers stood their ground over Munich in 1938. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) who, at a private meeting—I beg his indulgence if I quote him in his absence—said that we should remember that Winston had to face a vote of confidence in his own constituency when he voted against the Government over Munich.

We must not take analogies too far, but it seems to me that Her Majesty's Government bow down and appease Brussels all the way along the line and the danger is that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, like Neville Chamberlain, will be swept away from office, perhaps as a consequence of his weakness, some two years hence. My only hope is that our party will not be swept to destruction in that same tidal wave. I believe that, if we stand our ground and hold fast to what we believe to be right today, we are much less likely to be so.

8.8 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) mentioned Neville Chamberlain. I happen to remember the said gentleman as Prime Minister. People said that he was very good for Birmingham but he could not deal with foreign affairs. Perhaps that might be the same with the present Prime Minister, the nice gentleman to whom the hon. Gentleman referred just now.

The hon. Gentleman refocused our attention on supply. The European Community constantly reiterates its basic democracy. I would challenge whether, in fact, our form of democracy is at all compatible with the treaty's. I believe that Government after Government will be entangled in treaties that are incapable of providing the fruit that they promise, because of their constitutional structure, which prevents some hon. Members from doing what they want in this country and which I believe does not allow the Labour party to do what it would wish to if such treaties did not exist. The difference between Neville Chamberlain's situation and the present is that whereas Chamberlain was up against armed force, all Prime Ministers and all Governments of this country for the foreseeable future, unless the position changes, will be fighting the treaties, which are difficult to alter. That is the problem that will face any Government.

The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), a former Treasury Minister, reminded us that this was economic warfare. Indeed it is, because the treaties set up economic warfare and economic competition. The Conservative party believes in economic competition in this country and pretty well everywhere else. If there is to be economic competition, one has to have a legislative framework. Once the legislative framework has been set, by democratic means one hopes, one knows where one is. The trouble with the treaties is that they get negotiation and legislation hopelessly tangled together. The framework of the economy, in terms of legislation, gets tangled up with finance and we find ourselves in constant difficulty.

Truth is supposed to be one of the first casualties of war. Unfortunately, truth has become the casualty of the treaties and of the economic warfare within the Community. That has been vividly illustrated today. A former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), has confessed to us that the granting of substantial sums to eastern Europe for reconstruction was done over a dinner table. Is that the way in which to vote money? Of course not. Did we know about that? No, but we know the truth now because more and more hon. Members with experience are spilling the beans.

What about Edinburgh? We are told tonight, "Oh, under the Edinburgh arrangement, we had to pay up because we had to ensure that the Spaniards would move forward with Europe." Why should there always be a succession of changes in the European Community? Why does it have to introduce yet another move towards centralisation before the previous move has been assessed and before its results have been analysed? There is an answer to that question, which I shall not venture tonight, although we must bear that point in mind.

As the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood said, when the Edinburgh summit was announced, we were told that the discussions would concern the Danes, enlargement and this, that and the other. We now hear that the agreement was made to keep the Spaniards on side and to reconstruct eastern Europe. That is why the Government then agreed not just to retention of the rebate—that is fine for the moment—but to an expansion of the expenditure envelope. That is what we now discover two years on.

The truth is a casualty even inside the Cabinet. I heard the Secretary of State for Defence say on television last week that the Bill was a treaty commitment. I intervened during the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to remind him and, indeed, the Chancellor—who has reminded us that he does not know what the treaty is about—about the nature of that commitment. The Chancellor said that the Bill was a treaty commitment and I pointed out that article 201 of

the Maastricht treaty makes it exclusively the responsibility of each country's legislature, in our case this House.

Article 201 says that after consulting the European Parliament on the proposals, the Council, acting unanimously,

"shall lay down provisions . . . which it shall recommend to the Member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

That was to happen after the proposal had been put to the Council and to the Edinburgh summit. In other words, far from saying that it is a constitutional duty of the House to pass the Bill, the treaty gives the House the option to say no. It also gives the House the option to say no to supply or, as the Labour amendment says, the option to say no unless and until action is taken on fraud, waste and the common agricultural policy. The amendment does not wipe out the possibility of enactment altogether. Unless a legislative assembly or a democratic body representing taxpayers has the ability to control expenditure, both in taxation and the distribution of expenditure, it cannot control the Government.

The Government, by coming along tonight on the basis of confidence, are confessing that in earlier negotiations, behind closed doors and in secret, they committed the House and the country to expenditure. The Government say that the Bill is so important for future negotiations that they will have to face that for the good of the country, they must get it through, whatever its merits, and eschew the opportunity of saying, "unless and until there is better control of misappropriation and fraud, and better this and better that."

If the House agrees to a Second Reading tonight, it will break one of the historic and fundamental defences of the citizens of this country because it will be agreeing supply reluctantly. In some ways, that is redolent of the supply that used to have to be granted to the monarch. Parliament used to have to supply the deficit in the monarch's own accounts from the revenues that it collected. It supplied the difference between the monarch's accounts and his expenditure. That is the basis of what we are now doing.

I want to be a little more popular in my remaining points. What I have said will be clear to those in the House today, but I am sure that the public are completely foxed by what has been going on in the past few weeks. Unless I was a Member of this House, I think that I would be foxed. Even now, I am not altogether sure of certain things because the arithmetic is so complex, and so on. We do not know what the extra payment will be. As the Chancellor himself told us, the figure is calculated retrospectively and it depends on so many economic factors that we do not know what it will be.

I used to have a constituent whom I will call Bob who is, unfortunately, no longer with us. He was a gatekeeper at Tate and Lyle and he had been in the forces. He used to question me closely on these matters. When the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was negotiating all this, he came to a halt and Lord Rippon came to a stop. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup and President Pompidou had a chat and after that chat, negotiations went ahead. Bob said to me, "That Pompidou, he saw Mr. Heath coming." Bob would say to me now, "Why is the House having to do this?" I would say, "Because it is like a cheque that has to have two signatures. Mr. Major signed two years ago in Edinburgh and he is now asking us, as the second signatory, to sign. The problem is that we did not understand at the time—and it was not made clear—why our country was signing it. We have the right not to sign it."

Bob would say, "But look, we are going to get more back, aren't we? All this money is coming back to us." I would say, "Not exactly because at the moment, we are paying much more in than we get back." The 1992 figures tell their own story. Gross contribution is £6.7 billion, receipts are £2.8 billion and net receipts are £3.9 billion. The rebate is £1.8 billion and the final net contribution is £2.1 billion. That rebate is all important, as has been admitted. Bob would say, "That's all right. It is in the treaty, isn't it?" I would say, "Sorry, Bob, but the answer is no. It runs out in 1999."

Bob would ask, "What happens then?" I would say, "I happen to know that the Germans are very keen on doing something about the situation, not just with us but with France, because they are the major contributors and Germany is a bigger country than the United Kingdom. The Germans have said that they do not want the situation to continue into the next century." Bob would say, "Surely people understand that. It is only a leasehold." I would say, "Ah, Bob, but the EC works like this. It works by the current politicians getting off the hook by providing future politicians with insoluble problems. When we get to a problem, the reason why a decision was taken will have been forgotten and the people responsible will have retired and be out of the way." It happens like that time and again.

I believe that Bob has a point. One of the problems is that everywhere in the country—we know this from our constituencies—we are offered funds. Funds are not just being misapplied, as we know, but are questionable. The other day, the Select Committee on European Legislation discussed a proposal relating to education. The proposal said that 1996, the year of the great treaty, will be the year of lifelong education and the European Community will spend the equivalent of £6 million telling us, all over the Community, that education in life is so important. There is hardly a person in this country who would not agree with that. Of course it is important. Is that money going towards further or adult education? No, yet the EC is telling us through agencies, through advertising, through projects and distribution and conferences just how important education is. That is the sort of thing for which we may have to pay.

Bob would say, "Well Nigel, that is not very good, but, of course, we still have our foreign policy, haven't we?" I would say, "Well no, not exactly, Bob. We now have a common foreign policy." Bob would say "Well, what about the United Nations and the Security Council?" I would say, "Well, I am afraid that that is common as well because we have a common foreign policy. We sort of co-ordinate life and we have an obligation to that".

Bob was an ex-service man and he would say to me, "What about our Army? We have the Army and the Queen is the head of the Army. Surely we can send our soldiers where we like." I would say, "Well, I would like to think that. But in any peace operation, for anything such as the tragedy that we are now seeing in the former Yugoslavia, there is a common policy." He would say, "Who would make the decision? Would it be our Parliament, or the Queen?" I would say, "No, I am sorry, Bob. It would be the Union president." He would ask, "Who is the Union president?" I would say, "Well, we do

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not know." Bob would say, "What do you mean, you don't know? Surely you, Nigel, know all about the EC. Who is the Union president?" I would say, "It changes every six months." "Oh," he would say, "so in 1996 or 1997, when we have to send some troops somewhere and it is under the European Union, not the United Nations or NATO, and we do not know how it will work out, to whom will they be accountable?" I would say, "Under the treaty terms that we have now signed, they will be accountable to the president of the Union for that six months." Bob would say to me, "Nigel, are you mad or are you telling me the truth?" I would say, "Unfortunately, Bob, I am telling you the truth."

I do not think that any hon. Member in the House would challenge anything that I have said in respect of fact in my speech. We have a Black Rod of Brussels who knocks on the door of this Chamber. The Black Rod of Brussels is summoning us not to a legislative assembly, one which we in the end control, but to decisions which have been made behind closed doors by the princes of Europe—those now and in the future.

8.21 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) is right. The country is confused. Two weeks ago, the Government began with a putative majority of 500—more than 500—on this issue. By the end of last week, we were into a suicide pact. Yet the atmosphere in the House is hardly the thought that the Government will—remotely—lose tonight. There is no sense of urgency about it; it is a nonsense found out. I cannot explain to anyone why hon. Members may have the Whip withdrawn, or why the Government perceive a crisis on this issue, above all other issues, in their legislative programme. I merely reflect on the curiosity of it. I shall return to that point a little later.

I shall look at two statements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We have not discussed European finance in the terms that we have a control over it, or that we may stop the sending of money, taxes, tariffs, or levies to Brussels, since 1988. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said of the taxation of the United Kingdom by Brussels, "It is utterly beyond the control of this House." That was his statement during his powerful speech this afternoon. He has actually sounded the death knell of the House, has he not? We were founded on the control of supply, so that our citizens would bear the charges and impulse of Government for the purposes of this country and that we had the final word on it. "No, no," says the Chancellor, "it is now utterly beyond the control of this House."

I have no vanity about that in a personal sense. The Chancellor means that taxation is now utterly beyond the control of the electorate, the people, the citizens of this country who make our industry and our wealth. They are now taxed by treaty and sent to a foreign capital, Brussels, as I see it, without any intervention from the House and with no annual review, which the Government currently have to face in seeking the funds to maintain our own institutions and our own patterns of expenditure. No, no, this is more sacred than that, because we may not interfere.

All I conclude from those words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer is: give Brussels a penny more, and the day after tomorrow, when the Bill has been passed, no matter the fraud, waste or deception, he will again announce that those moneys, cast aside in one evening, are now also utterly beyond the control of this House, and therefore the people. Perhaps the Cabinet will reflect that that may be the source of discontent which ignites this nation on the European issue. Once a passage has been made, that is irrevocable and irreversible if the bureaucrats and the unelected people who now govern us in fundamental law have their way. That was what the noble Lady Thatcher meant when she said that it was a ratchet and that once it gained one inch, it was for ever given. That is what we have seen in Europe.

When I first came to the House, this Europe did not have the presumption or the pretension that it could tax us directly without us having a word, without us being able to say that the exigencies of Britain, our care, or our interests in our own people, must come first. The Chancellor of the Exchequer made light of the costs of the membership of a club and, of course, concentrated, as all Governments have, on merely the net contribution. I was thrilled when my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the former Chancellor—it always takes the leaving of office to discover truths; it is one of the most remarkable things in this House—discovered the quantum. If I were to demur from anything that he said, I would say that he took Lady Thatcher's abatement out of the quantum. In point of fact, under the Community taxation rules, we have to pay the full quantum, so that by 1996-97, it will be £10.3 billion. Then, one year later, the rebate will be paid back. Therefore, the burden of taxation in the current year falls on us all as the total quantum. As my right hon. Friend rightly pointed out, are those objectives and matters on which we should necessarily spend our own money? That is a question that is properly for the House of Commons.

Forgive me for particularising, but I thought that wonderful speeches were made by two Opposition Members. One was made by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), to which we have become used, and the other was made by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands). They reminded us of what the essential heart of our institution is about. If we cannot control money, we cannot control our own Government. Yet, our own Government turn round to us and blithely say that those controls are now utterly beyond the control of this House and therefore of the people. That is why this is a fierce debate in one sense. We believe in the rights of our electorate and, as many hon. Members have said, we believe that we are here only because people have put trust in us to express honourably and truthfully what we feel on the great public policy issues of our day.

Why, of all the measures, has it been decided that this is a confidence measure? I am rather old-fashioned. My view is that if a Government propose a measure, it is defeated and they believe that the loss of that measure is so profound to their existence, they should stand by a separate confidence motion. That used to be the tradition of the House. The danger to the House is that if the Government start particularising every piece of legislation as a confidence motion, in the short term, they can bring about the ruin of their country and, in the long term, they can bring about their own ruin.

Every Conservative treats this issue solemnly because of the fear that, in the balance of judgment in the cabal of Cabinet members, who sat together and weighed up the

issues, they came to the conclusion—whether due to spite, not fact—that the destruction of my party and of the constituency associations across the country would be the consequences of the Government not getting their way on what Americans would call merely a line amendment to the budget. We are considering a small matter, almost immaterial in public expenditure. So we all ask ourselves why the Government draw the line on this one issue—note that it is not the debate next week about VAT on domestic fuel. If the Government lose that measure, that is just a small part of an overall Budget. The House has not denied the Government the funds to maintain the government of this country and its institutions. One ponders why, and we must listen very carefully to what the Government have to say in that regard.

My second bite at the speech made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is that he said that we are talking about a major international agreement. Other hon. Members have referred to the nature of this major international agreement. Let us be quite clear: this is not the end of the cold war as in Paris; this is not a meeting between Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Reagan agreeing on solemn undertakings in the advancement of our international benefit.

This is now meant to be a Community in which, I regret, my own Front Bench insisted on us all becoming citizens together. When the Council issued its direction four weeks ago that the process should come forward, that Council comprised common citizens of a Union to which I am not attracted.

How can one argue that one's common citizen—one's neighbour—has formed a solemn international agreement? One cannot do that. That is part of the deception with such arguments. One can use the argument one way or the other. I am now very used to that from Front-Bench spokesmen. They say one thing today and another tomorrow, and they hope that we do not notice the difference. They have a pretty good stab at reconciling matters.

What we now have is jovial bluff. We are told that this is a solemn international agreement with citizens sitting around the table prepared to divvy up, in an unchallengeable fashion for a period of time, indefinite in the memories of this House, and forward for years, a certain source of finance. That is the solemn international agreement, but it is not borne out by the treaty. That is a proper mechanism which supports, according to the treaty and our own domestic law, the supremacy of the House in these matters.

The Government must follow the traditional methods and constitutional arrangements of this country, as must each other respective member of the Union. There is nothing odd about that. As I said, we shall have a vote on VAT next week. The Government do not threaten resignation if they lose the increase in VAT. In fact, I rather suspect that there would be a cheer from Conservative Benches if that occurred.

One should reflect on why, in all the legislative programme, this one tiny issue is set out. I am going to suggest something that I find very uncomfortable. We are governed by a cabal that is federalist in its intentions. It has told us, "Softly, softly, catchee monkey." It has told us over the years, "We resist." However, I listened to a Labour Government and read a Labour White Paper which said that if we were to vote for common arrangements for free trade, we should not believe that we would lose control over anything as we had an absolute veto on everything.

The Foreign Secretary does not have a view on anything in these matters. He is an agnostic on the single currency. On the other hand, a powerful, young and thrusting hopeful in Cabinet tells me that he thinks that this is dreadful and that it will have consequences. With the brio from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he understands why we should join. What guidance. On the one hand, yes; on the other hand, no and, from the Foreign Secretary, "I'm an agnostic." No wonder there is concern and disbelief about the Government's position.

It is a matter of, "Not by my words do you judge me, but by my deeds." Since I have been a Member of this place, we started from a position of very little government from Europe. We are ending up with a formidable body of law in respect of which the Chancellor says that it is utterly beyond the reach of this House. The constitutional position is wrong if he is right. However, I know that he is wrong: it is within the reach of this House.

What do we do about this? We are confronted with the fact that we no longer have a free choice in the matter. I can speak only for myself. However, I was first chosen by good and honourable people. I was elected by an electorate whom I hold to be good and honourable. Like every other hon. Member, I have tried to honour those relationships. If the Government think that by stuffing my mouth with gold or offers of reward, or by withdrawing the Whip, they can alter the first trust in a democracy—that of a Member and his constituency—they misjudge their party and the Members of this House.

We must be true to ourselves, or the electorate will have no confidence in the most important institution in our democracy—a free Parliament. In the end, that is what I stand by. I do not wish to see a Government go down. We know that that is a fatuous proposition: they will not go down. How have we got into this state? I ask the House to reflect on the men who comprise the Cabinet and to think: is their judgment sound in these matters that they can create turmoil of this nature?

I do not want the Government to go because I believe that the programmes that we have set out and that we have struggled to accomplish are worth while and appropriate. However, I say this in a personal vein so that they may understand the agony that they have placed on their own hon. Members: how could I face my electorate, when clearly I have stood before them and said, "I stand not for giving money to something that is corrupt."? From the time I was born until today, I have been told that if people spend money foolishly, withhold the source of the funds. That was a principle of this House. Where do we stand without it?

The Government have misjudged the temper of their own nation and they have misjudged the truthful intent of their own party. They will see people go through the Lobby, but in their hearts they are damned.

8.36 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I had not planned to speak in this debate, but so many of the speeches have been so utterly depressing that I felt that I needed to say something that sounded pro-European Union and not like a lot of anti-European rhetoric. However, I must confess that some of the views are

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sincerely held. In particular in that regard, I am thinking of the comments of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) to whom I always listen with great interest.

We are in an absurd position today. We have business before the House that one would normally expect to go through almost on the nod. It comprises several European Union documents which people generally have great difficulty reading because they are so thick and because they are usually out of date. One usually takes very little notice of them.

This sort of legislation should go through almost on the nod. However, the Government have tabled their motion and, because of the controversy to which the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills referred, the Labour party could not resist challenging the vote of confidence—*[Interruption.]* Labour will not win the confidence vote. I am not sure what the business managers are saying, but I am sure that many Labour Members will abstain on the main Question. The Government will get their business.

I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members accept that fraud and waste must be tackled. No one would disagree with that. I would expect tough initiatives on this matter. The Chancellor seemed rather sanguine about the way things were happening. I should be grateful if the Paymaster General would describe the Government's position on this point and tell us whether they are satisfied with the current policies and whether they will work and be effective.

By the time of the intergovernmental conference in 1996, I hope that we will not have to include things in a Maastricht mark 2 treaty document on this point. By then, I hope that the policies will be in place and that we will have an effective system of monitoring and surveillance.

The key—the heart—of this matter is the future development of the European Union. Like the majority of hon. Members and, I believe, the majority of people in Britain, I want the European Union to develop, not to hesitate, not to be held back and not to unravel in any way. The stakes are far too high.

The future of the European Union for us is very important, socially and economically and from the point of view of peace, foreign affairs, matters of the interior, co-operation, and so on. That is absolutely vital, and the money must be forthcoming, particularly since, as I notice in the motion, that part of the money will be for expansion of the European Union. I find the notion of expansion exciting. All countries in the European Union will work for the benefit not only of European Union countries but of other parts of the world, particularly poorer countries.

Much has been made of Edinburgh, but the Edinburgh summit took place. The aim was to have a financial structure. One has to have that because it is impossible to plan something the size of the European Union without having some stability in one's finances. One has to be able to plan. I therefore believe that it is necessary to ensure that the Government succeed tonight and that the European Communities (Finance) Bill is passed.

I now refer to democracy. People talk about giving up our sovereignty. I prefer to use the "pooling". [*Laughter.*] There is giving and taking. Some hon. Members do not accept that. They do not believe in the European Union—I do. We all differ on that point. Just as the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) will argue his case in his own way, I shall argue in my way. The future of my children and their children is in the European Union, which I want to work economically, but I also want it to create the basis of peace. In the first and second world wars, 30 million people died. The creators of the European Union—the people in the early days—said, "We must stop German nationalism. We must nail the feet of the Germans to the ground so that they cannot embark on any more wars." That was the basis.

When one pools sovereignty, one must have a development of democracy. There is a democratic deficit in the European Union. It still has structures that are synonymous with an early institution, and quite centralised powers. Those powers must be spread. I hope that there will be much on that point in the treaty document that comes out of the 1996 IGC.

There has been talk about referendums. We had our referendum in 1975, and the majority was massive. The people of Britain decided then that our future was in the European Union—the European Common Market, as it was then called. Since the treaty of Rome, we have had further treaties. We have had the treaty on the single market and the Maastricht treaty. There will be another treaty in 1996. All those treaties are mechanisms for the development of the European Union. I look forward to the 1996 IGC and to debating beforehand what will be the key issues in it.

Many hon. Members who attended the Maastricht debate resented—perhaps "resented" is too strong, but you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, handled the duties of the Chair brilliantly during those difficult times—being presented with that thick blue document. Whether hon. Members are Euro-sceptics or pro-European Union, many felt that to be presented with such a document as a fait accompli was just not good enough. It is important that there is an opportunity for all Parliaments of the European Union in some way to be able to take part in such debates rather than be presented with a fait accompli.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the purpose of the previous referendum was to stop the Labour party tearing itself apart? Therefore, would it not be equally fair now to have a referendum to stop the Conservative party tearing itself apart? Does the hon. Gentleman agree also that people voted to stay in—not to go into—an economic community? If they thought that they were voting to stay in what was going to become a federal state run from Brussels, with Westminster becoming a county council, many would not have voted yes in that referendum.

Mr. Randall: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. One can always have new terms of reference for a referendum—one can have a new set every week and still not be satisfied—but that is what happened. It worries me that the leadership on both sides are talking now about the possibility—the glint—of a referendum. Personally, I am against that. It would cause turmoil and it would stop development of the European Union, and that is not desirable. I would not want Labour or the Conservatives even to put a reference to a referendum in their manifestos for the next election. That would be completely wrong.

When it comes to debating the issues rather than being presented with the blue document—this is entirely my own view, based on informal discussions with other European Union politicians—as soon as the French

presidential elections are over, and we can speculate on who can win, the Germans and the French will be setting the pace and we will be confronted with some important decisions. France and Germany could race ahead and challenge Britain on what it will do, and the question of a two-track Europe could come up. I should be very disillusioned if, in any way, the future of Britain were risked by Britain being put into the second track of a European Union.

On the balance of power, the doctrine of subsidiarity, which was debated with the Maastricht treaty, has not been taken far enough. It is a crucial element. The two new pillars or new powers that we have are very important. I refer to defence and foreign policy and home affairs.

On monetary and economic union, from the point of view of business, we must have a stable currency. My own view is that monetary and economic union will come as surely as night follows day. I want far greater co-operation, and I want a central bank to have the discipline that we want. I want to see great co-operation at European level, particularly in respect of high-technology products such as in the aerospace and information industries.

We on the left of British politics used to argue—I regret that we do not do so as much as we used to—about internationalism. The Common Market and the European Union have in some way eliminated that. I regard the European Union as crucial in developing poorer countries, not only in the European Union but outside it. Countries have benefited greatly. I appreciate that, and I welcome in particular the development in the size of the European Union. I regard the matter as a great opportunity. The 1996 IGC is crucial. I want to see those arguments put on the table. It is important that we have a stable financial structure which will allow planning to take place. That is what the motions before us tonight seek to ensure. We do not want there to be any hiccups in the future development of the European Union.

8.50 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): When my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer opened the debate on the European Communities (Finance) Bill, he paid me the small but singular compliment of saying that I had been consistently opposed to giving more money to Europe; so my colleagues will not be surprised to learn that I do not intend to break my record in that respect this evening.

Tonight we are asked to vote for more money for Europe; we are not asked to stop it receiving the vast sum that it has been allocated already. When I listen to the debates in the House, and particularly those speakers on the Front Bench who talk of what percentages they did or did not manage to achieve, my mind drifts away from that technical stuff to my constituents who come to my surgery to relate their financial problems. An extra fiver or a tenner in their pay packets would make a good deal of difference to their standard of living and would reduce their worries.

I think also about the business men in my constituency. They tell me that the backs of their businesses have been broken either by regulations or by the gratuitous expenses imposed on them by the European Union. They do not come to me whining and moaning and asking for Government help; they come to me bewildered that Parliament allows the accretion of expensive bureaucratic items which are paid for with taxpayers' money. The bureaucrats who make the decisions that affect people so dramatically are paid handsomely from the money that we ask the British people to contribute towards the European budget.

I sometimes listen to my colleagues who tell me that the money that we give to Europe is only a small fraction of our budget—they say that Europe is not an expensive club at all. They ask: why grumble about it? Why not talk about the European Union's achievements? But I ask myself: what achievements? What are these achievements and why does the British population not appreciate them?

When I walk the streets of Billericay or other parts of my constituency or when I take a train from London to Cambridge, as I did on the weekend, why do people not boo at me for resisting the idea of this European organisation? Why do complete strangers compliment me on my resistance to giving any money to it? Why do the British people, foolish creatures that they are—almost 52 million of them, if I am to believe some of the speeches that have been made in the House—think that there is something wrong with our giving more money to this institution?

The people of Britain did not fully understand the deep and profound issues of Maastricht, but they understand this issue. They understand that their hard-earned money is being taken from them and given to an institution which we are told is riddled with fraud. But fraud or no fraud, I would not support giving more money to Europe because I do not think that we have a mandate to do so—especially when we are presented with a fait accompli on the issue and we Conservatives are told that we face an enormous sacrifice almost for even querying whether we should give Europe more money.

It has been said several times before, but I want to say it again, that the House is founded on the belief that the people shall not be taxed without their consent; yet we are told by our own Prime Minister that that idea was lost when we made a deal with Europe and the Prime Minister decided, on the British people's behalf, that they would be taxed to enable the Government to give more money to the European Union. I think that that is profoundly wrong and it is not the sort of policy that people in my constituency send me here to support.

Many things have been said about those of us who resist the legislation. It is said that we are petulant or difficult, or perhaps slightly crazy. Those sorts of things were said about others in the past. The barons who resisted King John over the Magna Carta were criticised. King Charles came to the House, criticising those Members of Parliament who wished to prevent him from taxing the British people without their consent and demanding that they be brought before him.

Although those of us who resist the legislation may not survive as Members of Parliament, I think that we will have made our mark in putting up a strong case for refusing to give money to a European organisation that is clearly not loved by the British people. We are told that, whatever we say, it does not matter because the deal has been done already.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Does my hon. Friend agree that a solution to the problem would be to hold a referendum? Even now, it might not be too late for the

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Government to make a commitment to hold a referendum after the intergovernmental conference in 1996 so that we go no further, particularly in relation to a single currency.

Mrs. Gorman: I agree in principle with my hon. Friend: the people should be consulted about the issue. There has never been any consultation. We joined the European Union believing that we were entering a common market. Even in that, we have been disappointed because the European Community is not an open and free market; it is a cartel. Brussels dictates all aspects of our business life. The level playing field concept is nonsense, because competition is about comparative advantage.

When we joined Europe, we believed that we would be sharing in the economic miracle of the post-war European scene, but policies in Europe today are hell-bent on destroying even those conditions that made Europe appear attractive to Britain.

The European Community costs the British people £7 billion a year. None of us can grasp fully what that means. It means that 3.5p in every pound from taxation goes to the European Community. If we did not pay that money to Europe, we could halve VAT and do away completely with VAT on fuel. If we were so minded, we could increase old-age pensions by £7. Those would be enormous advantages for the British people, but we will not see them because the money is going elsewhere.

The British people will not thank us for giving money to pay for the extravagances of our European partners—whether they are roadways through Portugal or irrigation schemes in Spain. How does that advantage the British people to whom we are responsible? It does not advantage them in the slightest, and the British people understand that. They support those of us who resist the move to give more money to Europe.

I urge the House, although I realise that I am speaking to closed minds, to decide that we will not give the European Union a penny more, even if it puts its house in order. Until the British people exercise their enthusiasm through the vote, and by turning out to vote in European elections—we all know that fewer than 30 per cent. of our citizens do so—and until they are given a say in whether they wish to hand over authority to the Government of the day, we shall never be able to say that we are doing these things in the name of the British people. Therefore, I shall not support the measure tonight.

8.58 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Tonight's debate is about much more than the Conservatives' difficulty being the Opposition's opportunity. The fact that we are debating a matter of confidence tonight was demonstrated by the speech of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). If one listened closely to what he said, it was clear that his speech was a devastating indictment of the stewardship of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). Among other phrases that he used, the hon. Gentleman referred to those on the Treasury Bench as a cabal. Those are the people who are running our country and who have control of policy on Europe. Therefore, we are discussing the competence of the Government. Demonstrably, we and the people whom we represent have no confidence whatever in the Government.

When one listens to the tortured, agonising speeches of people such as the hon. Members for Aldridge-Brownhills and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), one realises what a state the Government are in. It is our duty to say that they have had their chance. They have been running the country's European policy for 15 years. There are others who could do better. We would not start from here. *[Interruption.]* I shall be coming to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) in a moment. All the matters that hon. Members have complained about were to a large extent shaped by Lady Thatcher, the present Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. They are to blame. If there was a change of Government, in future my right hon. Friends would harmonise the interests of Europe with those of the United Kingdom. We could take a lesson from President Mitterrand, who combined and promoted the best interests of France and the international perspective. That is what is lacking in the United Kingdom's policy.

The hon. Member for Wycombe referred to the sapping and damaging references of his hon. Friends and said that they diminished our influence in Europe. Exactly so. That further underlines the fact that many Conservative Members are inadequate to promote the best interests of the United Kingdom and Europe.

Mr. Whitney: Will the hon. Gentleman admit that what most damages Britain's standing in Europe is the fact that members of his party and the Liberal Democrat party, who profess to be in favour of Britain's membership of the European Union and of the enlargement of own resources, will go through the Lobby tonight to vote against what they profess to believe in? What could be more damaging to British political integrity than that?

Mr. Mackinlay: I do not know where the hon. Member for Wycombe has been. The Prime Minister has made this a matter of confidence. Opposition Members believe that if we were given the opportunity of being on the Treasury Bench, we could do a lot better in promoting the best interests of the United Kingdom in Europe in future negotiations as one moves towards 1996.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: I have limited time, but as it is my hon. Friend, I feel obliged to give way.

Mr. Graham: Does my hon. Friend agree that if there was a general election in three weeks' time, we would be elected and we would sign the social chapter, which would put millions of people in Britain in a better position to support the aims of the Common Market?

Mr. Mackinlay: Precisely. Conservative Members do not understand that we want a slice of the action in the interests of working people. That is what they are being denied at present. We are paying the bill but not getting the benefits. That is largely because of the rather selfish interests of many Conservative Members and because our foreign policy is run by a nice man, but someone who is out of touch with the best interests of ordinary working people in Britain.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood referred to the Prime Minister as a nice man, but went on to criticise him. The best that can be said about the Prime Minister is that he is a nice man over-promoted. One of the leading members of Thurrock Conservative Association said on television last week that the Prime Minister was the Captain Mainwaring of British politics. He went on to use a term that I will not repeat in the House because it would be unparliamentary. Nevertheless, it reflected the yobbo tendency of the Conservative party.

The behaviour of the Conservatives, their approach to Europe and the comments of a former vice-chairman of the Conservative party about European colleagues are all on the charge sheet against the Government.

Opposition Members are obliged to vote against the Bill tonight to demonstrate a lack of confidence in the Government and to give those Conservative Members—many of whom I disagree with, but whose courage I respect—the opportunity to demonstrate that this is an important matter of principle.

Hon. Members suggest that it is cynical of Labour and the other Opposition parties to vote in such a way tonight, but our politics are adversarial and we have an obligation to frustrate and bring down the Government. That is the nature of things. I wish that it were not so— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"] Yes, I happen to think that our adversarial system is barmy and that many reforms need to be instituted. As there has not been a referendum on the issue, the House must decide. We also have a duty to frustrate the Government.

In other parts of the world, treaties are signed subject to ratification by the legislature and there is a presumption that it will examine fully the implications of the treaty. That is what happens in the United States. We do not have a system or a tradition whereby it is understood that the Executive might sign or endorse a treaty, but it is subject to endorsement by Parliament or the people. That is what we lack and it is another reason why those hon. Members who broadly support the concept of Europe should join those hon. Members who oppose the Bill.

The Government have no mandate for this legislation. That legitimately unites all Opposition Members with some Conservative Members, with whom we might disagree on some important details, but with whom we agree that a democratic mandate is necessary.

The Bill will increase EU resources, but the Government's stewardship of existing resources has been sloppy. Forgive me for raising a constituency matter, but my area of Essex was entitled to objective 2 money, as were the constituencies of the hon. Members for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). We were denied that money. The Government argued that that was due to the bureaucrats in Brussels, but this wrong also bears the fingerprints of clumsy handling by the right hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) who, as the Minister responsible for trade and industry, did not understand that Thurrock was in the Southend travel-to-work area. We were therefore denied the resources to which the social and unemployment problems on the north bank of the River Thames entitled us.

Ministers on the Treasury Bench have grossly mishandled the distribution of funds, to the great disadvantage of my constituents and those of many other hon. Members. Time and again, we come back to the fact that Members who occupy the Treasury Bench are arrogant and maladroit and should go. We are presented with that opportunity tonight, if we can encourage enough Conservative Members to join us in the Lobby.

I regret the fact that the Ulster Unionists feel unable to join us in the Lobby. They should bear in mind the fact that the Government's lack of negotiating skills has resulted in the absurd situation in which cohesion fund money is available for 26 counties in Ireland, but there is no comparable money for the Six Counties. That is profoundly foolish.

If my right hon. and hon. Friends had been in office they would have banged on the table in Brussels and argued that there was a special case for parity of treatment for all the 32 counties of Ireland, both north and south, and that cohesion fund money should be made available for the whole of Ireland. That is one more reason why I hope that members of the Ulster Unionist party will pause and reflect on the fact that they are sustaining a Government who are not promoting the best interests of the working people of Warrenpoint, Derry or Belfast.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the hon. Gentleman also bear in mind the fact that there is an industrial policy in the United Kingdom which does not help us in the agricultural sector of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Mackinlay: I take on board the hon. Gentleman's point and I hope that cognisance will be taken of that by my right hon. and hon. Friends who, sooner or later, will occupy the Treasury Bench.

I hope that the debate and the vote tonight will demonstrate beyond all doubt that the Government have lost the confidence of the vast majority of the people of this country, as will be demonstrated by the votes of all the Opposition parties apart from the Ulster Unionists. The Government are under notice that, sooner or later, there will be a collapse in their ranks which will precipitate a general election and the election of a Labour Government.

9.10 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): There have been some fierce debates this evening and the Opposition parties have taken part as well.

Let me make clear the principal differences between the amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the one hand and the position of the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and most Government Members who agree with them on the other. First, we say that this House has the right and duty to scrutinise and, as appropriate, to amend what is a substantial financial measure. The Prime Minister is effectively seeking to deny the House that opportunity. The Bill, he says, is perfect and the House of Commons—even hon. Members informed by our constituents—cannot improve on the flawless legislation that he has set before us.

Secondly, Labour says that the Government have not done nearly enough to combat waste and fraud in the European Union budget. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor say that they have done all that they can and they are happy to see the Bill pass into law without incorporating further action.

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

Thirdly, we say that the common agriculture policy is a wasteful and economically and environmentally damaging monstrosity which must be changed, root and branch. The Prime Minister seems to think that reform is coming along nicely.

Fourthly, we say that there have been developments since Edinburgh which warrant the House of Commons and the Government seeking further action to get European Union expenditure under proper control.

On each of those points—scrutiny, waste, agricultural reform and developments since Edinburgh—the people of Britain and the true majority in the House agree with us, not with the Prime Minister. We speak for the British people, and he does not—it is as simple as that. That is why the House should pass the amendment tonight.

Earlier, we had a truly extraordinary admission from the Chancellor under some considerable pressure from my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). The Chancellor admitted to the House that he could not remember when he first knew about the £700 million increased estimates on this year's contributions to the European Union. Given that that money must be paid from the contingency reserve, and given that it represents fully one fifth of the contingency reserve—the new control total states that the contingency reserve is just £3.5 billion, and here we are talking about an extra £700 million—is not it staggering that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is supposed to be in charge of the nation's finances, cannot remember when he first knew that one fifth of his reserves had gone? No wonder so much money is wasted in Europe, when the Government are not controlling it properly in this country. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] Perhaps I shall say that again when the Chancellor comes in, as he ought to hear it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East also set out how unprecedented it is for the Prime Minister to insist that every essential element of the Bill is so perfect that the House cannot improve upon it. Such an attitude, as hon. Members have pointed out during the debate, cannot be consistent with the right and duty of hon. Members to their constituencies, nor with the proper exercise of democracy.

The Prime Minister's treatment of his own hon. Friends offers us another sign of how woefully out of touch the Government are. Cannot the Prime Minister see how the people will judge his threats to his hon. Friends? They will ask what they are to make of a Prime Minister and a Cabinet who cannot carry their colleagues with them by persuasion; cannot convince by reasoned argument; cannot appeal to the usual party loyalty; and instead try with threats simply to bludgeon their way through. So divided are the Conservative party that the only weapon that the Prime Minister can use to create a semblance of unity is the threat of defeat at an immediate general election. The Prime Minister is not deploying persuasion or debating skills against his own Back Benchers, but the traditional Conservative weapon of coercion of the past 15 years, the threat of unemployment.

Will people say that such policy demonstrates that the Prime Minister is acting with success, based on authority and strength? No. They will say that this Prime Minister is a failure, who is acting on division and weakness. They will be right. Every time the Prime Minister deploys the political suicide dissolution threat—there may be more instances of that to come on the Bill and on votes on VAT which we hope to instigate—he should remember that by issuing that threat he does not make his position stronger, but weaker, because he reminds the country of the authority that he lacks. He should remember the more he twirls the chamber of the Russian roulette revolver, the more he risks finding the bullet. Perhaps the immortal words of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) were right, when he said that we all know that a suicide threat is a cry for help—that from the Prime Minister's former Chancellor.

The Prime Minister would do well to remember that threaten though he might his hon. Friends, intimidate as he has tried to do their constituency associations, at the next general election it is the people of Billericay who will decide on their Member of Parliament. Perhaps I should repeat that for the benefit of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who is not listening, but perhaps the electorate will not choose her. The electorate will also decide whether they want to return a Conservative Government. The behaviour of the Prime Minister now will not help him when they come to make that decision.

The value of the House should be based on the fact that hon. Members have the opportunity to bring our constituents' concerns to bear on the great issues of the day. We can seek to persuade one another, set out our case to the wider audience in the country and scrutinise and amend legislation. The Prime Minister, however, is now trying to curtail that right. My hon. Friends and I have many differences with the arguments put forward by the so-called Euro-sceptics. I part company with those of them who believe that isolation within the European Union is a viable option for Britain. I disagree still more with those who believe that it would be a good thing for Britain to attempt to shape its destiny outside the European Union. That those hon. Members are voicing important concerns, held by many people in this country, which those of us who want close and constructive involvement in Europe should at least address, is undeniable.

One reason why the Maastricht treaty ran into trouble not just here but in Denmark, France, Germany and elsewhere is that the thinking, assumptions and constitutional ambition of the European political elite ran way ahead of the concerns and understanding of citizens throughout the European Community. The lesson for those of us who believe in the benefits of European co-operation should not be to attempt to dismiss out of hand, or crush with confidence motions, concerns about waste, over-centralisation, lack of democracy and the other imperfections of the European Union. Our task should be to show how those concerns can be answered and remedial action taken. That is precisely why our deliberations on the Bill should be informed by the amendment that my right hon. and hon. Friends have tabled this evening, and it is precisely the reason why the Government's version of the Bill needs to be amended in the way that we have suggested.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): Before the hon. Gentleman gets away with the conjuring trick of trying to present his amendment as a constructive measure to reduce fraud, will he answer the question that the shadow Chancellor failed to answer—

will he admit that that is not a constructive amendment but a wrecking amendment, which would deny the progress of the Bill?

Mr. Smith: It is a very constructive amendment, framed in circumstances in which the Prime Minister has made tonight's vote a vote of confidence.

As I understand it, the Chancellor of the Exchequer argued earlier that this was a wrecking amendment because, if carried, the Bill would be lost and could not be introduced until another Session. I think that when the Chancellor said that, he had forgotten that the Prime Minister had made the vote a vote of confidence.

If the Opposition win the vote, there will be a general election; and at that general election, the Labour party will win; and after that victory, there will be a new Session of Parliament and a Bill will be placed before the House, not simply signing up to the Edinburgh agreement, but taking the measures to tackle waste and fraud and to reform the common agricultural policy—the things that are absent from the current Government's Bill.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: In a moment. Let me make a little more progress.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said, waste and fraud in the European Union are not confined to agriculture, as much of the debate has been. They happen in many other sectors. My hon. Friend cited the unacceptable waste that too often happens in the European Union overseas aid budget—it is especially tragic when part of that goes astray. Many other hon. Members have drawn our attention to the unacceptable and alarming fact that, when it comes to waste and fraud, things seem to continue to get worse rather than better.

The Chancellor attempted to rubbish claims that the recent Court of Auditors' report showed fraud running at anything like £6 billion a year. He can do so only because the Court of Auditors did not tot up all the things that they had identified throughout their report, but those things do add up, and they amount to billions of pounds.

Wine production has increased by 20 per cent. since 1989, despite European Union expenditure of £1 billion to take vineyards out of production. German apple growers were paid more than £180,000 to dig up their trees, which had mysteriously grown back in place when the inspectors went to find out what had happened. There were no competitive tenders on the new European Parliament building in Brussels and the costs increased from £781 million to £1.42 billion.

Sir Donald Thompson *rose—*

Mr. Whitney *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I give way to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney).

Mr. Whitney: The hon. Gentleman said that wine production had increased. Is he aware that it has decreased by 34 per cent. since 1987-88?

Mr. Smith: That is not the figure in the Court of Auditors' report and I stand by the figure that I have given of a 20 per cent. increase since 1989.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No.

In reacting to the Court of Auditors' report, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in radio interviews, and the European Commission's Secretary-General, have drawn a distinction between fraud and financial mismanagement. Opposition Members would not go along with the Secretary-General in rejecting, as he did last week, what he called "media allegations" that fraud was widespread in European budgetary spending. He should take more notice of what the Court of Auditors say. The Chancellor, like him, should be—as Opposition Members are—as worried about financial mismanagement as fraud.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said, it is not so much the distinction between one and the other that matters, important though it is legally; the important fact is the sheer amount of money that is being wasted. We need to mobilise every pressure to get something done about it. A powerful signal should be sent to the Commission and our partners in Europe that people in this country, for years high net contributors to the European budget, are sick and tired of waste and corruption.

Sir Donald Thompson: For the past 20 years, every Labour Minister has said that Labour will win the next general election; none has kept that promise. Let me ask another question, however. The Opposition Chief Whip went to the Government Chief Whip and said, "We think that the Edinburgh deal was a good one, although we would have done better, but we will support it only if you introduce a simultaneous Bill to fight fraud." Why did not the Opposition introduce such a Bill? They acted as they did only because they wanted to defraud the electorate.

Mr. Smith: Much has happened since the Edinburgh summit, including a succession of Court of Auditors' reports revealing a consistently serious position.

In tabling tonight's amendment, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I were not expressing a new-found or sudden concern. Time and again, on the Floor of the House and in Committee, we have expressed our alarm at the lack of effective control on the Community budget and the need for decisive action not only to root out fraud and waste, but to gain recompense in instances where lax controls on the part of national authorities are to blame.

[Mr. Smith]

We advanced that view, for instance, in our submission to the Delors consultation on growth, competitiveness and employment in Europe. What, in their submission about competitiveness in Europe, did the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his right hon. Friends have to say about waste, fraud and corruption in the European Union? Absolutely nothing; so obsessed were they with their dogma and their opposition to the social chapter that they completely omitted in that important submission even to hint at the idea that waste, corruption or fraud—on which, according to the Chancellor, so much progress is being made—might somehow have an impact on competitiveness.

We challenge the Government's position on the binding European convention that is being advanced for the protection of the Community's financial interests, to make such matters an offence against Community law. I ask the Paymaster General to tell us whether the Government will support that measure or oppose it. Will they simply rely on the joint action initiative, which I understand would not be binding?

Sir Teddy Taylor: Lest there be any misunderstanding about the wine situation, will the hon. Gentleman strongly advise hon. Members to read the Court of Auditors' report—they may not have read it yet; it became available only today—which shows that expenditure on wine products increased by 45 per cent. between 1992 and 1993?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes a telling point. *[Interruption.]*

Earlier, someone asked what the Opposition parties were doing in the Chamber. The answer was "morbid curiosity", and I think that what the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) has just done to the hon. Member for Wycombe with the Court of Auditors' report provides a very good illustration of what I am talking about.

Few would disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) and others that the CAP cannot be allowed to continue as it is. When the Chancellor was asked about it on a recent edition of the "Today" programme, he said:

"The Agriculture Ministers"—

that presumably includes his own Agriculture Minister—

"do make it too complicated."

That is one of the things that the Finance Ministers have pointed out.

We argue that the problem is not just that our Agriculture Minister, along with all the others, has made it too complicated; those Ministers have made it too expensive, too wasteful, and too open to fraud and abuse. That waste adds enormously to the industrial cost of the European Union, as well as to the agricultural cost: we urgently need reform.

I referred earlier to developments since Edinburgh. They form an important part of our arguments and of our reason for introducing the amendment. I have already referred to the Government's, at best, prevarication over the anti-fraud convention and the missed opportunities on the Delors submission. Something else, however, has changed since Edinburgh: the Government have introduced VAT on domestic fuel.

Some hon. Members may be unaware that the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel hits Britain twice—it adds not only to fuel costs of British families, but to our net contributions to the European Union, something that the Chancellor of the Exchequer seems to have missed out from his copious briefings and corrections to hon. Members for the debate.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head, but extra charges and extra payments to Europe arise from the imposition of VAT on fuel. Those costs do not arise from the calculation of VAT under the agreement that the Bill will incorporate because the VAT base is already harmonised. They arise because VAT on fuel adds to the calculation of member states' gross national product at market prices. It thereby increases both the fourth resource of funding and the cap on the GNP-related third resource. It is estimated that that will add about £8 million a year to Britain's European contributions, a fair proportion of the extra £75 million that the Chancellor talked about. The Government should now provide what they have so far failed to provide: an exact estimate, which hon. Members might like to take into account when they vote this evening and when they vote on VAT on fuel, which we hope they shall have the opportunity to do soon.

In reply, the Minister may say that the figure amounts to only a few million pounds. We say that it is a few million pounds that British users of fuels, especially pensioners and disabled people, should not have to pay. They will be furious that they are forced to pay not only VAT on fuel, but, as a consequence, more money to Brussels. It adds insult to injury and people will not forget.

The Opposition's argument is that the Prime Minister's approach to the Bill is deeply flawed. We say that, if Britain's contributions are to increase, the House has a right to decide on the action that the Government should take to cut out fraud, waste and the excesses of the CAP. We say that, far from being anti-European, action on these matters is essential to build confidence in Europe. Nothing more corrodes public support for the European Union than fraud, waste and excess perpetrated at their expense. Nothing more entrenches narrow, crabbed nationalism, which falsely imagines that isolation from Europe is the best way of winning friends and markets.

A Europe of budgetary waste and fraud, agricultural excess, political centralisation and itinerant Parliaments will never win public support. A Europe that acts for peace, prosperity, jobs, trade, infrastructure, the environment and human rights, a Europe of person-to-person contact through travel, twinning, sporting and cultural exchanges, a Europe with real political subsidiarity, can win confidence. That is what we must seek—a people's Europe, not a Europe of vested interests.

The Opposition say, too, that a proud country is able to take a lead and to say yes and no, but it is scornful of the Prime Minister's maybes. There is, however, something even more important than the Prime Minister's reputation, the Government's standing or party advantage in the House this evening. It is the Chamber's responsibility for overseeing, scrutinising and, where necessary, amending

legislation. The Prime Minister has called into question the integrity of the House of Commons. Hon. Members will vote on the words of the amendment. They are:

"this House believes that the European Communities (Finance) Bill is not an acceptable measure as it increases United Kingdom contributions to the European Union without action by Her Majesty's Government to cut fraud and waste in Europe or to reduce expenditure on the Common Agricultural Policy."

A true majority of right hon. and hon. Members agree with those words and I have no doubt that a true majority of people in this country support them. The people are watching and counting and they are paying the price for the fraud, excess and waste that we want stopped.

I call on right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House to carry the will of the people into the Bill tonight. The amendment is right. The British people will be our judge.

9.34 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The House is used to lack of consistency from the Labour party but we just heard from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) a particularly choice example of trying to oppose something without actually being against it. We all know that Labour wants higher contributions made to the European Union. It has argued for them, requested them, stands for them and would implement them. Nevertheless, Labour has found a way of tabling an amendment that would wreck a Bill to give effect to higher contributions.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), answering an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) said that he supported the Edinburgh agreement, yet the hon. Gentleman tabled and argued an amendment that would have the effect of blocking a Bill that takes that same agreement into law and would release those contributions.

To put the matter beyond doubt, the House authorities have confirmed that Labour's amendment is a wrecking amendment. If passed, it would block the Bill. Any thought that Labour can be in favour of the Edinburgh own resources decision yet vote against it is shown to be a sham.

Mr. Bill Walker: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Government's view is that the House should properly monitor legislation, particularly that affecting finance, and that the Government are not adverse to amendments that allow the House to scrutinise matters more carefully? Could not amendments be tabled and accepted at a later stage?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No amendment to the Bill has that effect. The House must either approve or not approve the own resources decision taken at Edinburgh. Any conditional or half-acceptance would not have the effect of giving approval, and of giving effect, to the decision negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) said that Labour's stance takes to almost absurd lengths the duty to oppose. We have established as point one that Labour will vote against a measure in which it believes and that it wants.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend the Minister say whether or not the Government agree with the substance of the amendment that I tabled, which invites the Public Accounts Committee to take a substantial interest in fraud? The answer that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) suggested that was not the case. Perhaps I misunderstood my hon. Friend the Minister. Will he get that straight?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I strongly believe in this House taking a close interest in mismanagement and fraud in the European Community. Indeed, I have just sent an explanatory memorandum to the Scrutiny Committee about the European Court of Auditors report for 1993. The point that I was making, in response to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), is that an amendment to the Bill not only would not have such an effect, but would block the Bill's Second Reading and prevent the entering into force of the own resources decision in any form.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I am grateful to the Paymaster General for giving way. Let us get this absolutely clear. Is he saying that the Bill must go through unchanged?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman is welcome to table amendments in Committee. I am saying that the amendment tabled by the official Opposition, if passed this evening, would not have the effect of amending in any way the Bill or the decision. It would block the Bill, which could not then be reintroduced in this Session. That was not understood by the hon. Member for Oxford, East or by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East in his earlier speech.

Mr. Smith *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have answered the point that the hon. Gentleman made. He made his own speech earlier in the proceedings, which I shall now endeavour to answer.

I want to take the House back to some of the comments made in the debate, particularly those by my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). He made the point that an international agreement entered into by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is something that the Prime Minister is entitled to see passed into law by the House even though it is two years after the Edinburgh Council. The task faced by my right hon. Friend at that Council was, indeed, daunting. The Community was in the depths of a world recession. The single market was not then in place. The Uruguay round of GATT was in the greatest difficulty. Denmark's future in the Community was in doubt, and the prospect of further enlargement to include the Nordic countries and Austria was completely over the horizon. Those and other issues were tackled with great determination by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other Ministers.

Co-ordinated efforts were made to stimulate growth in the Community. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) played a leading part in the growth initiative at that time. I wish to pick up on one point that he made: that the external tariff of the Community was of decreasing importance. I put it to my right hon. Friend that the landing rights at French airports were denied to British Airways not by tariff barriers but by non-tariff barriers. I think that he will agree that the Spanish market, to which he referred, is by tradition a

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

protectionist market. It takes the force of Community law and the single market to break down those barriers for British exports.

None of this would have been possible without the settlement of the financial questions faced at Edinburgh. The political way was cleared for a solution to the Danish question. Negotiations were started with the EFTA countries and Austria, and a new commitment was made to free trade and deregulation. What was essential at that negotiation was to clear away the difficult issue of own resources. That had been under discussion in the Community for more than 10 months, and the previous Lisbon Council had failed to resolve it. The Commission wanted a higher figure. It wanted the own resources of the Community to increase to 1.37 per cent., not by 1999 but by 1997. The abatement was also under fire. The abatement negotiated in 1984 at Fontainebleau has netted back to this country some £16 billion. Other member states, naturally, wished to remove it.

The abatement is under threat not from other member states but from the words and actions of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. Just before the Edinburgh Council, referring to our abatement, he said:

"There has got to be renegotiation over that."

The Opposition would have given in on just about everything. Here I agree with the point—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister. Conversations should be a little less noisy. It is extremely difficult for both sides of the House. I can hear many conversations which should be less noisy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agreed with the intervention and with the speech made by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) who said clearly that the Opposition parties—the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party—could not be trusted on European matters because they would give in to just about everything. The itch to tax and to spend runs very deep through Opposition Members.

As we know, in the event, the own resources ceiling was to rise to 1.27 per cent. by 1999. That is less than half the increase proposed by the Commission and supported by the Labour party in the European Parliament. The British abatement is secure. In answer to the point raised by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), it can be changed only by unanimity in 1999. That will require primary legislation in this House which means that a vote here is required before the abatement is changed, even at that late date.

The effect of that decision, negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, is to increase our net contribution by £75 million next year and by about £250 million in the last year of the century. Of course, the existing decision means that there is growth anyway in the size of the European budget due to growth in the size of the Community's gross national product and the effect of inflation. It is that increase which many people have muddled up with the increase attributable to the Bill. In fact, the yearly increase flowing from the Bill will be considerably less than that under the previous review in 1988.

By 1999, the adjustment to the contribution ceiling contained in the Bill will cost each person in this country about 7p a week at today's prices. All Conservative Members agree that all public expenditure needs to be looked after. I ask the House to keep a sense of proportion and to compare that 7p a week at today's prices with, for example, the £28 a week which is everyone's share of the social security budget today.

A comment has been made by several hon. Members about the abrupt increases in the United Kingdom's contribution that can be seen from one year to the next. By cunning choice of baseline, a steep increase can be seen between specific years. I think that the House now understands that there are technical reasons for that. This country has a financial year that runs from April to March. The Community accounts on a calendar year so it can be easily seen by any hon. Member that a shift in expenditure or contributions within a calendar year can take that expenditure out of one financial year and into another. If one combines that with the effect of the abatement, whereby we get reimbursed a year in arrears, it is plain to see that our contributions fluctuate from year to year. There is, therefore, nothing sinister in the figures put forward by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer early last week.

I regret the scepticism expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) who said that he wanted the true figures. He has the true figures. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is not keeping some secret update from the House—far from it. He actually brought forward by a week, for the convenience of the House, the figures that would normally be published on Budget day.

Fraud and mismanagement have been mentioned by many hon. Members in this debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), in his elegant way, referred to the problem of financial management and what he termed the "lack of focus" in some European Community spending. As usual, his comments need to be taken seriously by Ministers. I agree with many of the sentiments expressed by Conservative and Opposition Members about the lack of adequate financial management in the European Community.

There is also the linked, but actually separate, issue of fraud. That was raised by, among others, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) and I can assure him that the Government take extremely seriously the criticisms and recommendations laid out in the European Court of Auditors report. It is, by definition, extremely difficult to quantify fraud. Some of the wilder estimates given by hon. Members during the debate were, frankly, just guesses. I can assure the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) that, contrary to what he said, the European Court of Auditors has not put a figure on prevalence of fraud.

Having said that, I agree that financial management in the Community is not good enough and fraud is far too prevalent.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On the whole question of fraud, what happens if the measures introduced to deal with fraud after Maastricht do not work? Supposing that, next year and again the year after, the Court of Auditors produces another report of a similar nature. What will the Government then do? Will they take

the Community to the wire? Will they pursue a policy of brinkmanship, or will we hear the same old drivel well into the future?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Fraud, like sin, can never be totally eliminated but I can give the House the absolute assurance that we will pursue this issue with renewed vigour. That includes, which I think will be of assistance to the hon. Gentleman, the wider use of administrative penalties. So, where serious shortcomings are identified, we recommend the cutting off of further funds to the areas or projects identified. That was a point raised and a request made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) among others.

Combating fraud is not simply a question of spending more money. It is typically Labour thinking to suppose that the quality of any organisation or initiative is judged simply by the amount of public money spent on it. Yes, we need greater policing of EC expenditure. We also want to see more preventive measures to take away the opportunities for fraud at source.

Mr. Andrew Smith: On preventive measures, will the Paymaster General answer the question to which no answer was given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) earlier? Will the Government, in seeking to prevent a defeat on VAT on fuel, be making that issue a vote of confidence?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That is not a subject for today's debate, Madam Speaker, as I am sure that you agree.

The question of fraud, which is of interest to the House this evening, is a matter that we shall be pursuing partly by the better policing of expenditure and partly, as I also mentioned, by better preventive measures.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Could the Paymaster General simplify this a little for the sake of people at home? Is it not right that we have a very good deal, through the Prime Minister at Edinburgh, and that we are paying very much less than we would have been paying into Europe, which is very important? In fact, it is petty cash in Treasury terms. For it, we are getting inward investment in the United Kingdom, we are getting millions of pounds back out of Europe for environmental reasons and I think that the rebels in this House have not even understood the whole question.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We all welcome my hon. Friend back and the whole House will agree with his intervention.

My final point about fraud is that we must remove the distortions which give an incentive to fraud. There is a connection in that regard with CAP reform. Many of the frauds in the Community arise because of a disparity between EC prices and world prices. That is why the Government have pressed so hard for CAP reform. The MacSharry reforms, which were agreed in 1992, are a very big step in that direction.

When Labour was last in office, agriculture consumed more than two thirds of the EC budget. The figure is now about half and it will continue to fall, not because of Opposition criticism but through the determination and practical steps taken by Conservative Governments.

In response to points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East and others, let me say that the agricultural guideline which sets a limit on agricultural expenditure will be rigidly observed. As it can be increased only by unanimity, I can repeat the assurance to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we will police that guideline absolutely.

The amendment, with its weasel-worded rejection of the Bill, would achieve none of those things to improve the war on fraud or to reform the CAP.

Mr. Cormack: Will my hon. Friend tell the House that we are determined to be tough on fraud and tough on the causes of fraud?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I can give that assurance to my hon. Friend.

The amendment would not assist in the smallest degree. The House is aware that the Labour party is the party of public expenditure at home and, since its last U-turn in its attitude to the European Union, it is the party of public expenditure in Europe: public expenditure good; European public expenditure even better.

The *Official Report* is littered with requests from Opposition Members asking for, urging and demanding more expenditure. In his previous post as shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said on 24 November 1992:

> "We firmly believe that there should be Europe-wide measures on employment, job creation, investment in transport infrastructure, measures for industrial regeneration and investment."

The hon. Member for Oxford, East, who replied to the debate on behalf of the Labour party, called for more money before Edinburgh and for even more expenditure afterwards.

The Liberal Democrats are just the same. As usual, it depends on which audience they are addressing. The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) said that he wanted

> "a bold, and . . . generous settlement at Edinburgh".—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1992; Vol. 214, c. 773-85.]

However, he and his party are apparently supporting an amendment which would wreck the only settlement that is on offer. I hope that the Liberal Democrats have explained to their rural constituents their new-found interest in CAP reform and reduction in agricultural expenditure.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for Oxford, East said, there has been nothing in the speeches of Opposition Members, before or after Edinburgh, about the need for budgetary discipline and cracking down on fraud. They have never mentioned the European Court of Auditors. We can look in vain for any reference to the problem of fraud or waste in their speeches in 1982 and since, yet now they produce that as a fig leaf to cover their amendment.

This is a sham amendment put forward by a party with a sham policy on Europe. It is opportunistic, it is inconsistent, and it is wrong. Opposition Members hope that, by betraying their principles, they will bring down the Government and then betray ours. I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends: do not fall into a trap so crude. The Bill is about an extra 700ths of 1 per cent. of gross national product at the end of seven years. It is worth

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

more than that to stand firm and fight for the European Community we want and not to sell out to the Opposition parties. I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 330.

Division No. 5] **[22.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stainberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*

Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baker, Rt Hon K *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rutcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert *(Harrow West)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith

Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 329, Noes 44.

Division No. 6] **[22.17 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baker, Rt Hon K *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus

Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whitingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gordon, Mildred
Hall, Mike
Hood, Jimmy
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Loyden, Eddie
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
McCrea, Rev William
McWilliam, John
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Oiner, Bill
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Welsh, Andrew
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody and Mr. Austin Mitchell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Committee of the whole House pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Committee tomorrow.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (FINANCE) BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the European Communities (Finance) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums to be charged on and paid out of the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund, or payable out of money provided by Parliament, under the European Communities Act 1972; and

(2) the payment of any sums into the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Budget of the European Communities for 1995

[Relevant document: European Community Document No. SEC(94)1479, the Commission's Letter of Amendment No. 1 to the Preliminary Draft General Budget of the European Communities for 1995.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. COM(94)400, the Preliminary Draft General Budget of the European Communities for 1995; 8782/94, the Draft General Budget of the European Communities for 1995; the proposals contained in the unnumbered document: European Parliament Minutes for the Sitting of 27th October 1994 relating to the Draft General Budget for the European Union for the Financial Year 1995; the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 23rd November, relating to the Council's decisions on the European Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the Draft General Budget for 1995; and European Community Document No. 9943/94, relating to the adjustment of the Financial Perspective with a view to enlargement; and supports the Government's efforts to maintain budget discipline.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

10.32 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I expected to be speaking after hearing what the Minister had to say about the budget. He was supposed to be going to tell us why—

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that this is business No. 3, the Budget of the European Communities for 1995, and that the Government have not moved that with a speech but have moved it formally, for a speech later? Is that the position, please?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is what I had assumed. I thought that it was fairly obvious.

Ms Armstrong: The Minister may have nothing to say, but we have some questions to ask him. This is a very important piece of information to come before the House. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who want to continue their conversations please leave the Chamber?

Ms Armstrong: It seems that Ministers are too reliant on civil servants nowadays, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps some time in opposition would be helpful, allowing them to learn to prepare their own speeches.

The debate gives us an opportunity to comment on the drawing up of the 1995 European budget before the European Parliament finalises its deliberations next month. I shall excuse the wrong date that we are given in the explanatory memorandum: I understand that the Council meeting took place on 16 November, not 15 November—but, today and on previous occasions, we have become somewhat used to the mistakes in figures that the Chancellor is wont to make, and we shall forgive him.

At present there is clearly a disagreement between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers about important parts of the budget, but I intend to focus on the role of the Chancellor at the Council of Ministers meeting. First, I should like to know—particularly in view of the Government's rhetoric today—why the Council of Ministers rejected every amendment made to the budget by the European Parliament to tighten control of fraud. In all five categories, the European Parliament tabled amendments transferring financial commitments to the area of tackling fraud; it suggested not using new money for that purpose but moving, within budget headings, money that had largely been allocated to administration.

In the explanatory memorandum, the Minister gives no explanation whatever; indeed, he barely alludes to those issues. I think that, particularly in view of the rhetoric that we heard from the Minister in our earlier debate—

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you noticed what is happening? Have you observed that the Minister has just been given his speech—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I notice everything that goes on in the Chamber.

Ms Armstrong: I have some sympathy for the Minister: earlier, he had to speak while hon. Members behind him were fighting, and he has now had to get people to bring him the appropriate papers. It is a hard life being a Minister in the Tory Government.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): You were not elected.

Ms Armstrong: I was indeed elected.

Along with most other people in the country, I want to know what the Chancellor did at the meeting of Finance Ministers on 15 November in relation to the amendments dealing with tackling fraud. What was his view? If I were generous, I would assume that he fought tooth and nail to support amendments to crack down on fraud. However, in the explanatory memorandum we are given no hint of the Government's view or of why the Council made the decisions that it made.

To date, the Government have not exactly been shrinking violets in their stance on majority voting or, indeed, on the social chapter. Why have they not made a similar fuss about measures to tackle fraud levels which, as we have heard, are costing us £4.5 billion, which in agriculture alone rose by 50 per cent. between 1990 and 1993 and which are set to rise by a further 30 per cent. in 1994? Perhaps the Minister will tell us what action the Chancellor took at the Council of Ministers with regard to those amendments on fraud. Did he ignore them? Did he believe them to be frivolous? Did he argue for them and for the citizens of Britain? We cannot know, but we expect some answers from the Minister when he has had time to read his papers.

What action did the Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer take to prevent the Council of Ministers' decision to increase expenditure on the common agricultural policy by 545 million ecu while slashing support on overseas food aid by 65 million ecu? Do the Government believe that aid to multinational agribusiness companies should take priority over support to people dying of starvation through natural and man-made disasters?

What action did the Chancellor take to prevent the Council of Ministers from trying to increase expenditure on the CAP over and above that recommended by the European Parliament? What action did he take over the Council's suggestion, with which he apparently agreed, to cut support for the Northern Ireland peace process and its aftermath by 30 million ecu? What justification can he give for that action?

What action did the Chancellor take to prevent the Council of Ministers' decision to increase expenditure on the CAP while slashing support for internal policies, including constructive initiatives relating to the environment and to consumers? It appears that, in every way, consumers and the citizens of Britain have been hit by budget decisions in which the Chancellor at least participated. We need to know what view he took on those decisions at the meeting.

The opportunity to discuss the European budget during the budget-making process is welcome, but it is clear that not having information about what takes place at Council of Ministers meetings puts hon. Members at a disadvantage. We know what the European Parliament thought and why it took its decisions, but we cannot find out the answers to other questions, except through the explanatory memorandum. As I have already made clear, that memorandum far from explains the Council of Ministers' actions at the meeting and it is our only clue to how the Council voted or how it reached a view on the European Parliament's proposals.

How can we know whether to congratulate or to criticise the Chancellor on the position that he has taken? We have no clue as to what Ministers say, how they vote, what they support and what they oppose at the meetings. We do know what priorities the European budget should have. It is not acceptable that the CAP costs the average family in Britain £20 per week. It is not acceptable that the CAP budget has risen from £6.4 billion in 1979 to £30.4 billion in 1994. It is not acceptable that fraud is costing all of us up to £4.5 billion.

We also note that there is no mention in the memorandum of the fact that the budget headings, particularly those dealing with administration, will include spending on the implementation of the social chapter. We know that, under objective 4 of the social fund, there is to be spending on, for example, skill training to retrain workers. We also know that the Secretary of State for Employment does not intend to claim any money from that for British workers. That is another example of the ideological bigotry of denying opportunity to British people. This country is contributing to the social chapter and the British people want to enjoy its benefits. Half of the top 100 companies are committed to implementing aspects of the social chapter; yet despite the rhetoric that we heard today, the Government are unable to paper over even the thinnest cracks in their party.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The hon. Lady referred to papering over the cracks. When Labour MEPs voted for double the increase in the future European budget that my right hon. and hon. Friends proposed to the House today, did they make it conditional on the terms of Labour's amendment tonight?

Ms Armstrong: The right hon. Gentleman has not been listening. Labour MEPs have proposed amendment after amendment to the 1995 budget.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg) *indicated dissent.*

Ms Armstrong: The Minister has obviously been enjoying himself before coming to the Chamber.

Labour MEPs proposed amendment after amendment to cut fraud and to introduce measures to tackle it. Those amendments were removed by the Council of Ministers. Our manifesto for this year's European elections said that ending the present common agricultural policy should be a priority in the next round of treaty reforms, so that the Union will be for all its people, not just for wealthy farmers.

The budget should be spent efficiently to stimulate the creation of quality skilled jobs, to improve skills qualifications, to invest in the trans-European communications network and to fund research and environmental projects.

It was clear today that the Government are so concerned with their own internal problems that they have failed to tackle fraud in preparing for next year's budget. At best, they have colluded with the rise in the cost of the CAP, when there was an opportunity at least to trim. There are important questions surrounding the 1995 budget—I hope that the Minister has some answers.

10.47 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I rise to make the speech that I had hoped to contribute to the previous debate. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to answer some of my points, but I shall fully understand if he cannot do so.

Having just supported the Government, I want to make one or two remarks about the European Communities (Finance) Bill. Some misleading claims about the nature of the Bill were bandied about. It was said that it was presented as a Finance Bill, but I question that. A domestic Finance Bill puts all the proposed taxation and revenue-raising measures before Parliament, which then decides whether to approve them; if not, the Government do not have the money at their disposal to make any expenditure.

The problem with the European Communities (Finance) Bill is that not a great deal changes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are debating not the European Communities (Finance) Bill but a motion. If the hon. Gentleman does not stick to that subject, I will rule him out of order.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am grateful to you, Mr. DeputySpeaker. I was coming on to the way in which we scrutinise European budgets and was trying to use the European Communities (Finance) Bill as an example of how, in many ways, that is never achieved and to give some of the reasons why. I was using that Bill as a particular example. With your forbearance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to raise one or two points on that matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not try to debate the Bill. The Bill has been debated throughout the day. It is over and done with. We are now debating a motion, and the hon. Gentleman must confine his remarks to the motion.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Indeed. I was using one or two areas of the Bill only to illustrate the problems that will exist for us in future debates on European budgets. I believe that 1995 is specified, but others will be presented before us. I should like, if possible, to continue using the Bill as an illustration of where the problems will arise and hope that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General can take

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

from that some of the main areas and problems that he would like to look at in relation to the other budgets that come before us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to tell me that he wants to make the speech that he would have liked to make in the main debate on Second Reading this afternoon. He cannot possibly do that. His remarks must be on the motion, otherwise he will be out of order.

Mr. Duncan Smith: In that case, I am guided by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and will finish at this point.

10.51 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) has sat down, because I always find his speeches most entertaining, even if sometimes I do not agree with them. By and large, I think that the people with whom one does not agree are far more entertaining than those with whom one agrees.

Today has not been a great day for Parliament and I do not think that it will end any better in this debate, which is narrower than the European Communities (Finance) Bill, which we have just given a Second Reading. Although the Bill was related to the European budget, the debate ended up not as a rational debate but more like an elaborate game of charades.

In discussing, however briefly, the budget of the Union, one of the basic things that we must recognise is that there are within the House a small but extremely dedicated group of people—in the Conservative party, but also in the Labour party—who are opposed root and branch to everything to do with the Union. Some hon. Members are circling around rather like carrion crows waiting for an appropriate piece of meat on which to alight. I thought that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) was rather like that today. He is the former Chancellor, the man who took part in the Council meetings of Finance Ministers that determined the budget. Until recently, he was our representative there.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames made a speech, which I can describe only as entirely in the mainstream of old-fashioned English nationalism. He rejected the idea of the regional fund. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) remarked, rightly, that the two structural funds—the regional fund and the social fund—are exceedingly important elements in the budget. Liberal Democrat Members and, I know, Front-Bench Labour Members support those funds most strongly, yet the former Chancellor said that he saw no sense in recognising additionality.

Indeed, as far as I could see, the former Chancellor was wholly opposed to the idea of regional expenditure, although, as we know, the budget is used in that area and the Commission presses for that to correct disadvantages in different parts of the Community. Yet the right hon. Gentleman, the man who until recently was the spokesman of our Government, was clearly and absolutely opposed to any such proposition.

One of the things that I found most extraordinary about the right hon. Gentleman's contribution in that regard, considering his recent responsibilities, was the idea that there was an absolute intrinsic incompatibility between us and everybody else in the Community. "All our partners," he said—the Germans, the Dutch, everybody. I do not think that that is true at all. It is terribly dangerous thinking. Speaking as a Scotsman, I think that the Scots are more different from the English than the English are from the Germans. The House should just think about that, because it undermines completely the false argument that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames advanced.

In the previous debate, to which I shall refer only briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had repeated speeches from the Euro-sceptic area opposing the use of the European budget to improve the balance of wealth and poverty and to improve opportunity in the Community through the cohesion fund and the structural funds. Like the founding fathers and like those who wrote the visionary document that established the regional fund, the Liberal Democrats believe that the budget should be seen as a means not only of running the administration of the Community but of making an actual change to the benefit of the weaker members of the Community.

I support what the hon. Member for Durham, North-West said about the surprising view that was taken by the Council of Ministers in respect of the propositions made by the European Parliament about fraud. As Ministers have been most anxious today to proclaim how zealous they are about fraud, there seems to be a contradiction.

My next point concerns the British clawback which we had following Fontainebleau and the agreement achieved by Lady Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. I do not think that we can expect that to go on for ever. We all know why it was perfectly right that we should get money back; the effect of the common agricultural policy was different for us. There is, however, no sense in pursuing that as a long-term effort. It would be far better if the British Government went into budget negotiations talking about a need to reform the basis of revenue within the Community so that it is more equitable throughout the whole Community than it now is. We should, therefore, be as interested in unfairnesses that happen to other countries as we are in the difficulties that we face.

All day, we have been hearing people say, "We must reform the common agricultural policy. It costs far too much." We did not hear a single word about how that was to be done, not even from Labour spokesmen during the previous debate. We must face the fact that it is not an easy matter. It is certainly impossible to reform the common agricultural policy quickly. The Paymaster General was fair to say earlier that expenditure on the CAP has dropped quite dramatically and that although the reforms that have been instituted are slow, they are beginning to have an effect. People who claim that, somehow or other, one can wave a magic wand and reform the common agricultural policy, just like that, are living in cloud cuckoo land. Political pressures make it impossible. The complications of social and rural support, which feed through the CAP, make it impossible. We all agree that we should move towards reform, but it is wrong for any speaker to suggest that there is some quick fix which will take us out of the situation. There is not.

10.58 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I understand that it is Labour party policy to reform the common agricultural policy, although the party has not put a date on it.

I do not want to give now the speech that I was unable to give in the previous debate, because that would be out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even though I might have brought the Government to their knees if I had been able to give it in the previous debate. I must say, however, that all the pressure, all the arm-twisting, all the panic, all the exaggeration and all the ability that the Government have, in their usual fashion, to turn a difficulty into a disaster, misapplied in the previous debate, have brought us to this mish-mash of rubbish and rhubarb in the relevant documents.

The Minister cannot even be bothered to give us an opening speech to justify, to defend or to explain. It is disgraceful that, after all that went before, when we come to the detailed application of the money to which the Government have just been coercing the House to agree, they cannot be bothered to explain where it is going. The Minister had to have his speech drafted for him during this debate by civil servants in the Box, have it ferried over so that he could skim through it—as he is doing—and learn it off by heart so that he could give us some shambles of an explanation at the end of the debate. It is a disgraceful performance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) on the Opposition Front Bench coped brilliantly, but she should never have been put in that position. The House should not have been put in that position by the Minister's inconsiderate approach to this matter.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): The hon. Gentleman would be the first to acknowledge, as a veteran in these matters, that his hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) did not portray total familiarity with the procedures relating to the budget, when she consistently referred to the Chancellor. Those of us like the hon. Gentleman know perfectly well that another Minister takes the Budget Council.

Mr. Mitchell: The right hon. Gentleman does a competent job defending the incompetence of his own Front-Bench spokesmen. However, the Minister was there to give us an explanation. He did not and, in failing to do so, he did not give my hon. Friend any of the material that a Front-Bench speaker normally expects to be able to bite on, rebut and reply to during his or her speech. That is a failure. There is no point in excusing it. A different Minister may be concerned, but the Paymaster General is on the Government Front Bench at the moment and that is all that we can go by.

It is very difficult to follow a budget on this scale, especially when the explanations given by the Government are so slipshod as to get the wrong date for the Council of Ministers. It is also difficult because so much of what we are asked to follow is hypothetical. The European Parliament has not yet deliberated on the matter. We do not know what it will include in the course of its deliberations. I notice that in the Government's explanatory memorandum on the budget on 14 November, they tell us:

> "The Government notes that the European Parliament has proposed the creation of a Chapter to deal with expenditure under the second pillar (Common Foreign and Security Policy) which might be funded from the Community budget."

Here is potentially enormous expenditure, which we are asked to note that the European Parliament may well include when it comes to its deliberations in December. It is an enormous issue and we are just given this casual explanation:

> "The Government considers that this prejudges the results of negotiations with the European Parliament on the budgetary mechanisms for those actions under the Second Pillar which are to be funded from the Community budget. The Government will therefore seek to ensure that the Council returns at its second reading to the budgetary structure contained in its Draft Budget."

In other words, there is a huge hypothetical area, in which the Government are arguing on one side, the European Parliament is arguing on the other and we are asked to debate it today on the basis of total ignorance and this pathetic explanation.

Another difference is emerging on the expenditures that have been frozen at the VAT rate of 1.21 per cent., over 1.2 per cent., by the European Parliament which can be put back by the Parliament at a later stage. What is the size of those items which are to be put back? What will be produced by the advent of newcomers—probably three, possibly four? Again, there was no explanation and no allowance made in the budget, although the European Parliament wanted to put it in. The Council of Ministers refused to give it the ability to do so.

Again, something that will affect the scale of expenditure and the scale of everybody else's contributions is left there hanging, a great open question still to be decided. That is an incredible way in which to formulate a budget. How can we in this House, having witnessed the drama and arm-squeezing which went before, be asked now to discuss intelligently—which the Government would presumably like us to do—a budget that has great gaping holes and hypothetical aspects to it? Indeed, the expenditure limit of 1.2 per cent., I note from the budget documents, is not to be exceeded. The limit is to be reached at 1.1999 per cent. recurring. The calculations are so precise that the figure can be set at 1.1999 per cent. recurring. That figure is totally hypothetical, and that is the usual method of fiddling accounts in the Community.

The limits are always exceeded in practice and there is then an elaborate procedure of accountancy devices—which the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) could explain for us if he were to bring his accountancy ability to bear on the budget—so the Commission and the Council can fiddle the figures through, through various loopholes. This is not a budget; it is a "bludget". The Government will be bludging all next year to turn the documents into something that amounts to sense.

I object to the basis on which the budget figures have been prepared. There is an elaborate system of bribing countries, particularly the three Mediterranean states of Greece, Spain and Portugal, and Ireland, with our money to accede to strengthening the process of union at our expense. The cliffhanger over the own resources decision with Italy and Spain is typical of the process.

[Mr. Mitchell]

When the Minister replies to the debate in an informed fashion—now that he has written his speech and given it some coherence that it did not have at the start of the debate—I hope that he will explain the effect of that blackmail in respect of the own resources decision. Italy and Spain have been allowed to get away with a reduced payback after the fiddle on the milk quotas. After starting off all bluster and saying that the money had to be paid back in full, the Chancellor of the Exchequer climbed down and agreed that it did not have to be paid back in full. He said that that was more efficient than proceeding through the European Court of Justice to prosecute those countries.

Have those paybacks been made? Has the money been paid over by Italy and Spain to the Community? What is the effect of that recoupment on the budget? Where does it feature? How can we trace what has happened to that money? The issue sets a most undesirable precedent of blackmail by refusing to agree to budget provisions, in this case to the own resources decision, unless concessions are made for derelictions in other areas. That is the undesirable principle of blackmail on which the decision was based.

I am amazed that a Government who are so strict and stringent about public expenditure that they are hounding single-parent families and social security beneficiaries, and are cutting Government expenditure in every way possible, are so lax when it comes to major items amounting to millions of pounds in respect of the basis on which the budget is drawn up.

I cannot see how the Chancellor could give us the exact estimates, which he set out in the letter that he sent to all hon. Members, of exactly what the Edinburgh agreement was going to mean in terms of extra contributions by Britain based on the hypothetical figures in the budget. We do not know how many states will be contributing to it or what the basis of the contributions will be. We do not know what qualifications the European Parliament is going to make, but the Chancellor can purport to give us an exact figure for our contribution. It is impossible for that figure to be given.

The fourth paragraph of the explanatory and financial memorandum on the European Communities (Finance) Bill states:

"The new Decision also provides for the continuation of the abatement mechanism whereby the United Kingdom benefits from a correction in respect of budgetary imbalances."

Why should such a provision by included in the Bill? I thought that this correction mechanism and abatement procedure could be withdrawn only on the principle of unanimity in the Council. We are certainly not going to agree to its being withdrawn. Why does it have to be there, specified in that fashion?

The next matter is the nature of the GNP contribution, which, as I understand it, is a fallback position if the own resources contribution is not adequate to cover the budget expenditures. The GNP-raised contribution is specified in the European Communities (Finance) Bill. Perhaps the Minister will explain how that emerges in the budget documents. It is a variable. It rises and falls with the own resources contribution. Is it going to rise, or is it going to fall? If it rises, presumably it will benefit us as a country with one of the lower GNPs. How is that mechanism provided for in the budget documents?

The Minister, having prepared his speech, should be prepared to answer those questions. We need his guidance on them, given the size of the pile of documents and the hypothetical nature of the budget that we are asked to discuss. I should very much appreciate his guidance, particularly on those two matters.

11.10 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I intervene briefly to question the procedure that is being used this evening. I do not know whether right hon. and hon. Members have considered the 23rd report from the Select Committee on European Legislation, but the House would do well to dwell on paragraph 1.8, which states:

"The budget clearly raises matters of political importance and, as in previous years, we recommend further consideration on the Floor of the House, rather than in European Standing Committee B. We trust that this year the debate will be arranged to allow the House to examine the budget properly and not, as was the case in 1993, by means of a late debate on a grossly overloaded Motion."

I do not regard that as scrutiny. I cannot believe that any Member of the House of Commons could suggest that what is happening in this debate is detailed scrutiny of those important budget papers. I regret that the Committee took the decision to refer the matter to the Floor of the House. It was in error. It has denied the House the opportunity of scrutinising the matter in Committee. May I explain why.

We are dealing with budgetary headings. The Minister knows that that is the soft option for Ministers. The scrutiny in a Scrutiny Committee or in European Standing Committee A or B is such that Ministers can be constantly pressed on the detail of documents placed before those Committees. In many ways, reputations are made by Ministers in those Committees, which, I understand, are described by Ministers as the most difficult proceedings of the House of Commons to handle because they require extraordinary knowledge of a subject. Clearly, Ministers do not wish to be caught out by Opposition or Conservative Back Benchers.

What we have tonight is second-best procedure and no scrutiny. We have now spent several hours debating this aspect of the legislation, with its implications for the budget, recognising that the public expect us to consider such matters in far greater detail.

As someone who has supported the Community all my adult life, certainly since the age of 14, I have been an impassioned supporter of the Community, which is now the Union. For the first time in my life, having spent all those years arguing, I desperately wanted to vote the way I did this evening because of budgetary considerations, not because of its being a motion of confidence, but because those who support the Community must realise that, unless we sort out problems now, if we are confronted by a referendum in years to come, we will lose on the referendum. The British public will make up their minds on the basis of whether the Community's problems of fraud have been dealt with.

It is only by adopting the right procedure in considering budgets that Ministers can go to Council of Ministers meetings, reinforced and armed with the facts, to argue the reservations expressed in the British House of Commons. By adopting this procedure tonight, first, we undermine even further the prospect of that greater union that many of us support; and, secondly, we undermine the credibility of this place.

11.14 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The motion in this important scrutiny debate is, inevitably, rather long because it refers to many papers which are already available to the House. The budgetary process is extremely complex: we move from a preliminary draft Budget early in the year, to a draft Budget which is then amended and which, in time, receives a first reading and then a second reading.

That process is by no means complete. The budgetary Council, which I attended recently, amended the European Parliament's budget. Those amendments have now gone back to the European Parliament and a final resolution of the 1995 budget is expected on or about 15 December.

The budget authority for the European Union is the Council and the European Parliament. Generally, the Council of Ministers has the final say over the obligatory side of the budget, which is chiefly agricultural expenditure; whereas, for many years, the European Parliament has had the final word on non-obligatory expenditure. That has become more important over the years as the proportion of the budget taken by agricultural expenditure has dropped from well over two thirds to its present level of about half.

Throughout that long process, the Government have kept the House of Commons informed through a series of explanatory memorandums. I pay tribute to the Committee responsible for scrutiny for the forbearance with which it received and digested these inevitably complex documents and, where necessary, made them available for debate in the House.

The point is well made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that it is difficult to address these complex matters in the Chamber with the requisite degree of detail. That is why we rely on the Committees which sit outside the Chamber to do a great deal of the detailed work.

Throughout the budgetary process, the Government aim to ensure that budgetary discipline is maintained within the limits of the financial perspective and also, perhaps more importantly, the existing own resources ceiling. The House debated the own resources ceiling and the change to it, consequential on the decision of the Edinburgh Council, earlier this evening.

We believe that the Community budget should be subject to exactly the same restraints as the national budget of each member state. The Government believe that the Council's second reading draft budget is acceptable. Under it, commitments will increase by 3.4 per cent. on 1994 and payments will increase by 2.8 per cent. That implies real growth of about 0.5 per cent.

The Council was right to reject the European Parliament's approach to enlargement and the new anticipated own resources decision. The European Parliament was anxious to take account in advance of the Edinburgh decision—the 1.21 per cent. of contributions—even before national Parliaments had approved them. That would have been resented certainly by the House and by the Parliaments of other member states.

We believe that when approval is complete in each member state, but not before then, it will be appropriate to move to the 1.21 per cent. ceiling. The Council of Ministers was adamant in bringing forward the 1975 budget on the basis of the existing own resources decision.

We all hope that the Union will enlarge on 1 January next year to include Austria, Sweden, Finland and, we hope, Norway, although the referendum this evening may point otherwise. We do not yet know. Again, we think that it is wrong to anticipate the extra resources that would be brought in by the new member states. If and when some or all the states join on time, amended budgets will be required.

The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), who leads for the Opposition, raised the issue of agricultural expenditure. The Government are certain that the agricultural guideline must not be exceeded. To remind the House, it is a feature of the existing budgetary arrangement that expenditure on agriculture cannot rise by more than 74 per cent. of the growth in Community gross national product. Therefore, the proportion of the budget contributed to agriculture falls through time. That is a very effective discipline.

Naturally, some member states and some interest groups within member states would like that guideline to be exceeded. When the 1994 budget was discussed, there was evidence that the guideline was being breached. However, I am happy to report to the House that it is likely that there will be an underspend on agriculture in the current year.

I am aware of comments made in this debate and the earlier one about agriculture and common agricultural policy reform in general. I can only repeat that no Government have worked harder or more consistently for sensible reform of the CAP than the present one. The MacSharry reforms, which were agreed in 1992, will gradually reduce the level of producer prices. That will bring relief to consumers throughout the European Union. The reforms will also reduce the problem of surpluses and gradually narrow the gap between Community agricultural prices and world prices. Indeed, the gap has already narrowed substantially for commodities such as wheat.

Ms Armstrong: I wonder if the Minister will help us by explaining why, when the Council agreed to spend to the guaranteed level in agriculture, the Parliament felt that it was possible to budget for an underspend lower than the level to which he referred, but the Council said no and wanted spending to go right up to the level?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As I have explained, the position of the Government is that agricultural budgetary expenditure should be set at the guideline. A great many interest groups, particularly in other member states, believe that that is an almost ferocious discipline which is likely to be exceeded. We say that expenditure must be accommodated within revenue and that revenue cannot accommodate all expenditure.

It is perfectly true—I think that this is the point to which the hon. Member for Durham, North-West alludes—that the European Parliament consistently tries to bring down agricultural expenditure, over which it does not have final control, not, I am afraid, to save money for the taxpayers of the European Union, but to spend any money saved from the budget on its own projects on the non-obligatory side of the EC budget—items such as internal expenditure, aid, research and development and other categories.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

Other hon. Members mentioned fraud. I do not need to repeat how seriously the Government take that issue and the more general one of the need for financial discipline and an end to the all too prevalent financial mismanagement of some sectors of the budget.

That is achieved only in part by spending more money on anti-fraud activities. The right response to a problem is not always spending money on it. It would be best to build better preventive measures against fraud into the structures of the Community—clearer legislation, more transparent regulations and pre-expenditure checks. We have already ensured that the new regulations governing structural and cohesion fund expenditure contain requirements for value for money and better monitoring and scrutiny.

In answer to the question whether the United Kingdom takes up money available for anti-fraud activities, yes we do, but not simply because the money is available. We do so only where we believe that there is demonstrably added value. It would not be sensible to take already well-trained customs officials off duty simply to put them through a Euro-training course because the money is available, especially as that might take money that could be better spent in some of the other member states, where larger amounts of fraud have been discovered.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) mentioned milk quotas and the court case that Britain launched against the Commission over its proposed relief for Italy and Spain because of over-production of milk in earlier years. Only the British Government launched that case. Others may talk about budgetary discipline, but the British Government act. We were alone in launching that case and I am glad to remind the House—my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already argued this strongly today—that the case was settled on our terms. The Governments of Italy, Spain and, to a lesser extent, Greece will have to pay back a £2.5 billion fine.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby also mentioned the abatement. It is true that we take extremely seriously any threat to the British abatement, which has clawed back about £16 billion since it was negotiated by Lady Thatcher at Fontainebleau. Although the Labour party may have huffed and puffed before then about the need for an abatement, when Labour was last in office it did not get back one penny piece by way of rebate from the European Community. It took the advent of a Conservative Government in 1979 to start getting rebates. That was regularised at Fontainebleau in 1984. Others may talk about rebates; we delivered one.

In answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, 1999 is a significant date only because the existing new own resources decision, which the House debated earlier, runs from 1992 to 1999. At that point, there will be an entire renegotiation of the own resources decision, just as there was at Edinburgh in 1992.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is not the reality of the abatement that because of its existence, Britain effectively has a back seat in dealing credibly with the fraud in the European Community? Although we want and need the money, is not the truth that if we did not have the abatement our whole attitude to European finances would be very different? We would be very much in the front lines, and we may well have driven through much-needed reforms and made the Community a far more credible place than it is today.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I need no such incentive to pursue the matters of fraud and mismanagement. Even with the British abatement, we are substantial net contributors to the European budget, as the House well knows.

The hon. Gentleman makes one good point, which is that the fact of a member state becoming a net contributor has a dramatic effect on its attitude to the European budget. That is why a very important feature of the recent own resources decision, which was debated earlier today, is that we are now being joined as net contributors by many other member states. Of course, Germany is by far and away the largest net contributor, and the gap between Germany and other member states will widen in the remaining years of this century. But in addition to the UK, the French are now very substantial regular net contributors. In terms of contributions per head of population, we have been overtaken by the Netherlands, and when Sweden and Austria join, they, too, will be contributing more per head than we are.

Italy is a most interesting case. It is now a net contributor and that has had a startling effect on the attitude of Italian Ministers regarding the whole question of financial discipline and the need for it in the Council of Ministers. We are now being joined by many other member states which share our preoccupations with the need for financial restraint and for a crackdown on fraud.

The final point that I must make to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby is that although all the matters will be renegotiated in 1999 just as they were in 1992, we cannot have the British abatement removed from us except by unanimity. Just as this Bill, which sets the new own resources figure for 1992 to 1999, was brought before the House by primary legislation, so it will be that in 1999 another Bill will be brought before the House. Effectively, it is not only the Government who have a veto over any change to the British abatement, but the House of Commons. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by that.

Finally, I turn to the advent of other member states and whether they will upset or alter the budget for 1995. I can confirm to the House that the figures in the explanatory memorandum are based on a Community of 12. If, as we hope, the Community enlarges next year, additional resources will be available. During discussions on the European Union (Accessions) Bill, I stated that there would be a net benefit to the UK from the resources brought into the Community by those states, and I remember mentioning a figure of some £300 million. The figures that we have at the moment are the most pessimistic available. If enlargement takes place, they could marginally improve.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. COM(94)400, the Preliminary Draft General Budget of the European Communities for 1995; 8782/94, the Draft General Budget of the European Communities for 1995; the proposals contained in the unnumbered document: European Parliament Minutes for the Sitting of 27th October 1994 relating to the Draft General Budget for the European Union for the Financial Year 1995; the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 23rd November, relating to the Council's decisions on the European

Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the Draft General Budget for 1995; and European Community Document No. 9943/94, relating to the adjustment of the Financial Perspective with a view to enlargement; and supports the Government's efforts to maintain budget discipline.

CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order E (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order H(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings)),

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet:

1. in Edinburgh on Monday 5th December at half-past Ten o'clock, proceedings being interrupted at Two o'clock;

2. on Tuesday 13th December at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee; and

3. in Glasgow on Monday 19th December at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Ainsworth be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Michael Stephen be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Richard Spring be discharged from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Mr. Tim Smith be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

HEALTH

Ordered,

That Mr. Jonathan Evans be discharged from the Health Committee and Mr. Robert Key be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Jonathan Evans be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Sir Wyn Roberts be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Eric Clarke be discharged from the Scottish Affairs Committee and Mr. David Marshall be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

TREASURY AND CIVIL SERVICE

Ordered,

That Mr. A J Beith be discharged from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and Mr. Malcolm Bruce be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ordered,

That Mr. Malcolm Bruce be discharged from the Trade and Industry Committee and Mr. Nick Harvey be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

PETITIONS

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

11.34 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I wish to present a petition from a further 450 of my constituents, in addition to the 2,200 signatures that I have already submitted, and to add to the 300,000 signatures that have been collected nationally in opposition to the increase of VAT on domestic fuel and power.

The petition reads:

The Petition of the constituents of Nottingham, South declares that the decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in April 1995 breaks election promises and is unfair, hitting those who can least afford it.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons pass legislation to stop the increase on VAT on domestic fuel and power going ahead.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I wish to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, in addition to a number of petitions that have been submitted recently and the many cards that have been received condemning the Government's proposal to increase VAT on domestic fuel.

The petition states:

The Petition of citizens of the United Kingdom declares that the Government's decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in 1995 will place a heavy financial burden on Pensioners and others on low incomes which they will find hard to meet.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons vote down the proposed increase.

And the Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition was collected by my constituent, Mr. G.A. Mawson.

To lie upon the Table.

Burnley Health Care Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

11.36 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I want to refer to the problems experienced in the Burnley national health service trust. That trust serves not only Burnley but Pendle and parts of the borough of Rossendale.

In the past few months, major problems have arisen in the trust. It is clear that those problems will become all too common in other trusts because they have been caused by the NHS reforms forced through by the Government. Because of the introduction of the concepts of market forces and the purchaser-provider role to the health service and the fact that the NHS is now judged according to financial criteria as opposed to the quality of service offered and various statistics—all too often the wrong ones—what has happened to the Burnley health care trust will be repeated in many other trusts.

I want to make it clear that the problems experienced by the trust have nothing to do with its staff, who, despite those problems, have got on with their work and provided a first-class service to the people served by that trust. In September, I was an in-patient at the hospital, so I can speak from experience about the standard of service offered and the dedication of the trust staff.

The call for a debate on the problems of the trust has not only come from me and my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson), but has been loudly echoed by the people served by that trust. They believe that the problems encountered need to debated in the House, because they want answers to many of the questions that we have been asking on their behalf for some time. Indeed, on the day that it was announced that I had been fortunate enough to secure this Adjournment debate, 18 November, the *Burnley Express and News* said:

"At last, we might get some answers to the questions surrounding the current shenanigans at Burnley Health Care Trust.

By securing a parliamentary debate on the management of the trust, there's just a chance that the people of this borough will get some answers.

We don't want to know for political gain. We don't want to score political points. We just feel we have a right to know what's been paid out and for what reason?

The central characters are not beyond reproach—they are accountable to us all and we have a democratic right to be given the facts, figures and reasons behind this whole sorry saga."

In the same newspaper, the chairman of the East Lancashire health authority was quoted as saying, at a meeting held that week, that

"there was an urgent need for a new style of management at Burnley with the emphasis on co-operation not confrontation."

The Minister must have seen the many headlines and quotations of the papers in the past few weeks, and I shall refer to a few of them. One was in the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* of Tuesday 25 October:

"Scapegoat: 'Health chairman asked me to resign to save his own neck.'

The chairman and chief executive of the troubled Burnley Health Care Trust each called for the other's resignation today in an astonishing bust-up."

On 4 November, the *Burnley Express and News* said:

"Consultants at Burnley General Hospital yesterday welcomed the resignation of their colleague Dr Sam Pickens as medical director—but said they hadn't won a victory."

That is under the heading:

"Medical director quits board job."

As recently as Friday 25 November, the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* said:

"Health boss No 3 resigns. Pay-out probe urged as Chairman Rawson follows Aikman and Pickens."

That type of thing has been going on for many weeks and we need the answers to those questions.

On 15 September, I heard on Radio Lancashire that Mr. Ian Mahady had been made redundant. Radio Lancashire telephoned me for an interview about that, and I said that I had no information, other than what I had heard on the radio. However, I said that I was very anxious about what I had heard on the radio, because Mr. Mahady had been given three hours' notice to clear his desk and leave the hospital, after which he might not enter the hospital again.

Whether he should have been made redundant or not, that was an appalling way to behave towards Mr. Mahady. I know that he is pursuing his appeal, and that he had the right of appeal. That appeal is being dealt with, and the British Medical Association is representing him in that respect. Nevertheless, that behaviour shows the false way in which those matters have been handled.

The BMA issued a statement on 15 September, saying:

"This is the first compulsory consultant redundancy in the North West Region to take place directly as a result of the internal market, and the British Medical Association, which is representing Mr. Mahady, is very concerned at the implications for consultants in future.

The BMA will be appealing against the decision on the grounds of failure on the part of the Trust—which admits to having no procedures to deal with staff redundancies".

I find it incredible that a trust employing such a large number of people has no procedure to deal with such matters.

On 19 September, 21 consultants sent a letter to the chairman of the health care trust, Mr. Rawson, which said:

"We can find no justification for the removal of Mr. Mahady at such short notice and cannot see any reason why he should not have been allowed to continue with the care of his patients for the three months of his 'notice', irrespective of any arguments regarding the redundancy."

That is the type of argument that many constituents have raised with me and my two hon. Friends who are here for the debate.

On 27 September, I attended a public meeting of the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale community health council, at Rawtenstall, and during that meeting I mentioned the situation there. I spoke to the chairman and the chief executive of the trust, who were present at the meeting. I was given a copy of a press statement, which said that, earlier that day, two leading consultants, a Mr. Robert Atlay and Dr. David Warrell, had been appointed by the trust to inquire into the situation at the unit, and that that had been with the approval of the North West regional health authority.

I made it clear that, in my opinion, we needed an independent inquiry. Any body that acts in a way that is criticised is certainly incapable of appointing another body to conduct an inquiry into its actions.

I then wrote to the Secretary of State, asking her to appoint an independent inquiry to look at

"the way in which this has been handled by the Trust . . . the functioning and working of that unit and . . . the way in which all staffing matters are dealt with at Burnley General Hospital."

In a reply dated 18 October, the Minister who will reply tonight stated that this was an

"entirely local matter between the Trust and one of its employees."

He wrote to me again on 27 October, saying that Mr. Mahady was

"exercising his right of appeal".

I accept that, and do not wish to become involved in any specific appeal; but the Minister also said:

"Individual Trusts are, of course, responsible for making their own staffing arrangements, having due regard to employment legislation and ensuring that the health needs of their local community are met in the best possible way."

On 7 October, the trust issued another statement saying that it had "every confidence" in Dr. Pickens, and that it was

"a credit to him that over the past year he has been fulfilling the dual role of Consultant Physician with a full clinical workload and that of Medical Director."

On 12 October, at their request, I met the chairman and chief executive—Mr. Rawson and Mrs. Aikman—privately. At that meeting, I was assured that Mrs. Aikman had the full backing of both the chairman and the board; they were confident that, at any appeal or tribunal resulting from Mr. Mahady's redundancy or dismissal, their position would be supported. Yet on 24 October, Mr. Rawson asked Mrs. Aikman to resign. The following day she asked him to resign. At the end of the week, she resigned.

At that meeting, Mr. Rawson gave me a copy of a letter that he had sent to one of my constituents, who has written to me about the same issue. The letter said:

"These reports have not altogether reflected the full facts of the situation and have led to considerable concern within the local community. With this in mind I have invited two . . . independent clinicians to review the circumstances and facilitate a resolution to the situation. I intend to make both public and to act on their recommendations".

When will the report of that inquiry be available? Will the recommendations still be implemented when it is finally published?

I must tell the Minister that the overwhelming view—my view, that of my constituents and that of my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle and for Rossendale and Darwen—is that the matter will not be resolved until an independent inquiry takes place. What has been done so far has not resolved the position at all. On 1 November I wrote to the Secretary of State again, asking for such an inquiry and forwarding a petition with 7,000 signatures calling for Mr. Mahady's reinstatement. I wrote:

"The Trust is clearly in crisis and you have the responsibility and power to act and you should do so now in the interests of the N.H.S. and patient care."

I wrote to the Secretary of State again on 4 November, saying:

"It now appears Mrs. Aikman has been paid over £250,000 to go on condition of silence."

We have a right to know what that payment was.

It was also rumoured that, if Dr. Sam Pickens had left as both consultant and medical director, he would have asked for £1 million. I know that he did not get that in the end, because he continued as a consultant. If no payment was made to him, we have a right to know.

In a letter dated 10 November, the Minister said:

"The responsibility for any settlement lies ultimately with the Trust chairman who is personally accountable for a termination payment to the chief executive."

If the chairman, who resigned last Friday, is found to have paid out a sum in excess of what he should have done, who will meet that amount? The cash payment has been made and it has implications for the pension and other matters. We have a right to know that.

On 1 November, I wrote to Mr. Rawson to ask how much the chief executive had been paid to go and on what terms. I said that the public had a right to know. I asked him why, when we met on 12 October, he said that it was clear that she had the full backing of the board. If that is so, what changed? Was what I was told on 12 October true?

On Friday of last week, Mr. Rawson finally went. An acting chief executive is now in place. Up until today, an acting chairman was in place but there is no medical director. Today, the Minister announced the appointment of a new chairman—Dr. James Archer. Obviously, I hope that he is able to overcome the problems. He said that his role was to end uncertainty and to heal any remaining wounds. I hope that he succeeds in that objective, which will be a hard task. People want answers to the questions that I have put.

Yet again, there has been a change in the chief executive. A few weeks ago, after the chief executive Mrs. Aikman went, Mr. David Meakin, a financial officer, was appointed to fill her position in an acting capacity. This morning, David Chew was appointed. He is an employee not of the trust but of East Lancashire health authority. It is strange that he has been switched from one job to another.

It is known that Mr. David Meakin was strongly opposed to any merger with the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care NHS trust. Mr. Chew, however, has been heavily involved in planning for federation. I, the press and the public are opposed to any merger or federation. I hope that the Minister will assure us that Mr. Chew's appointment does not mean that there is to be a merger between Burnley Health Care NHS trust and the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley trust, which is what the press is saying. That will not be acceptable. We must ensure that there is a lot of consultation before any federation takes place.

I hope that the Minister will respond to those points and assure us that problems will not be allowed to arise. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle wants to say a few words on these important matters.

11.52 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I shall be brief. I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). The annual report of the NHS executive, which has just been published, states:

"The NHS is accountable through Parliament for the effective and efficient use of taxpayers' money."

I want to concentrate on that in the two minutes available to me.

I want to know a bit more about the pay-off to the former chief executive Maggie Aikman and to ask the Minister the simple question: why did she go? Who decided that she should go? Was the rest of the board involved? The code of conduct and the code of accountability for NHS boards suggests that they should have been involved. If they were, should they not take collective responsibility and resign, like the former chairman James Rawson?

What reasons did Mr. James Rawson give to Maggie Aikman for requesting her resignation in the first place? Is it true that the pay-off amounted to £250,000? What about her pension arrangements? If the £250,000 figure is accurate, how can that possibly be justified? If Mrs. Aikman's performance was lamentable, why did she receive such largesse? I asked Mr. Rawson those very questions and he refused to answer. Will the Minister answer them?

Astonishingly, the Minister for Health told me last week that the Department keeps no records of trust chief executives who resigned or who were dismissed, or of the reasons for their dismissal. Will the Department do so in future? Did the Secretary of State ask the chairman, James Rawson, to consider his position? If the right hon. Lady did so, why?

I do not want to rake over the coals but it is as plain as a pikestaff that the community is mortified by what has occurred. An independent inquiry is needed so that lessons can be learnt for the future. We must avoid a repeat of the astonishing, tragic farce that is Burnley health care trust.

11.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on securing this Adjournment debate and on the assiduous way in which he has followed the regrettable events of the past few weeks. I cannot say other than that I deeply regret that they occurred. I assure the hon. Gentleman that they are not typical of the national health service or of trusts, and such a series of events is probably unique in modern times.

I join the hon. Member for Burnley in paying tribute to the staff, management and everyone else involved at the hospital for continuing to offer a fine health service to the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Patients must come first, and I am glad to report that there is no evidence that patient care suffered as a result of the events in question. The district health authority is closely monitoring the quality of care in the hospital. The events must not detract from the trust's record and its achievements. They include increasing the number of in-patients and out-patients treated; achievements in the learning disability field, for which it won a prestigious award; a reduction in waiting lists and waiting times; new consultant appointments; and new facilities in general surgery, gynaecology and other specialties. The trust has achieved an overall improvement in health facilities for the people of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale.

The course of events is approximately as the hon. Member for Burnley described them; I shall comment briefly on one or two of his specific questions. He asked when the inquiry will report and whether its recommendations will be implemented. I can only answer as soon as possible, and that the trust will take close account of the inquiry's findings.

I cannot agree that an independent inquiry would achieve anything now. I have no reason to doubt the independence and objectivity of the two consultants who are investigating the matter of Dr. Mahady. Neither do I agree that the issue will not be resolved until there is an inquiry. It will be resolved in a period of calm and stability under the new chairman and chief executive, to allow the scars that may remain from the events to heal and to allow everything to get back to normal. That is always needed in the health service.

Mr. Pike: If the Minister will not take it from me that an independent inquiry is required, he should ask for the views of the community health council. It will point out that a range of staffing issues have arisen from the old-style management. We hope that that will change, but only one aspect of the trust has been considered.

Mr. Sackville: I hope very much, as I hope the hon. Gentleman does, that the new chairman and chief executive will address any such problems.

On the matter of the payment to the former chief executive, I can confirm that she received a net sum of £135,750 and that that represented a gross cost to the trust of £245,000. Those are very large figures, but I have no reason to suppose that they were not the negotiated settlement that represented her contractual entitlement. Her contract had been renewed quite recently and, with her basic salary grossed up to her total package over a period of just over two years, that is the figure that was negotiated. I can confirm that the former medical director received no payment, although he is, of course, still a valued member of the hospital.

I should also like to comment briefly on what was said about the new acting chief executive, Mr. Chew. No sub-agenda should be assumed, as a result of his appointment, connected with the future configuration of the trust. He was appointed because he is an experienced manager who, it is believed—I have no reason to doubt it—will bring experience and a much-needed period of stability to the trust.

I should like to reiterate that, regrettable though the matter is, for it to continue to occupy the press and the minds of people locally can only cause worries for the staff, patients and everybody else, and a great deal of further noise about it cannot help.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: No, because I have only a few minutes left.

So those who are friends of the hospital, as the hon. Member for Burnley is—and he has just been in the hospital—will agree that there is nothing to be achieved

down that route. What we need for calm is mature consideration of how those events can be avoided. I have no indication that such matters within the trust are likely to recur. As I have said, it is quite unique in the recent history of the health service that such events should occur in a hospital.

I should like once again to congratulate the trust on the standard of care that it has achieved. I congratulate it on the fact that it has maintained that care during the past two months. I deeply deplore any attempt to exploit it for any political or other reason. I heard what the hon. Member for Burnley said about not wishing to seek any political gain by raising those matters. I am sure that he agrees that they are regrettable, but they need to be put behind us so that things at the hospital can return to normal.

I shall quote once again, as the hon. Gentleman touched on it himself. As he knows, Dr. Archer

"is an eminent microbiologist who has served the interests of patients in Burnley for many years. He is respected by clinicians and management alike."

His role is to

"end uncertainty, heal any remaining wounds, and to have everyone working together to restore public confidence in this excellent hospital."

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 29 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the address, as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Careers Guidance

1. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what he is doing to increase the effectiveness of careers guidance.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): Thirteen careers services are now operating under contract after competitive tender, and tenders for 51 more in England and Wales are being considered. We have set demanding specifications for a high standard of impartial advice from ages 11 to 18.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Sheffield careers service on winning its investors in people award, the first service in the region to do so? What are the Government doing to ensure that best practices are maintained in the careers service?

Mr. Paice: I congratulate Sheffield careers service on receiving its investors in people award, as I congratulate all the 1,000 or so businesses and organisations that have won that award. My hon. Friend is right to concentrate on the need to spread best practice, which is why we are working closely with the Department for Education. The two Departments recently produced a booklet called "Better Choices", which lays down a suggested framework for schools, colleges, local education authorities, training and enterprise councils and careers services to work together.

Mr. McCartney: While the Minister is congratulating himself, will he give us some information about the career guidance that he will give the 11,500 jobcentre staff in London who have been asked to take an unpaid Christmas holiday due to the administrative pay budget shambles, or the 750 workers who have today been sacked by Severn-Trent water company? Those job losses are in addition to the 900 job losses already announced by Severn-Trent, although its chairman has been given a £173,000 pay rise and a £500,000 pay-off on leaving the job. Is not John Maples absolutely right about the Government—that Ministers are incompetent and that there are record levels of sleaze and greed? It is no wonder that there is no national feel-good factor.

Mr. Paice: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position, but he is obviously so intent on making his mark that he has not read the question. His question had nothing to do with careers guidance, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) asked. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would take comfort from the fact that unemployment has fallen by 450,000 in the past two years, as a result of which there is less need for quite as many Employment Service staff.

Take-home Pay

2. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the relative levels of take-home pay in the United Kingdom and other European Union countries.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): British workers' average take-home pay is among the best in the European Union, better than France, Italy or Denmark and comparable to western Germany.

Mr. Luff: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his answer provides further evidence of a remarkable combination of low personal taxation, high take-home pay and low overall labour costs? Does he further agree that that proves the success of the Government's economic policies and gives the lie to the Labour party's claims about the dangers of a sweatshop economy?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is important to do away with the myths. Wages in Britain are relatively high and taxes are low, so take-home pay is high. In addition, the Government are extremely careful not to impose costs, burdens and inflexibility on employers that would make them uncompetitive. Of course, the Labour party is committed to the social chapter—*[Interruption.]*—and to making sure that those costs are higher so that jobs would be lost in Britain. As I said that jobs would be lost in Britain, Labour Members cried, "Hear, hear."

Mr. MacShane: On take-home pay, is the Secretary of State aware that a pay-slip handed to me in Rotherham last weekend showed a pay rate of £1.80 an hour, which amounted to take-home pay of £99 for a 53-hour week? That is an national disgrace. At the party that he is organising to celebrate his 10 years in Parliament, will he ensure that the cleaners, servants and the people serving the champagne—of which that rate of pay would buy four bottles—will be paid a decent wage?

Mr. Portillo: If the hon. Gentleman is worried about pay today, I hope that he will at least congratulate the Government on the massive improvement that has occurred during our term in office. Pay in real terms for the bottom 10 per cent. of full-time workers has increased by 23 per cent., whereas, under the previous Labour Government, their pay fell in real terms. He should be concerned about the Opposition parties' proposals for a minimum wage, which would destroy those people's jobs. It is better for people to be on the ladder of progress with a job than to be put out of work by a minimum wage and to have no job at all.

Mr. Heald: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the suggestion of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon

Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) that the way forward in solving the unemployment problem is to borrow more money, to get more people into public service jobs and to ignore efficiency, or does he agree that British workers should be climbing the technology ladder for a high-wage, highly efficient economy in Britain?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is right. That was the second major contribution by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East to the national economic debate. On the first occasion, he admitted that a minimum wage would cause a shake-out—a euphemism for saying that it would destroy jobs. He has now applied his mind to the unemployment problem and believes that the remedy is for inefficient public services to employ more people and that that, somehow, will bring down unemployment. It would mean, of course, higher taxation on the wealth-creating sector and it would damage incentives and destroy jobs. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing those two arguments from the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East to the House's attention.

Employee Rights

3. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he proposes to improve the rights of employees at work and protection against unfair or arbitrary dismissal.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): The Government recently introduced a number of extended and enhanced rights for employees in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993. It is now automatically unfair for an employer to dismiss an employee for taking certain specified types of action on health and safety grounds, for seeking in good faith to assert a statutory employment right or for reasons connected with pregnancy or childbirth.

Mr. Mackinlay: What advice would the Minister give a constituent who came to her surgery and who showed prima facie evidence of unfair and arbitrary dismissal but who had been employed for less than two years? What remedy to that wrong would she suggest to her constituent?

Miss Widdecombe: Certain automatic rights are available to all employees, regardless of hours worked. It is important that a balance is struck between undue burdens on employers and the protection of employees. The two-years' policy strikes the right balance.

Mr. Butterfill: Many people, particularly hoteliers in my constituency, think that rights are already loaded against them and that industrial tribunals' decisions prevent them from operating efficiently. If the social chapter were introduced in this country, would not many jobs be destroyed and our unemployment level be the same as that in Spain and France?

Miss Widdecombe: I agree with my hon. Friend's latter point. To maintain that balance and to ensure that we do not overload employers with unreasonable requirements, we have strongly resisted paternity leave, the part-time work directive and other measures that militate against employers employing and that destroy jobs. The most important protection that a worker can have is to be able to get a job; the Opposition would ensure that he would not have it.

Ms Eagle: Almost nine months ago, the Government lost a case before the European Court and were told to equalise the rights of part-time and full-time workers. Since then, we have heard nothing but a deathly silence from them. When will they bring part-time workers' rights into line with those now enjoyed by full-time workers?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Lady confuses the European Court with the House of Lords, which I should not have thought was easy to do. The Government will announce their conclusions in due course.

Youth Training

4. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of those leaving youth training today do so having gained qualifications; and what was the figure two years ago.

Mr. Paice: Seventy-two per cent. of young people completing youth training gain a qualification or a credit towards one, and the percentage of trainees gaining higher level national vocational qualifications is increasing year on year.

Mr. Clappison: Is my hon. Friend aware that the modern apprenticeship scheme has been well received in Hertfordshire? Will he join me in congratulating Hertfordshire training and enterprise council on the excellent lead that it is taking in the manufacturing sector?

Mr. Paice: I shall, indeed. Hertfordshire training and enterprise council has taken the lead in the engineering and manufacturing sector and must be congratulated on that. Eighteen prototype modern apprenticeships are up and running and 40 more are expected next year. When they are fully in place, 70,000 people a year will be qualifying at NVQ 3 level through modern apprenticeships, which is a step change in the skills supply of this country.

Rev. Martin Smyth: But does the Minister accept the concern that we do not have enough trained technicians—a fear shared by industrialists and expressed to me only last week when the Esso energy lecture prize was being given? Are he and his colleagues trying to improve that situation?

Mr. Paice: All the studies show that it is at NVQ level 3—the technician/junior management level—where our skills problems are most severe by comparison with our competitors. That is why we introduced modern apprenticeships and why the White Paper proposed the concept of accelerated modern apprenticeships for those who have stayed on in further education beyond the age of 16. We are very conscious of the fact that there is a problem, and those two measures, in addition to the changes to the funding mechanism for TECs, will encourage far more skills to be gained at that level.

Mr. Tredinnick: Can my hon. Friend give some indication of the improvement in the staying-on rate for 16-year-olds?

Mr. Paice: Yes, I can tell my hon. Friend that in the past 10 years the percentage of that age group staying on has doubled: 93 per cent. of 16-year-olds are now in education, training or work.

Mr. Barron: Where did the Minister get his misleading statistics about the qualifications gained by people on youth

training? This month's *Employment Gazette* states that two years ago, in July 1992, 37 per cent. of people leaving youth training received a qualification or a credit towards one. In July 1994, the figure was only 41 per cent., not 72 per cent., as he claims. I am quoting the Government's own statistics. Why do we constantly hear fiddled figures from the Department of Employment about our crisis in training? In view of the very small growth in youth training, why have the budgets of TECs been slashed every year for the past five years?

Mr. Paice: Seventy-two per cent. of youth training completers in the year to January this year gained a qualification or a credit towards one—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about those who complete youth training. They are the statistics with which the House should be familiar. As for funding, the hon. Gentleman will have to wait a little longer.

Labour Statistics

5. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current percentage of unemployment in Southend-on-Sea; and what was the figure last year and in the previous year.

Miss Widdecombe: On the unadjusted basis for October, claimant unemployment was 10.2 per cent. in 1994, 12.3 per cent. in 1993 and 11.9 per cent. in 1992.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I greatly welcome the improvement, but is the Minister aware of the resentment in Southend that areas with lower unemployment receive loans, grants and subsidies for job creation? As the committed Conservative that we all know her to be, will she and her colleagues at the Department endeavour to get rid of the absurd distortions in the labour market and try to establish a level playing field so that Southend gets a fair deal?

Miss Widdecombe: I have to say to my hon. Friend that, for one moment, I thought that he was about to ask for equalisation for Southend by getting some European moneys. However, I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that, even without such moneys, Southend is doing very well. Long-term unemployment has fallen by 12 per cent. since last year. Youth unemployment has fallen by 15 per cent. Retail opportunities are creating more than 600 new jobs. Vacancies are up by 4.9 per cent. and placings are at their highest level since November 1990. Good old Southend is doing quite well.

Mr. Foulkes: But is the Minister aware that there is one forecast redundancy in Southend, East which I would greatly regret? It would be most unfortunate if the Tories kicked out the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and deprived us of the opportunity of doing so at the next election.

Miss Widdecombe: I forecast no further redundancies immediately in Southend.

6. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest employment figures; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): The summer 1994 labour force survey shows just over 25 million people in employment in Great Britain, an increase of 226,000 since summer 1993.

Sir Thomas Arnold: I welcome those figures. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the combination of the pursuit of low inflation and further measures to promote productivity offers the best hope for jobs in the future?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Employment is rising and unemployment is falling in Britain far faster than in the EC as a whole, especially in countries with minimum wages, such as France and Spain, where youth unemployment is two and three times the British rate respectively.

Mrs. Mahon: Is the Minister aware that one in three jobs offered to young adults is paying below subsistence level? Is he also aware that those under 18 often get as little as £45 a week? Could he live on that? Could he plan a future, get a mortgage, get married and bring up a family on that? Will he tell us how he could do those things on poverty-level wages?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Lady totally ignores the fact that under this Government pay at all levels has risen sharply; that is so for the low-paid as well. A single man in the bottom 10 per cent. of earnings has seen take-home pay increase by almost a quarter more than inflation under this Government. The hon. Lady may like to know that that same person would have seen his pay fall under the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Page: Will my hon. Friend please help me? In 1990-91, with unemployment going up in my constituency, I had the papers on to me every month asking what would happen about unemployment and what the Government intended to do about it. In the past two years, and in the past 18 months in particular, unemployment has dropped substantially. We are now down to a figure of 2,000 unemployed, which is well below the national average, yet the papers have not been on to me once. What should I do about it?

Mr. Oppenheim: It is the old adage that good news often is not news whereas bad news is news. We have a lot of good news in the British economy. Exports are at record levels, productivity is rising by 6 per cent. a year and manufacturing output is up by 5 per cent. a year. That is the best way of ensuring not only more jobs, but more high-paid, high-skill jobs in the British economy. That is what we are now getting.

Long-term Unemployment

7. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to help the long-term unemployed find work.

8. **Ms Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to help the long-term unemployed find work.

Mr. Portillo: The Government's economic policies aim to create low inflation and sustainable growth, which will lead to more reductions in unemployment and more job creation. For some time, my Department's priority in helping to achieve that has been to give special help to people who are long-term unemployed. Long-term unemployment is now less than 1 million, the lowest figure for two years.

Mr. Pickthall: Unemployed people will have heard what the Secretary of State said and, I guess, will have believed it almost as much as he did. Does he recognise that 38 per cent. of total unemployment is long-term unemployment? In Skelmersdale, in my constituency, long-term unemployment is as high as 44 per cent.—more than 1,000 adults have been unemployed for over 12 months in one small town. Why do his Government refuse to consider schemes such as national insurance holidays or tax rebates to encourage employers to take on the long-term unemployed in order to relieve a town such as Skelmersdale of the social tragedy that long-term unemployment forces on it?

Mr. Portillo: Unemployment is west Lancashire is down by 25 per cent. from the peak. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that long-term unemployment in this country is about 35 per cent. of total unemployment; the average for the European Union is 42 per cent. If the hon. Gentleman looks around Europe and finds a socialist Government, he will find higher unemployment, higher long-term unemployment, higher youth unemployment and that unemployment has not been falling as it has been in this country. If there were a socialist answer to this question, presumably socialist countries would have delivered it.

Ms Gordon: Does the Minister agree that this country needs not only job seekers but job finders and that a change of name, another fiddle of the figures and another cut in benefits for which people have paid national insurance contributions for years will not solve the problem of long-term unemployment, especially for older people? Does he agree that the only solutions are effective Government job-creation policies, such as releasing the capital receipts of right-to-buy sales and other strategies outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall)?

Mr. Portillo: No, the hon. Lady is wrong. The real answer is sustained economic recovery, which requires our pursuing vigorous and determined economic policies. I am sure that we shall see some more of that from my right hon. and learned Friend in his Budget this afternoon. Of course I believe that we should give special help to long-term unemployed people. That is why 1.5 million different opportunities are provided for long-term unemployed people during the course of the year. The hon. Lady is absolutely wrong to say that the solution to this problem is yet more borrowing and yet more Government spending. Her Government and Governments around Europe tried that, and it resulted in higher unemployment. We have pursued a sustainable recovery and unemployment is falling in this country.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the private finance initiative is now the best way for us to create more jobs in providing the infrastructure that this country needs? Will he state why he thinks that private companies should invest in inefficient public services—a policy that appears to be advocated by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)?

Mr. Portillo: It is quite extraordinary that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East should have made such a suggestion. The inefficiency of the public sector has to be paid for by taxpayers and there is no reason why taxpayers should pay for inefficiency. It is not a good way to create employment. The way to create employment is to have sustained recovery. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the private finance initiative can play an important part in providing infrastructure and I expect that the Chancellor will make some comments on that subject.

Sir Michael Neubert: Would not the all-important morale and self-confidence of those out of work be greatly improved if Her Majesty's official Opposition adequately recognised the reduction in unemployment over two years of almost 455,000, if they recognised adequately the high level of employment in this country, by comparison with most other European countries, and if they stopped denigrating the employment and training programmes, which are providing 1.5 million places this year, as my right hon. Friend has just mentioned?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, it must be very dispiriting to those who are looking for work to find that the Opposition are determined not even to acknowledge the fall in unemployment and to recognise, for example, that the Opposition have always opposed the creation of our youth training programmes. Indeed, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the new Labour spokesman, was busy criticising those programmes again the other day.

It is a massive deceit on the British public for the Labour party to pretend, as the Leader of the Opposition was doing the other day, that it can spend its way out of unemployment. We cannot spend our way out of unemployment. We can reduce unemployment if we follow a policy of low inflation and sustained recovery.

Mr. Chidgey: Is the Minister aware that fewer than one in five of the long-term unemployed who complete a training for work programme are able to find work and remain in it? Does he agree that it is time for a radical working benefits programme with benefits transferred to a training subsidy to ensure that unemployed people are given the high skills that they need to find productive and stable jobs?

Mr. Portillo: I agree that we should be flexible in our thinking about those matters, and I share the hon. Gentleman's dissatisfaction with the present level of achievement of training for work. If we are going to spend that much money from taxpayers' sources on training for work, we should be able to ensure that more people get jobs. The principal purpose of training for the long-term unemployed is to get them into jobs. We shall need to reorient our programmes to reflect that.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Has my right hon. Friend noted that, notwithstanding the Government's strenuous efforts to address the problem of long-term unemployment, 59 per cent. of men aged between 55 and 64 remain out

of work? Does he consider that, in the circumstances of today's labour market, the terms of the jobseeker's agreement should be different for different groups? Is there not a risk that the requirement on those for whom work is not available to go through the motions of actively seeking work will become a somewhat humiliating feature of the claiming process rather than a contribution to the functioning of the labour market?

Mr. Portillo: No, I do not agree with my hon. Friend, on this basis: I believe that it is absolutely wrong to give up on any section of the population below the age 65 which has the opportunity to move into work. There is a fair amount of discrimination against those people and that is why I encourage the Employment Service to take particular steps to help some of the older men and women who have been out of work for a period of time. However, I believe that those people should be kept in touch with the labour market, and that the jobseeker's agreement is an important way of handling that.

Ms Harman: Does the Minister accept that many of the long-term unemployed lack the skills that they need to get a job? Is he aware that the Government's survey—"Skill Needs in Britain"—reports that a growing number of companies are complaining that they cannot expand because they cannot find the skilled workers that they need? When we have, at one and the same time, unemployed people who cannot get jobs because they lack skills, and businesses complaining about skills shortages, would it not be madness to make further cuts in the training budget?

Mr. Portillo: I welcome the hon. Lady to her new position and I look forward to continuing our fruitful partnership. However, I do not believe that her analysis of the question is as close to the mark as that of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), speaking from the Liberal Benches.

One of the problems with training for work is that we are getting quite a few people with qualifications, but we are not succeeding sufficiently in getting those people into work. If the hon. Lady thinks about it, I am sure that she will agree that the principal purpose of training long-term unemployed people is to give them jobs. That is the focus that I want to apply. Skills for those people are a way of getting them into work. We should not be satisfied just with giving them skills; we should concentrate on getting them jobs. That is what they want.

Young People

9. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of young people in the United Kingdom are either in education or training; and what was the figure 15 years ago.

Mr. Portillo: Eighty-four per cent. now compared with 54 per cent. in 1984—the first year for which figures are available.

Mr. Thomason: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in addition to the significant contribution provided by economic improvement, education and training have played an important part in reducing the number of unemployed people? For example, they have reduced unemployment in my constituency by 17 per cent. since October 1994. Does my right hon. Friend further agree that education and training and the improvement of job skills are a vital ingredient in continuing to provide opportunities for jobs?

Mr. Portillo: I agree absolutely. My hon. Friend's question stands in sharp contrast to the question that the hon. Member for Peckham asked a moment ago. Education, as well as training, is important. The Government's reforms have ensured that more people stay at school longer and leave school with better qualifications.

We know perfectly well that the Opposition have opposed the national curriculum, they have opposed testing and they have opposed league tables in schools. When the Labour party left office there were 7,000 youth trainees; there are now 277,000 youth trainees. When it was in office, the Labour party was content to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to live on benefit. That is the party which now advocates the minimum wage—a policy which in Spain has created three times as many young unemployed as there are in this country.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware that an advertisement for a job in this place, paying half the salary of a Member of Parliament, attracted 600 graduate applicants? Is he aware that an army of education system success stories remain unemployed? Will he, for once, give a straight answer to a straight question and tell the House what proportion of young people were in full-time work in 1979 compared to the present?

Mr. Portillo: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a number, but I can say that, under the Conservative Government, youth unemployment is 13.1 per cent. In France, youth unemployment is 23.2 per cent.; in Italy it is 32 per cent.; and in Spain, which has had a socialist Government for the past 10 years, it is 35.4 per cent. If the hon. Gentleman wants to mix it with me, let us do so on the European comparisons.

Mr. Evennett: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the educational and training opportunities for young people in this country have never been better, with more A-levels, more vocational qualifications, job training and the new apprenticeship scheme? Should we not be exalting those opportunities for our young people, which enable them to get good jobs?

Mr. Portillo: Today, 80 per cent. of 16-year olds are in education. Under Labour, the figure was 58 per cent. Today, 26 per cent. of 17-year-olds get two A-levels or more. At the end of Labour's term in office, the figure was about 14 per cent. Any indicator that we care to take shows that we are providing better education for our young people.

The Labour party not only let young people down when it was in office but now wishes to impose a minimum wage to make sure that they cannot get jobs.

I will not let that happen; there will be no minimum wage while I stand at the Dispatch Box. The Labour party would introduce a minimum wage and destroy jobs for young people.

Unemployment, Blyth Valley

10. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of when unemployment will fall in the Blyth valley.

Mr. Oppenheim: Unemployment in the Blyth valley has fallen by 11 per cent. this year and is 26 per cent. down on the peak in 1987.

Mr. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that unemployment in the Blyth valley is still 2.5 per cent. higher than the national average? Is he also aware that a worrying trend in the Blyth valley is the number of long-term unemployed, which has increased by 24 per cent. over the past five years? Is he further aware that there are many job losses for the area in the pipeline? With the demise of Swan Hunter, highly skilled design workers have had to leave the area. Five hundred science and development jobs will be lost from British Gas and 400 jobs will be lost from Northern Electricity. Will the Minister get off his backside, get some jobs for the north-east and help the people of the Blyth valley?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman is ignoring the fact that job vacancies in his travel-to-work area have been rising very rapidly. I agree with him on one point: we all accept that unemployment is still too high. It is too high all over Europe and throughout the developed world.

In this country, the level of unemployment is falling and employment is rising far faster than it is in the rest of Europe. As the hon. Gentleman has wilfully provoked me, I remind him that when his party was in power the number of unemployed in the north doubled and rose at a far faster rate than it has under this Government.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What does my hon. Friend think would be the unemployment in Blyth valley if the social chapter and the minimum wage were adopted, both of which policies the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) supports?

Mr. Oppenheim: I will just quote no less a person than Lord Healey, who recently said on Radio 4:

"Don't kid yourselves. The minimum wage is something on which unions will build differentials. ... Therefore, the minimum wage becomes a floor on which you erect a new tower."

The minimum wage would replace low pay with no pay. The minimum wage would create unemployment in Britain, just as it has done in Spain and France.

Young People

11. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what fresh initiatives he intends to take to motivate young people toward training and employment.

Mr. Paice: The competitiveness White Paper sets out proposals for better careers advice and work experience which, together with more vocational routes, should motivate young people to maximise their talents.

Mr. Michael: Does the Minister realise that his reply will be as boring to young people as the Minister was obviously bored in giving it? Does he not realise that giving opportunity is the best way to motivate young people? Will he say specifically what he will offer? What opportunity will he offer the 106,000 young people aged 16 and 17 who do not have a job, who are not in a training opportunity and are not in full-time education?

Mr. Paice: If the hon. Gentleman is going to bandy about statistics, I suggest that he finds out the truth behind those statistics. He will find that the supposed figure of 106,000 includes people who are in full-time education, whom we have never considered to be unemployed. It includes all those who are disabled and on special programmes. It includes a range of people who are not classified as unemployed. The Government have done more to provide alternative options for young people than any previous Government. With national vocational qualifications now providing vocational opportunities, and the development of general national vocational qualifications, modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships, there is plenty of opportunity for young people.

Mr. Gallie: If we accept the figure that was given by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), and if one in five of those in youth training fail to find jobs, does it not mean that there is an 80 per cent. success rate? If that is the case, is it not a good position from which to go forward?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The reverse of any negative is a positive. Eighty per cent. of young people completing youth training, further education or training have a job within six months. That is a high success rate. We are aiming for even more. With the development of youth credits and of modern apprenticeships, we are opting for even better than that.

Dr. Reid: The Minister's platitudes will carry little encouragement for young people. I remind him of one statistic about the long-term unemployed, many of whom are young people. In 1979, before the memory-retention span of the Secretary of State for Employment, 340,000 people were long-term unemployed. This year, 1 million people have been unemployed for longer than one year. I know that the Government do not want to rush into anything, but, after 15 years, how long will it take to reach anywhere near the level of long-term unemployment which they inherited 15 years ago?

Mr. Paice: For the 16 to 25-year-old group—the group which the substantive question is about—we have now put into place a range of opportunities. For those in that group who are long-term unemployed, we are running pilot programmes called 1-2-1 and Workwise, both of which so far have demonstrated considerable improvements in the ability to obtain work. That is satisfactory progress which we are monitoring extremely closely.

Workfare

12. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to introduce schemes related to workfare.

Mr. Portillo: My priority is to get unemployed people into jobs, and we have over 1.5 million opportunities to help them do so. But unemployed people must themselves make every effort to get work and it is right to require them, if necessary, to undertake appropriate action to do so.

Mr. Robathan: My right hon. Friend will know that my constituents were delighted by the drop of 10.1 per cent. in unemployment in Blaby last month. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear.] Will he consider extending the programme of community action, which can restore self-confidence and pride in the unemployed where it has been lost, assist the unemployed—especially the long-term unemployed—to get back to work and allow them to do something useful for society in community and environmental projects?

Mr. Portillo: The early part of my hon. Friend's question drew the cheer that it deserved. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to the achievement of the community action programme. It has succeeded in keeping the long-term unemployed in touch with the labour market and has given them the opportunity to show their skills. I reassure my hon. Friend that I will do whatever I can, within the budget that is made available to me this afternoon, to continue the programme.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Maddock:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Maddock: Can the Prime Minister tell us whether his Government will treat any vote on reducing VAT on domestic fuel as an issue of confidence—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady knows that VAT on fuel has been approved by the House on several occasions—I think from memory on four occasions. It was introduced two Budgets ago, and clearly it would be a very important vote if a fresh vote were manufactured on the issue. But it does not fall into the same category as the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

Q2. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Gillan: Did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity to listen to the interview yesterday with the chairman of Rentokil—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. The House must come to order. *[Interruption.]* Order. This is using very valuable time.

Mrs. Gillan: The Opposition find one of the most successful businesses in the UK amusing. The company was awarded a most respected award in a *Management Today* survey last week. The chairman of Rentokil said that, in his experience, our low inflation, low costs and record exports were unprecedented. Is that not the real story and the background to today's Budget statement?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt that business men and business women around the country recognise that we have the best combination of economic circumstances for many years, and my hon. Friend is quite right to say that that is the background to the Budget. There is no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will sketch out further details shortly.

Mr. Blair: Is it true, as some Back Benchers were saying this morning, that in exchange for their support last night they were offered by Ministers a referendum on further European integration?

The Prime Minister: I made clear my views on that to the House in May, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary echoed those views only last Friday. They have not changed.

Miss Emma Nicholson: In his busy day, has the Prime Minister noted the visit of the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait, and his colleagues? Would my right hon. Friend now like to endorse the integrity of Kuwait's sovereign border and the need to keep Kuwait alone, intact and in power as a state?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to do as my hon. Friend asks, and I think that that would be the overwhelming view of every hon. Member. Recently, when it seemed as though—yet again—the integrity of Kuwait's border was threatened, British troops and aircraft were there to defend it. That would of course be the position were that to happen again.

Q3. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Byers: Will the Prime Minister confirm that last year his Government spent £355 million on management consultants? Is he aware that such a sum of money would have paid every pensioners' bill for VAT on fuel? Does

the Prime Minister not feel that the time has come for his Government to get their priorities right and to put the needs of pensioners before the profits of City consultants?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, substantial sums of money have been made available to assist pensioners with their value added tax on fuel bills. Very large sums have been made available and there is no relationship between that expenditure and expenditure on management consultants to help improve the efficiency of the Government, to release resources, to keep taxes down and to help ensure that there is money available to assist pensioners and others.

Sir Roger Moate: Does my right hon. Friend share the widespread disappointment that Norway will now not be alongside us in our battle against a federal Europe and a single currency? In view of the immensely strong ties that exist between our two nations, will he and the Government do their utmost to ensure the continuation of the European economic area, which is such a beneficial arrangement for Norway and the whole of Europe?

The Prime Minister: I am extremely sorry that the Norwegian people decided not to join, but of course we respect their decision in that. Norway would have been a net contributor to the European Union, and on many issues, but perhaps not all, it would have been a valuable ally for the British point of view in Europe. I am, however, delighted that Austria and the other EFTA states have decided to join.

Q4. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Hodge: Now that he leads a minority Government, will the Prime Minister break the habit of a lifetime, stick to at least one of his election pledges and scrap the proposed rise in VAT on fuel?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady will have heard me say just a few moments ago that the House had debated that matter on four separate occasions.

Mr. Clappison: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency alone hundreds of children from less well-off families benefit from the assisted places scheme? Is it not a shame that the Labour party wants to deprive children of that opportunity, especially when some in its leadership have had the benefit of a similar opportunity?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the assisted places scheme. The whole purpose of that scheme and, indeed, of the education reforms generally, is to give children opportunities that otherwise they would not have had. I regret very much that many of those opportunities seem to attract the opposition of the Labour party. One of the more distasteful sides of politics is seeing those who have climbed up the ladder of opportunity kicking it away from other people.

Q5. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Rendel: What moral difference does the Prime Minister see between what we all agree is wrong—Members of this House accepting payment to ask questions—and a party which accepts payment from the tobacco industry in return for vetoing a ban on tobacco advertising?

The Prime Minister: There is no relationship between the two facts.

Sir Jim Spicer: My right hon. Friend will remember the speech that he gave last Thursday at the staff college at Camberley. We know how well the students there received that speech. In it, he referred specifically to Bosnia and said that we could not impose peace on those who did not wish to accept it. He said that if we tried to do so we would leave many hundreds of thousands of troops on the ground. Will the Prime Minister give us all an assurance that those troops—British, French, Dutch and all the others who have served in Bosnia—will be our first priority and that, if need be, he will make sure that they come out of that mess safely?

The Prime Minister: Let me say to my hon. Friend that I reject totally some of the lurid and misplaced criticism of the United Nations protection forces that have been made in some American newspapers in the past few days. The protection forces in Bosnia are not a combat force; they were never intended to be a combat force; they are not equipped there to be combat force. They are there on a humanitarian mission, and that mission has saved the life of hundreds of thousands of Bosnians.

I very much wish UNPROFOR to continue its humanitarian work, as long as it can do its job without there being unacceptable risks to the United Nations troops that are there. However, I have to say to the House that if the parties to the conflict make the humanitarian task of UNPROFOR impossible, if they intensify the war rather than seek a peaceful settlement, they could create the conditions in which the United Nations would have no choice but to withdraw. I do not wish that to happen, but I have to say to the House that that could happen.

Q6. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: When the Prime Minister was first elected four years ago, he set himself the aim of creating a nation at ease with itself. In the light of last night, at which of the following does he think he has been more successful—creating a nation at ease with itself or creating a party at ease with itself? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to hon. Members on the Labour Benches for suggestions as to how I should reply to the question from an hon. Member on the Liberal

Benches. Given the fact that one can find a different Liberal policy from each Liberal to the next, and a different Liberal policy from each door to the next, each street to the next and each constituency to the next, I think that the hon. Gentleman should look at his own party before he criticises mine.

Mr. Ashby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in a recent survey of every household in my constituency, more than 90 per cent. expressed themselves satisfied with the national health service? That is reflected in other surveys. Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning those newspapers that continually talk down one of the finest health services in the world?

The Prime Minister: I will happily join my hon. Friend in that. There is no doubt about the affection for the national health service and, although we often hear a great deal of generalised criticism of it, that criticism tends not to come from the people who have just had treatment in the national health service. They tend to be very supportive of it, and rightly so, because of the treatment that it offers and the service that it gives.

Q7. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: I am sure that the Prime Minister will wish to join me in congratulating Customs officers, including those based at Holyhead in my constituency, on their efforts to combat drug smuggling. Does he agree that those efforts would be severely damaged if reports are true that 4,000 Customs officers are to lose their jobs as a result of an announcement today? How will that equate with the fact that the Prime Minister has announced the war on drugs? Will it not blow a gaping hole in his policy?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is quite right about the importance of the battle against drugs; hence the domestic and international initiatives that we have taken and the work set in train by the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council. Whatever may happen to the budgets to which the hon. Gentleman refers, I can assure him that the battle against drugs will not suffer.

Sir Peter Emery: In welcoming Senator Dole to this country, will my right hon. Friend point out that the United States Congress has many friends on both sides of the House, but that that friendship has been built up by Members of Congress and of the Senate fully understanding the work of their allies?

The Prime Minister: I certainly look forward to meeting Senator Dole tomorrow, and I know that he is also meeting my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. We have a wide range of matters to discuss, and I am sure that those discussions will be fruitful and productive.

Q8. **Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Anderson: Will the Prime Minister confirm reports that the President of the Board of Trade is looking again at the privatisation of the Post Office?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady should not be in any doubt that we think that the right decision, when we have a majority in the House, will be to privatise the Post Office.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend consider giving to the shareholders of privatised utilities greater powers to decide the salaries of their directors in advance, rather than reading about them months after the event?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an ingenious suggestion, which I shall be happy to consider.

Q9. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McKelvey: The Prime Minister appeared to be somewhat ambivalent on the question of a referendum on European Union affairs. Could we have a referendum in Scotland so that we can tell the right hon. Gentleman and the country how we wish to be governed?

The Prime Minister: I seem to recall that there was a referendum on that issue some years ago. The hon. Gentleman knows, and in their hearts most people know, that the establishment of a Scottish Parliament would be immensely damaging both for Scotland and for every other part of the United Kingdom. It may well be Labour party policy, and we shall test to what extent over the weeks ahead, but it is not a thought-out policy, it is not a policy in the interests of Scotland, or of the people of Scotland, and it is not a policy in the interests of the United Kingdom as a whole.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

SUPREME COURT OF ENGLAND AND WALES

That the draft Maximum Number of Judges Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

INCOME TAX

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Azerbaijan) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Malta) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Republic of Ireland) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Spain) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

WAYS AND MEANS

Budget Statement

Relevant document:

The unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by HM Treasury on 22nd September and 14th October, relating to excessive deficit in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it may be for the convenience of hon. Members if I remind them that at the end of the Chancellor's speech copies of the Budget resolutions will be available to hon. Members in the Vote Office.

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The "Financial Statement and Budget Report", with a number of press releases filling out the details of my proposals, will be available from the Vote Office as soon as I have sat down.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): The Chair has already said that.

Mr. Clarke: I was making sure that I had the hon. Gentleman's attention. I congratulate him on his alertness.

INTRODUCTION

I have three priorities in my Budget this year. The first priority is to keep the economy on track to achieve the great prize of sustainable growth. This recovery offers the best prospect that the British people have faced for many years to enjoy the benefits of growth that does not pass through illusory boom to painful bust.

My second priority has been to use this recovery wisely to encourage the creation of more jobs, particularly for people who have been out of work for some time. We must combine greater prosperity for the majority of our people with measures to prevent the emergence of a deprived underclass, excluded from the opportunity to work and dependent on welfare.

The third priority is to strengthen the economy in the longer term. We must aim for a modern economy in which the growth of enterprising companies will give people a greater sense of confidence in the flow of new jobs that will always be required to replace the old jobs eroded by technology and competition.

UK Economy

The background to this year's Budget is the healthy growth in output that we are seeing in Britain and overseas. The recovery has been under way at a modest pace for over two and a half years. It is now stronger and output has grown by over 4 per cent. over the past year. That is easily the fastest rate of growth of any of the major European economies. The forecasts I am publishing with this Budget show the economy expected to grow by 3¼ per cent. next year.

As the recovery has got stronger, growth has come increasingly from exports. Over the last year, British exports have grown by over 8 per cent. Investment in plant and machinery has grown by over 5 per cent. Consumer demand has increased by a more modest 2 to 3 per cent. That is a very healthy shape for this stage of the recovery and bodes well for our long-term future as a competitive industrial economy.

Our exporters have been able to take advantage of the pick-up in growth overseas, by keeping their costs down and raising their productivity. Our producers have succeeded in improving their performance in domestic markets, so that while exports continue to rise, imports are little changed. Overall, I expect our balance of payments on current account to improve by over £6 billion this year.

An improving balance of payments is remarkable for this country at a time when the economy is growing stronger. More encouragingly still, inflation has remained low.

Underlying inflation has fallen to levels that we have not seen for a generation. Indeed, only about one third of the adult population of this country have ever experienced such low inflation during their adult life. The other two thirds are still finding it difficult to adjust to the change to a low-inflation economy. *[Interruption.]* They are not going to adjust back under the Labour party, either.

Unemployment is on a clear downward trend, having fallen by over 450,000 since December 1992. The United Kingdom, as I have already said, is the only major economy in Europe where unemployment has fallen over the past year.

The unemployment rate in this country is lower than the average for the European Union. And the number of people in work is rising. The "Labour Force Survey" shows an increase of 226,000 in the number of people in work in the last 12 months. That means real new jobs for people up and down the country.

We are seeing strong output growth, strong export growth, falling unemployment, an improving balance of payments and low inflation. That combination is almost unique in this country since the war.

But let us be under no illusions. Those promising conditions have to be sustained if they are to deliver higher living standards and secure jobs for men and women. And these promising conditions have arisen at all only because of the difficult decisions that the Government have been prepared to take in recent years.

We must not now throw away the gains that have been made by turning to some short-term dash for yet faster growth. Growth will be sustained only if we keep the lid on inflation, get public borrowing down further, and push ahead with measures which strengthen the industrial economy. That is the way to convert growth into prosperity and jobs.

That way lies the virtuous circle of improved competitiveness, rising productivity, economic growth, low inflation, and more jobs. We must not change our minds now for the sake of short-term popularity. *[Interruption.]* Those who bask in their short-term popularity and neglect the need for sound economic measures will live to rue the day hereafter. Only by keeping our nerve and sticking to the determined policies that we have put in place over the past couple of years will we be able to enjoy the full fruits of improved economic performance in rising prosperity and lower unemployment.

Inflation

Let me deal first with inflation. Low inflation creates a climate of stability which encourages savings and investment in the future of this country. Nothing would

[Mr. Clarke]

be more damaging than if we let inflation off the leash again only to have to take another dose of bitter anti-inflationary medicine.

The British experience is that high inflation has brought economic recovery to a halt three times over the past 20 years. That is three times too often for my liking. And while we have succeeded in bringing inflation down to levels that were last seen when England won the World Cup, we must never take that for granted. Before that game I had lived in a low-inflation economy. After that game came Harold Wilson, in political terms.

I live in a low-inflation economy again now and am glad to say that our inflation rate is now well below the European average. We need to keep up that performance if we are to be a competitive manufacturing nation enjoying the living standards of the best in future. I will therefore continue to set interest rates to meet our objective of keeping underlying inflation in a range of 1 to 4 per cent., and in the lower half of that range by the end of the present Parliament. That is a tough target by Britain's recent standards, but not by those of some of our best competitors.

To make sure that we achieve that target, I have backed good intentions and resolve with a number of important decisions over the past year that have strengthened the framework of policy.

The Bank of England's quarterly inflation report is now fully independent of the Treasury. The Governor decides the precise timing of interest rate changes. And, most importantly, I decided in the spring to publish the minutes of my meetings with the Governor. As a result, we in Britain now have one of the most open frameworks for monetary policy-making in the world. This will stand us in good stead in keeping inflation permanently low; but it will most certainly not avoid the need to take tough decisions at times.

In September the Governor and I agreed that, with the recovery strengthening at home and prices rising abroad, there was a sufficient risk of inflation picking up here to justify raising interest rates by half a per cent. By acting before retail price inflation itself picks up, we will aim to nip inflation in the bud.

I expect inflation to rise slightly over the next year, reaching a temporary plateau of around 2½ per cent., as a result of higher commodity prices and stronger profit margins in our very buoyant manufacturing industries. But continuing competitive pressures will ensure that producers and retailers keep costs under control and pass on the benefit to consumers. I expect that underlying inflation should then resume its downward trend.

Gilt Market Repos

Before I turn to the public finances, I can announce an important further development of the gilts market. The Bank of England is publishing today a consultative document on the establishment of an open sale and repurchase—a so-called repo—market. This should improve both liquidity and efficiency, reducing yields and hence reducing the Government's debt interest costs. Each reduction in yields of just one basis point—one hundredth of 1 per cent. —will eventually save more than £25 million a year of public expenditure.

Public finances

I turn now to the public finances.

Last year, I continued the process started by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). I announced measures which cut the public sector borrowing requirement by 1¼ per cent. of GDP by the end of this Parliament. Combined with the healthy growth in the economy that we are now enjoying, those measures have helped to bring the public sector borrowing requirement from £45½ billion in 1993-94 to an expected £34½ billion this year. My objective remains the same: to balance the Budget over the medium term. We remain on course to eliminate Government borrowing entirely by the end of the decade. By 1996-97 borrowing will be approximately equal to the Government's net capital expenditure.

About half my own cuts in public borrowing last year were achieved through cutting public spending plans. But, because of the length of the recession, my right hon. Friend and I also had to raise taxes to meet the objective of healthy public finances.Delay and failure to act would have caused, since then, intolerable additional pressures to raise interest rates faster and to raise taxation still further. We would not have had strong and sustainable recovery now if we had failed to cut spending and raise taxes last year.

For that reason, the public spending cuts and the tax increases that I announced last year remain, of course, quite essential to the strategy of achieving economic recovery. We have restored confidence in our ability to achieve sustained recovery by the process of taking firm measures. We would damage that confidence again if we now seemed to falter, or even to go back on any of the measures that we have already put in hand.

VAT on Fuel Compensation Package

I am able to improve the package of help that I announced last year to cushion the effects of VAT on fuel on all pensioners and on vulnerable groups—enormous though that package was when I announced it last year. Last year I doubled public spending on the very effective home energy efficiency scheme so that, for the first time, everyone over the age of 60 became eligible for a grant. This has been a huge success. Soon over a million people will have received grants to improve the insulation of their homes, reducing their excessive heating bills and improving their comfort. That is still not enough. Therefore, on top of last year's doubling, which will of course be carried forward each year, I am now adding another £10 million a year to the resources to fund grants. Soon British homes will at last be a match for the British weather in every part of the United Kingdom, especially for the elderly.

Cold weather payments were set at £6 each week only two years ago. I now intend to increase them to £8.50 each week in order to reassure people that they will get help with their bills when spells of freezing weather occur.

Furthermore, next year, 1995-96, there will be an additional £52 for single pensioners and £73 for couples built into all retirement pensions as compensation for VAT on fuel.

From April 1996 there will be £68 extra on the single pensioner rate and £96 extra for pensioner couples. That is more than the whole of the VAT on fuel bills for a significant number of them.

In addition, electricity prices have been falling for many people. Gas prices are to be raised for the first time since 1991, but this will be coupled with discounts for prompt payment which will reduce many peoples' bills.

The House should appreciate that, so far, including the first stage of VAT—the 8 per cent. already in payment—both gas and electricity bills have fallen by 1 per cent. in real terms over the last two years. That real-terms fall is for everybody, before taking into account the package of help for pensioners so far in payment.

The full burden of the tax is, of course, only borne by people of working age who are not receiving means-tested benefits. I have made it quite clear that people of working age cannot expect tax cuts or a reverse of previously announced tax increases this year.

PUBLIC SPENDING

I would like to turn now to the Government's new plans for public spending.

Last year's Budget set a new milestone in the control of public spending. We managed to reduce the control totals that had been set in the previous spending round, by £8 billion over three years, and we reduced general Government expenditure by £15 billion over the same period.

That was a measure of the success of the new system of public expenditure control that we first introduced in 1992. Last year saw the first fruits of the programme of fundamental reviews of all Departments.

The reaction to that new approach was predictable. A welcome from the Government side of the House, criticism and alarmist nonsense from the Labour party and scepticism from the so-called experts who doubted whether those plans could be delivered in practice. In fact, for the current year, 1994-95, the first year after last year's announcement, we expect to do better than the plans that were set and we expect to underspend by more than £1 billion.

At the start of this year's survey, the Cabinet decided that we should also keep within last year's planned totals for 1995-96 and 1996-97 and allow no more than 1 per cent. real growth for 1997-98.

The plans I am about to announce deliver that remit. But it has not been easy. Last year's settlement was extremely tight. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary for his skilful handling of what has been a difficult spending round.

We have been guided by four basic principles this year. First, we have taken advantage of the welcome fall in inflation since the last Budget. Thanks to lower inflation, the price levels that we will be facing in 1995-96 will be 2½ per cent. lower than we expected when we decided on spending plans last year.

We have not let that feed through into a higher level of real resources for Government Departments. We have reduced our cash plans for almost all programmes. Lower inflation needs to be matched in the public sector by lower cash spending.

The second principle is that we have built on the increasingly important role played by private finance. All Government Departments are now looking actively at private finance options for their capital expenditure.

Thirdly, we have focused our search for savings on administrative and running costs, cutting the back office and protecting the front-line delivery of our key public services. Our aim has been to provide a better output of public services, for fewer inputs.

Fourthly, we have taken a close look at the Government's own spending priorities. We have looked for savings on some programmes so that resources can be channelled into the services and policies to which the Government attach most importance.

Private Finance

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) reacted to my mention of private finance. Privatisation and private finance for capital investment are rapidly becoming the chosen method for raising the quality of public services in the majority of countries in every continent in the world. They started in this country. Although the political debate here has been transformed since I first became a Minister, an irritating amount of post-socialist resistance still persists. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East will welcome the news that, fortunately, the Government's private finance initiative remains alive and well and is growing rapidly.

Last year, I announced that a number of transport schemes would go ahead under the private finance initiative. Significant progress has been made—£370 million of private capital has been invested in transport projects in the past two years, with a further £760 million already committed. In addition, £3.5 billion of projects are currently out to competition and the value of contracts placed will steadily build up from a stream to a significant flow. The right hon. Gentleman does not look so cheerful.

The private finance initiative, however, runs wider than transport. There are now more than 50 health projects either approved or completed, bringing more than £100 million of new capital into the national health service. Bids have been received for the first two privately financed prisons and more than £1 billion of information technology projects are now following or considering the private finance route.

In higher education, universities now receive approaching a third of their revenue from the private sector and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 31 October new proposals to make it easier for local authorities to form joint ventures with the private sector.

New projects are constantly emerging as the initiative breaks new ground. Today, I can announce that we are on course to let contracts in 1995 under the private

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finance initiative, leading to around £5 billion of capital investment. We said that we could do it, we introduced it and we are doing it.

Transport

The growing importance of private finance has helped us to find significant savings for the taxpayer in the transport programme. In recent years, there has been a huge increase in public expenditure on the trunk roads and motorway programme which has risen by one half in real terms in the past 10 years. That was essential to tackle traffic bottlenecks and to reduce costs on British industry seeking to get goods to markets at home and abroad.

Now that the main need of the economy is control of public spending and borrowing, we cannot carry on pumping in the same amount of taxpayers' money. We have, therefore, significantly reduced planned public spending on trunk roads and motorways. Even so, public spending on such roads—without taking account of the expected contribution from the private finance initiative—will be considerably higher in real terms than the average level of provision in the 1980s. Rapid progress with private finance of design, build, finance and operate roads will take provision still higher and the first four DBFO schemes will shortly go out to tender.

Private finance will also now play an increasingly major role in London Underground investment. In particular, I am pleased to report that the private finance competition for the provision of a new Northern line train service has proceeded rapidly. My right honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be able to announce a decision very soon.

That, together with future deals, should improve the quality of London Underground investment as well as its quantity. In addition to the contribution from private finance, the plans in the Budget imply total investment in the underground network next financial year of around £1 billion. The Budget also takes account of the key effects expected to arise from rail privatisation, not least the privatisation of Railtrack within the lifetime of this Parliament, as announced by my right hon Friend the Secretary of State for Transport last week.

As has been the case with other privatisations, rail privatisation will bring benefits to passengers from more efficient management bearing down on costs and being more responsive to passenger needs.

Running Costs

Private finance will play an increasingly important role in financing better infrastructure for public services in coming years. I now turn to the need for firm control of the Government's current, as opposed to their capital, spending.

One of our key objectives this year has been to intensify the search for savings on administrative and running costs. My right hon Friend the Chief Secretary joined the Treasury team from the Ministry of Defence, where he played last year a lead role in preparing the defence costs study. That experience served him well.

The success of the defence costs study is just one example—a very successful one—of how key programme objectives can be protected by bearing down on the administrative costs of delivering them. The outcome has been a substantial benefit for the taxpayer and for the front line.

The defence plans in the Budget fully cover the costs of the important equipment orders that the Secretary of State for Defence announced in his statement to the House in July. Indeed, taking account of the changes in inflation since last year, these plans actually allow a slightly higher real terms level of spending than implied by the plans last Budget, accommodating the costs of military redundancies associated with the defence costs study.

Improvements in the efficiency of delivering services is a policy that must apply throughout the public sector. The plans in this Budget reflect the results of a rigorous scrutiny of the Government's own administrative costs. It must be right for modern government to modernise their own management structures and to get their own overhead costs down.

As last year, we have maintained the policy that the pressure from pay and price increases should be met by greater efficiency or other economies. This has already allowed public services to achieve very reasonable pay settlements that reflect low levels of inflation and allow modest increases in real earnings. It is ridiculous to describe this long overdue and sensible practice as a pay freeze.

But, in total, the plans in this Budget are for central Government running costs not to rise in cash terms over the four-year period from 1993-94 to 1997-98 taken as a whole. That represents a real-terms reduction in those running costs of more than 10 per cent. in the cost of government. It is consistent with the civil service White Paper expectation that total civil service staff numbers will fall significantly below 500,000 over the next four years to their lowest levels since the war.

Local Authorities

It is only right that local government should follow central Government and take a similarly tough approach to containing its costs. The Government's proposals for local authorities have been set on that basis. The 1995-96 total standard spending in England will be 2.2 per cent. higher than this year, including provision for community care. That is perfectly reasonable after a year in which provision was far better than local authorities had expected or planned for because of the Government's success in reducing inflation.

As in central Government, local authorities will need to pursue opportunities for savings rigorously. Local authorities have substantial scope for improvements in efficiency, and for other economies. By that means, and by concentrating on their priority areas, they will be able to protect key services. The Government will use their powers to cap excessive local authority budgets should that prove necessary.

My right hon Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will announce the details of the local authority government settlement on Thursday.

Housing

We have managed to find savings in housing capital expenditure, in particular that of the Housing

Corporation. The Government will comfortably exceed their election manifesto commitment on the provision of new social housing up to 1994-95. The new plans will still allow a substantial social housing programme to continue, assisted by the corporation's success in levering in private finance.

Employment

Against the background of steadily falling unemployment, it has also been possible to make economies in the employment programme while still improving the quality of the programmes that are provided. A major reform of training for unemployed adults, based on payment by results, will seek to ensure that more trainees get jobs when they finish their courses.

Social Security

As a result of the announcements in last year's Budget, we are already down the track of a thoroughgoing reform of the social security benefits system. We intend to ensure that it is better targeted on today's real needs and we intend to make it simpler and less susceptible to abuse.

Legislation to reform statutory sick pay and to introduce a new incapacity benefit was enacted in the previous Session. This Session will see the passage of the Jobseeker's Allowance Bill and a major Pensions Bill to modernise the framework for both state and occupational provision.

Tomorrow, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will announce the details of the next phase of this programme of reform. I wish to mention now three of the initiatives that he will announce, from which I expect substantial public spending savings to flow.

First, there is housing benefit. My right hon. Friend will announce tomorrow a reform of the arrangements through which the general taxpayer subsidises local authorities' payment of housing benefit to the tenants of private landlords. The effect of this will be that authorities will not be fully reimbursed if they pay housing benefit on rents that are significantly above the average for the area and the type of property. Local authorities will, therefore, scale back the benefit they actually pay in line with the new restriction on central Government subsidy. They will, however, retain discretion and have some funding to pay the full rent in individual circumstances which they consider justify it.

The previous arrangements meant that neither the landlord nor the tenant usually had any incentive to negotiate a lower rent because housing benefit would usually pay the rent in full—*[Interruption.]* This has had the inevitable effect, as seems to be acknowledged, of driving up rents and public expenditure—*[Interruption.]* I see that that is a welcome reform. At the moment, the social security budget sometimes pays the rent in full in cases where the rent is far above the average rent for property of that type in the neighbourhood. In future, people on housing benefit will have an incentive to make the same judgments about what they can afford as people who have to pay all their own rent. The system will no longer be a prey to the unscrupulous landlord. The reform will take effect from October 1995. Existing claimants remaining in the same property where they live now will not be affected. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be glad to hear the encouraging response from Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]*

Let me see how far I can take the Labour party down the process of social security reform. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will announce tomorrow further measures to limit support for mortgage interest through the income support system to constrain the cost to the taxpayer and to minimise the distortion to work incentives.

Most people are readily able to insure their mortgage interest payments, if they wish, against periods of sickness or unemployment and many people already do so. For new mortgages taken out by people of working age after October 1995, support will not normally be available for the first nine months, although my right hon. Friend will consult on the precise arrangements, including different treatment for circumstances in which insurance might not be available. There will also be some scaling back of support for existing borrowers.

One reason why insurance has not become more widespread is that the taxpayer has picked up the interest bill too readily in too many cases. This change will give more borrowers an incentive to ensure that the mortgage costs of people who are temporarily unable to keep up with their payments will be met by the borrowers themselves and by lenders, rather than by the taxpayer.

Thirdly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will also announce a major intensification of the war against fraud in the social security system. We are already saving £700 million a year from existing efforts. The further measures on fraud, which include a major project to pay benefits in post offices by electronic means rather than by paper transactions, will, at a cost of £300 million, save another £2½ billion over the next three years.

The Government know that firm control of public spending and reduced public borrowing are essential to sustained recovery, prosperity and jobs. We will also show that strong control of public spending overall can be combined with improvements in key public services selected as Government priorities.

Education

The Department for Education provision will increase in real terms by almost 1 per cent. next year. The Government are intent on extending their significant achievements in education, and we have also managed to find savings in parts of the education programme. Almost one in three young people is going to university, compared with one in eight in 1979. That is a remarkable achievement. A period of consolidation to secure quality and standards is now required after a period of very rapid expansion. However, the overall package of student grants and loans will once again increase in line with inflation. There will be continued growth in student numbers in further education, again to record levels. The new plans also allow for further growth in the number of grant-maintained schools and for additional capital spending in our schools.

Home Office

The Government continue to attach high priority to spending on law and order. The new plans for the Home Office increase provision for the police by 3 per

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cent. in 1995-96. Major efficiency improvements from the Sheehy proposals will enable more police officers to be released for front-line duties. The reforms to be implemented next year will give chief constables much greater freedom to manage their own increased resources and to respond more effectively to the public's priorities.

Single Regeneration Budget

As a former Minister with responsibilities for the inner cities, I am pleased to say that within the single regeneration budget we have found extra resources to support new projects in our rundown urban areas and elsewhere. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be providing for more projects under the current bidding round and he will be able to conduct a second round of bidding with funds starting in 1996-97. In all, there will be more than £800 million for new regeneration projects over the next three years.

Health

That brings me—finally, on public spending—to the Government's plans for the health service. With inflation so much lower than expected this year than last, it would have been perfectly possible for us to reduce our previous plans for health and still to meet our manifesto commitment to real growth in resources for the national health service each year. Due to the high priority that we give to the national health service, we have decided not to claw back the unexpected provision in this way. Instead, the health service will keep the unplanned bonus that it has had this year from lower inflation. I shall spell out what that means. Next year, spending on the national health service will grow by £1.3 billion. That is 1 per cent. growth in real terms against the ½ per cent. increase that we originally allowed for in last year's Budget. It will come on top of a real increase of 3¼ per cent. this year because of the drop of inflation.

So, in addition to the extra money from the taxpayer, the health service continues to benefit from the improvements in performance flowing from the Government's reforms. Further improvements in efficiency are expected to release at least £600 million extra for patient care next year. All those savings, including gains from rationalising management and administration costs throughout the Department and throughout the national health service, are ploughed back into patient care. Those extra funds, on top of the extra provision that I have announced, which are achieved from savings coming from a variety of measures, have only one thing in common. All those savings—therefore all the extra funds—have so far been opposed by the Labour party.

All this—the extra provision and the savings—means that next year we shall all benefit from an even better financed health service, which has seen real increases in spending on it by the taxpayers in every year since the Government took power. It will be delivering even better standards of patient care, with further improvements in patients charter standards, and more progress in reducing waiting times.

HELPING PEOPLE BACK TO WORK

At the beginning of this speech I said that the combination of healthy growth and low inflation we are now seeing is virtually unprecedented in Britain's recent past. Few doubt the strength of the recovery. But everyone in touch with the real world knows that the benefits of recovery have yet to feed through to many people in this country. Unemployment remains far too high.

Thanks to the labour market and trade union reforms of the 1980s, unemployment did start falling at a much earlier stage of this recovery than it had in recent previous recoveries and, unlike other European countries, we have resisted pressures to add social costs on top of wage costs for our employers.

Unemployment will, of course, fall further as the economy recovers. But I have long believed, as my panel of independent forecasters points out and as is now widely recognised, that demand expansion on its own is not enough to produce a sufficient fall in unemployment. We have to do more to reduce unemployment in ways which are consistent with sustained growth and low inflation.

I have been making speeches on this and giving lectures ever since I became Chancellor on the need to ensure that we do not have recovery without jobs. As well as giving speeches, I have already done something about it. In my last Budget, I did three things.

I announced measures to make it harder for people who are quite capable of working to stay on benefit without looking for a job. That is at the heart of the job seeker's allowance. I made it easier for people with children to take jobs, by introducing a child care allowance into family credit. I made it cheaper for employers to give people work, by cutting the lower rates of employers' national insurance contributions by a full percentage point.

In this Budget I want to do more on all three fronts. We must get people back into work and out of dependency on benefit. We must reduce—not increase—the cost to employers of employing people who have been out of work. I aim to ensure that we do not have a class of people in this country who are excluded from economic activity.

Incentives for Employers

The first step is to encourage employers to look more favourably on people who have been out of work for some time.I can announce, therefore, a wholly new incentive to encourage employers to take on more people who have been unemployed for two years or more. In future, employers will get a full national insurance rebate for up to a year after taking on such a person. That will provide employers with an important new reason to give a second chance to someone who has been unemployed for some length of time—*[Interruption.]* Yes, but the Opposition were very late on the scene on which we have been working for a long time and they have got most of it wrong. I am going to announce a package which will show the Opposition how to do it.

This first whole-year national insurance contribution holiday will run from April 1996. More immediately, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment intends to develop new pilots under the

Workstart scheme. This offers employers a grant to recruit people who have been unemployed for over two years. There will be around 5,000 new job opportunities. Experience with existing pilots that we have been running suggests that the scheme helps to break down the prejudice which can blight the long-term unemployed.

I know that some employers will still worry that people who have been unemployed for a long time may have lost the habit of working. We introduced the work trials scheme to counter that. It allows unemployed people to try out a new job for three weeks, without losing their benefit. They will keep their benefit entitlement. It costs employers nothing for those three weeks and it lets employers see for themselves whether the people they take on can be relied on to hold down a steady job. The record so far is impressive. A large number of people are kept on at the end of the trial period. So I propose to expand the scheme to provide 150,000 job opportunities over the next three years.

In addition, I propose a further cut in the lower rates of employers' national insurance contributions for every employee. From next April, they will come down by another 0.6 per cent. This will reduce the cost to employers of providing lower-paid jobs by another £230 million in 1995-96, on top of the reduction of £940 million carried through from 1994-95. It must make sense to keep on cutting the burden on employers who create jobs and in particular on those employers who provide jobs for less skilled people. The Labour party keeps wanting to go in the opposite direction by increasing the costs on employers with a minimum wage and a social chapter.

Incentives to look for work

I need to match these incentives to employers with measures to ensure that people get the rewards to which they are entitled when they move from unemployment into work.

First, we need to ensure that people are kept in touch with the labour market and do not stay on benefit unnecessarily. The job seeker's allowance will reinforce the link between claiming benefit and looking for work. It will be supported by an unprecedented range of measures to help the unemployed.

One of our existing measures, Community Action, was due to finish next year. My right honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has decided to extend the scheme in revised form. It will provide work experience and a route back to jobs for around 40,000 long-term unemployed people each year.

We introduced Restart when I was Minister of Employment in 1986. That required people who had been on benefit for a long time to come in for an interview and advice to help to get back into work. It gave positive help to many people and got many back into work. It also revealed that some could not be bothered to come for the interview. They lost benefit.

For young unemployed people, we have been experimenting with similar schemes called Workwise and 1-2-1. We propose to extend them nationwide.

Helping employees with the transition to work

But it has to be worth people's while to take jobs. I also intend to introduce new measures to ensure that people are not deterred by genuine, short-term financial problems when they try to move from unemployment into work.

Anyone moving from benefit into a low-paid job is likely to be better off, but it may not seem like it to the man or woman concerned. The first thing that happens when a person takes a new job is that income support disappears, and with it all help with the cost of housing and their council tax. In due course, the person in the new job may be entitled to family credit and housing benefit. But at the moment it can be hard to find out how much that will be, or when it will come.

In the meantime, the person concerned has all the expenses of getting to work — buying clothes or tools, travelling to work, and so on. Time and time again, I have had people tell me that this is a major deterrent to taking a job and that they really cannot afford to take a job because of these gaps in the system. I have a number of measures to help.

I propose to speed up the payment of family credit, so that anyone who takes a job can be sure of getting the benefit to which they are entitled, and getting it quickly.

I propose to enable people who take a job to go on getting the same help with their rent and council tax as they had on income support, for their first four weeks in the new job. I propose to speed up the payment thereafter of housing benefit, so they can be quite sure where they stand at the end of the four weeks.

I propose to exempt from tax the back-to-work bonus which my right honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced in October. That will give people who have been unemployed, but have managed to do a bit of part-time work while receiving their benefit, a lump sum when they leave benefit and take a job.

I also propose to expand the number of grants available to people who take jobs, to cover their start-up costs. These are known as jobfinder's grants. I propose to make available around 25,000 grants of an average of £200 for those who have been unemployed for more than two years.

Family Credit

Family credit has been an important and effective way of encouraging lone parents and couples with children to take employment. By providing top-up benefit for those in work it makes it worth while to give up unemployment and benefit dependency. At the moment it helps half a million people. Last year, I improved family credit by announcing the new child care allowance which was introduced in October.

I now intend to give low-paid and unemployed people with families an incentive to take full-time work. The existing structure of family credit strongly favours part-time rather than full-time working. But the majority of the people who have been unemployed long term are people who need to find full-time work.

I therefore intend to introduce a £10 a week premium for full-time workers on family credit to give a new incentive to take full-time work rather than stay on benefit. This will also give a substantial boost to the incomes of 345,000 low-paid families with children.

[Mr. Clarke]

But childless couples and single people account for two thirds of the long-term unemployed. These people, of course, cannot, at present, claim family credit. I would like to examine whether introducing a new in-work benefit for childless people would be effective.

This is obviously a very big step and I have agreed with my right honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security that we should try it out on an experimental basis. We intend to test run a new benefit through a pilot scheme covering 20,000 people. If the pilot shows that the benefit helps to get childless couples and single people back into work we will then consider introducing a national scheme.

I have also been impressed by an imaginative scheme pioneered by the training and enterprise council in Lincolnshire. This helps people build up full-time work by parcelling together a number of part-time jobs. The scheme is known in Lincolnshire as Jobmatch. I propose to extend it to help up to 3,000 people a year.

Overall, these measures constitute an extremely important and carefully thought-out package of support for unemployed people. It is no longer credible for some people to campaign for reductions in long-term unemployment and to reduce benefit dependency without having effective policies to deal with it. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?] It comes into effect steadily from this Budget. The details will be announced by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Social Security. There will be a social security statement, in the usual way.

The days of priming the pump to cut unemployment are long since past. The Government are building reforms on reforms to remove at last the distortions and anomalies from the benefit system which discourage so many unemployed people from taking jobs.

This package aims to lift people from dependency into work and to smooth the transition from out-of-work benefits to modest in-work benefits. The measures will work because they are carefully put together and they are affordable and because they are being introduced at a time of strong economic recovery based on our sound economic policies so that more jobs are becoming available.

They are a set of effective policies to tackle the big problem of structural unemployment which faces the whole western world, and I believe that we are ahead of other countries in tackling it. I am sure that they will eventually gain widespread support—even from those who have no practicable ideas of their own. *[Interruption.]*

Opposition Members—I hear from their interruptions—still do not understand. If we look to the minimum wage, if we look to the social chapter, if we load costs on those employers who might otherwise create low-paid jobs, we will make matters worse. We are giving incentives to create jobs and making the transition from unemployment to work easier. We started work before the Borrie commission. We have come up with better recommendations and the Borrie commission and the Labour party have a long way to go before they even understand how the system works.

TAX

Let me turn now to my proposals for taxation. Happily, in this year's Budget, I have no need to raise revenue overall in order to secure the public finances. The action in last year's Budget, combined with a firm approach to public spending, will see to that. Nor—as I have already made clear publicly—are significant tax cuts justified this year. But I do have a number of proposals to ensure that we raise the necessary revenue in ways which do least damage to the economy while helping vulnerable groups.

ANTI-AVOIDANCE

I am delighted that there now appears to be a wide political consensus in the House on the need to close loopholes and to prevent the artificial avoidance of taxation. There is, I have to say, in some quarters a tendency to exaggerate the extent of tax avoidance by including proposals, as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) always does, that would actually impose extra taxes on legitimate business under the guise of a crackdown on so-called loopholes.

I have said before and demonstrated before that we are no friends to the tax avoidance industry. Last year, I announced a number of measures to close genuine loopholes, raising £2 billion over three years.

This year, I intend to go further by tackling the artificial avoidance of VAT on property transactions and share issues, by stopping the purchase of companies simply to make use of their surplus management expenses and by preventing tax avoidance through operations with discounted securities.

In total, the anti-avoidance measures in this Budget will yield an additional £1.5 billion in the next three years. We will continue to close down genuine loopholes wherever we may find them.

VEHICLE EXCISE DUTIES AND VAT ON CARS

I have some major proposals on vehicle excise duty this year. Few things annoy honest motorists more than knowing that many people still drive without a tax disc and waste the time of police and the authorities in trying to track them down.

Earlier this year my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Transport announced that the Government intended to move to continuous licensing. That means licensing on possession rather than use of a vehicle. We will be issuing a consultation paper setting out how we intend to do this. The move is designed to combat evasion and help fight crime by enabling the police accurately to check the ownership of vehicles.

I can, however, reassure the House that we will not seek to disadvantage those motorists, including classic car owners, who do not pay vehicle excise duty now because their cars are genuinely off the road.

I also intend to bring up to date the system of concessions and exemptions from vehicle excise duty. The existing highly complex arrangements go back, in some cases, to before the second world war and have little relevance to the modern world.

The number of different concessionary classes will be reduced from 132 to nine, a simplified and sensible handful. This will come into effect from 1 July 1995 and will yield about £30 million a year.

But the House will be pleased to hear that special treatment will still apply to cars for disabled drivers and emergency vehicles. Moreover, I have also decided that accessories for the disabled fitted in company cars will no longer be taxed as a benefit-in-kind from next April.

I propose to increase the rate of vehicle excise duty for cars—the tax disc—by £5, to £135. But to avoid adding to industry's costs, lorry duty rates will again remain unchanged.

I propose to introduce a significant change to one part of VAT relating to cars. Since 1992 taxi and car hire firms, unlike most businesses, have been able to recover the VAT on their cars. In response to industry's concerns about market distortion, I propose to extend this to cars bought by any business wholly for business use. This will mainly affect leased cars, with consequential changes to their VAT treatment when sold or leased on. The change should be revenue neutral in the long run, but will cost £140 million in the first year.

Fuel Duties

In my last Budget, I announced that road fuel duties would increase on average by at least 5 per cent. in real terms in future Budgets. This year, I intend to stick to that commitment. It is an essential part of the plans that I set out last year to deliver healthy public finances as quickly as possible and it forms an important part of the Government's strategy to return carbon dioxide emissions to their 1990 level in the year 2000. From 6 pm tonight petrol taxes will therefore go up by 2½p a litre for both leaded and unleaded petrol, taking into account the effect of VAT.

In recent years there has been a small differential between the duty on diesel and the duty on unleaded petrol. The differential is becoming difficult to justify in economic, health or environmental terms. I therefore propose to tax diesel at the same rate as unleaded petrol. This means an increase of about 3p a litre on diesel.

I also propose to increase the duty on gas oil and fuel oil by ½p a litre, which will raise £70 million a year. I propose, however, to freeze the duty on road fuel gases.

Tobacco

I turn next to duties on tobacco. The Government are committed to reducing smoking. I continue to believe that higher tax is the most effective and fair means of doing so.

Last year I said that I intended to increase tobacco duties by at least 3 per cent. in real terms on average a year. I intend to stick to that commitment today.

Tax on cigarettes will therefore increase by 10p on a packet of 20 from 6 o'clock tonight. Duty on other tobacco products will go up by a similar proportion.

Alcohol

The single European market has brought real benefits to British industry, through an expanded market for business, increased competition, reduced bureaucracy at frontiers and cheaper transport costs. These have all greatly benefited our consumers. But one of the most widely publicised other effects of the single market has been the increase in legitimate cross-border shopping in alcohol and tobacco, and in smuggling.

Both of these have inevitably meant some loss of duty to the Exchequer, pressures on the British drinks industry and some damage to British business. No Chancellor can remain unmoved in the face of this, but nor can any Chancellor simply adopt popular measures to cut taxes on alcohol which would threaten the Revenue and require taxes on other goods to be raised.

In the longer term, the solution is for the Government to work with our European partners to bring duties more in line. The forthcoming review of Europe-wide minimum excise duties gives us the opportunity to make a start on that. This year, pending that, I have once again listened to the concerns of the industries. I propose no increase in the duties on beer, table wine and spirits. This will mean that the proportion of the cost of an alcoholic drink represented by tax in this country will continue to fall. Ten years ago 37 per cent. of the price of a pint of beer was tax. Today it is only 30 per cent.

Betting and gaming duties

The Government also intend to modernise and deregulate betting and gaming. This process is, in my opinion, welcome and much overdue. The coverage of taxation must also keep up to date with the modern world. I therefore propose to widen the coverage of gaming machine licence duty to cover amusement machines such as arcade video games. It is anomalous that we should tax amusement machines with prizes, but not those without. I am sure that this measure will be welcomed by many parents, although perhaps not by all children.

Gaming machine licence duty has been increased only once since 1987. I propose to restore its real value to the 1987 level, but at the same time to allow payment by instalments. Those measures will raise about £60 million in a full year.

In 1991, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames announced a reduction in pools betting duty of 2½ per cent. Since then, this has helped to fund the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage and I have now reviewed the reduction. We have agreed that it should continue for a further five years, provided that the pools companies also continue to fund sport and the arts at their present level. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] Many of my hon. Friends appreciate, as I do, that the foundation continues to support a number of worthwhile projects to encourage participation in sport and the arts. I am delighted that the pools companies have generously reaffirmed their commitment.

Business taxes

A strong and thriving business community is the only way to ensure a strong and thriving economy. The Government have a record of achievement in developing the tax system in ways which improve competitiveness, sharpen incentives, simplify administration and encourage the small and medium-sized businesses which are so important to the future development of the economy.

[Mr. Clarke]

I should like to announce a package of measures today which will add further to the strength of British industry. Decisions on many of the measures that I shall be announcing today have been informed by the industrial finance initiative undertaken last year by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury and my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and his predecessor.

Corporation tax and capital allowances

First, I should like to say a few words about corporation tax and capital allowances. We have one of the lowest corporation tax rates in the industrialised world. Low tax rates are good for incentives. They mean that businesses can keep more of their profits to use as they, the businesses, want. Since 1984 we have cut the main corporation tax rate from 52 per cent. to 33 per cent., while scaling back capital allowances to a level broadly matching commercial depreciation.

I have considered again all the calls for increased allowances to encourage investment. They have a simplistic appeal. But I remain firmly of the opinion that increasing capital allowances would distort investment decisions and would not encourage the high-quality investment needed to improve economic performance. A narrower tax base would jeopardise our ability to maintain the low tax rates which have helped to transform British industry over the last decade.

The change from high capital allowances to low rates of corporation tax has been very successful. I propose to maintain that emphasis on low rates for the successful rather than high allowances for all in our system of business taxes. I also have no changes to announce on the rate of advance corporation tax or the value of the tax credit on dividends.

Business rates

I would now like to deal with business rates. We are about to implement the first five-yearly review of valuations of properties for rating purposes. Without those five-yearly reviews the rate base would become hopelessly out of date. The property market has changed a lot over the past five years with wide regional variations. [Hon. Members: "It has gone down."]

As a result of the review, many properties in the south of England will begin to see reductions in their rates bills. Some businesses in the midlands, the north, Scotland and Wales will benefit as well, but others will discover that up-to-date valuations will raise their liability.

I am glad to say that I will be able to continue to find resources to help businesses through this new transition period in the same way as we have been helping business through the transition from the last revaluation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales will announce details of the scheme later today.

But I can tell the House now that increases in bills will be limited to 10 per cent. in any one year for large properties, once adjusted for inflation. Small business properties account for three quarters of those receiving protection.

We have decided to limit real increases for such properties to 7½ per cent. This protection will in part be financed by limiting real reductions in rates bills for large properties to 5 per cent. and for small properties to 10 per cent.

But the revenue from limiting gains is not enough to help those businesses which find themselves worse off as a result of more up-to-date valuations. I have therefore decided to provide assistance of £605 million next year to finance the transitional relief. That is similar to the amount that we are spending on the former transitional relief scheme this year.

ECGD

I laid stress at the beginning of my speech on our improved export performance. We need to build on this and not become complacent. Strong export growth will be essential if healthy recovery is to be sustained.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I have taken a closer look at the services provided by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. We have agreed that a reduction in premiums of around 10 per cent. on average is possible while still protecting taxpayers' interests. This will improve our competitiveness, building on the premium reductions in the past two years.

Furthermore, we have agreed to increase the amount of ECGD cover available to many important developing markets by £300 million for 1997-98. Those measures will provide an added incentive for British exporters to play an even greater role in the most successful and rapidly growing economies in the world.

Landfill tax

As I said earlier, one of my main objectives for the tax system is that it should raise revenue in ways which do the least possible damage to the economy. In some cases, taxes do some good, by helping markets work better and by discouraging harmful or wasteful activities.

Taxes can play an important role in protecting the environment. One major problem is the disposal of waste. I would like to make an announcement today to help tackle the problem.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I will issue shortly a consultation paper setting out details of a new tax to be collected by Customs and Excise on waste disposed in landfill. We propose that a new landfill tax should come into effect in 1996. It should raise several hundred million pounds a year.

But I am determined not to impose additional costs on business overall. I shall therefore be looking at ways to offset the impact of the new tax by making further compensatory reductions in the level of employer national insurance contributions when the new tax is introduced. In brief, I want to raise tax on polluters to make further cuts in the tax on jobs.

Small Businesses

I have more measures to help small businesses in particular. The need to focus on smaller firms with growth potential has been an extremely important theme of the industrial finance initiative. It is absolutely

essential that we have a healthy and vigorous small firms sector for the future economic well-being of the country and to achieve higher levels of employment.

One important way in which we can help small businesses is by encouraging the venture capital industry. A flourishing venture capital industry plays a key role in promoting job creation, innovation and growth. The British venture capital industry has been growing in recent years and I am determined that that growth should continue.

In my Budget last year, I announced the introduction of the enterprise investment scheme and I announced consultation on a possible new venture capital trust scheme and an extension of capital gains tax reinvestment relief. All three measures were aimed at encouraging equity investment in small companies. I want to build on them today.

Enterprise Investment Scheme

The new enterprise investment scheme is now in place, offering tax relief for investment in unquoted trading companies. Over 40 per cent. of the schemes set up so far involve so-called business angels, who want to invest their expertise, as well as their money, in a small, growing business.

That is a good start, but the scheme has some complex rules and I have decided to simplify them. I am also extending capital gains tax reinvestment relief to the enterprise investment scheme, which should increase greatly its attractiveness.

Venture Capital Trusts

I have consulted widely on venture capital trusts and the response has been very positive. I have accepted suggestions for change on some details and I propose to implement the scheme in full. I want to go further by making investment in risk capital even more attractive than I originally contemplated when I announced the consultation period. Investment up to £100,000 a year in new shares in a venture capital trust will offer 20 per cent. up-front income tax relief and capital gains tax reinvestment relief, in addition to tax-free dividends and capital gains. I believe that venture capital trusts will make a successful contribution to filling a gap in our enterprise economy by encouraging more people to become venture capitalists.

The cost of the new scheme is expected to be £150 million next year, rising to £290 million in 1996-97. Of course, those costs have to be based on an estimate of the take-up, but we expect considerable take-up. It could mean that funds of £2½ billion might be raised over the next three years, providing much more investment where it is most needed in our small, growing, technologically advanced and innovative companies.

My proposals go significantly beyond what I first set out 12 months ago. They now put in place an effective and imaginative set of measures aimed at generating equity investment in dynamic, innovative growing businesses. They should be widely welcomed by everyone who understands how a modern free market economy works and how new jobs are created in the modern world. Unlike some hon Members, I do not describe tax reliefs of this kind to stimulate investment in business and enterprise as tax loopholes, which they are usually identified as by the Opposition.

Insolvency reform

During the recent recession businesses, particularly small businesses, were too often being closed down by their creditors and jobs lost before rescue options had been properly explored. Following consultation, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will shortly issue a paper setting out the Government's main conclusions on company rescue procedures in future.

To give management more time to reorder their affairs, we will introduce a 28-day moratorium binding upon all parties. This will give companies a breathing space to assess rescue prospects and come to an arrangement with creditors. We are also consulting further on a mechanism to help substitute equity for debt of firms in administration or receivership. I hope that those measures will contribute further to the creation of a rescue culture, discouraging the needless and wasteful liquidation of businesses that could become sound.

Loan guarantee scheme

The impact of the 1993 changes to the loan guarantee scheme has been encouraging, but its rules are still quite rightly being criticised as too complex. Together with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, I intend to review those rules with a view to making the scheme simpler and more attractive.

Lifting burdens on business

The tax system not only imposes a financial burden on business that pay tax, but a regulatory burden and an overhead cost as well. I want to reduce those burdens on businesses. Simply running PAYE and national insurance contributions is difficult for many small businesses. From next April, I propose to increase by more than 30 per cent. the threshold for businesses to make quarterly rather than monthly payments to the Inland Revenue.

That will benefit around 100,000 employers at a one-off one-year cost of £75 million. That means that nearly two thirds of all employers in the country will now be able to make quarterly payments on their PAYE. I also propose to consult on a move towards annual VAT payments for small traders and to further simplification of VAT accounting.

Furthermore, I intend to improve the administration of the tax system by encouraging closer working between the two revenue departments, the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, as well as closer co-operation between the Inland Revenue and the Contributions Agency. This will all be directed at improving the service offered to businesses seeking to comply with their tax obligations.

I would also like to make some progress towards closer alignment of tax and national insurance. From next April, clearances given by the Inland Revenue concerning non-taxable expenses will also count for national insurance purposes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will give details of this and other measures in his statement tomorrow.

I also intend to raise the registration threshold for VAT to £46,000 tomorrow in line with inflation. This will help a number of the smallest businesses.

[Mr. Clarke]

Finally, I turn to self-assessment. I am publishing today for consultation some details of the remaining legislation for self-assessment. The Inland Revenue has been consulting widely on the changes. The response has been positive and it is a worthwhile reform for which to aim. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and I intend to go ahead with our proposals and aim to keep any burden placed on employers as low as possible.

Taken together, this latest extensive package of tax reliefs and deregulatory measures provide a substantial package of support for the business community. They aim to strengthen British businesses not by intervention, but by easing cashflow problems, cutting back red tape and providing targeted help for small businesses. That is how we maintain our improved business performance, help to sustain the recovery and help to create more jobs.

SAVINGS

Higher savings also have an important role to play in helping sustain growth, by providing additional resources for investment.— *[Interruption.]* I must tell the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that the Budget contains extremely serious proposals to help small businesses, to cut unemployment and to produce all the real improvements in the economy that the people of this country want.

I have already announced measures to encourage savings into unquoted companies. There are two further measures I would like to announce today.

PEPS AND CORPORATE BONDS

Personal equity plans have been very successful since their introduction in 1986. Over £15 billion has been invested in over 4 million plans to date. They have widened share ownership and played an important role in providing finance to industry. I want to take that success further and in particular to widen the type of finance available to industry through PEPs.

I propose that, from next year, people will be able to invest through PEPs in a range of corporate bonds, convertibles and preference shares, and not simply equities. This change is expected to cost £10 million in 1995-96 rising to £40 million in 1997-98.

TESSAs

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister introduced tax exempt special savings accounts—or TESSAs, as they came to be called—it was understood that tax-free interest would be allowed to build up over a five-year period. For some of those accounts, the five-year period will soon be coming to an end.

I have had to consider whether this tax exemption for savings should be extended. TESSAs have been very popular, allowing many people to catch the savings habit and build a nest egg for their future. Over 4 million people have invested over £20 billion since they were first introduced.

Given their success and popularity, I have decided that all or part of the capital accumulated in a TESSA at maturity can be reinvested straight away in a new TESSA. Anyone who wants to continue to save tax-free will therefore be able to do so up to an overall limit of £9,000. This measure will cost £150 million in 1996-97.

INCOME TAX

Finally, I turn from taxation to income tax.

The lower, basic and higher rates of income tax will remain unchanged in 1995-96. However, we can at last begin to benefit from our steady return to healthy public finances. This means that I can fully index the personal allowance, the threshold for higher rate tax, and the income limit for the age-related allowance.

I have been able to provide some additional help in two important areas. First, I want to do a little bit more for pensioners. I propose to increase the age-related personal allowance by more than indexation. The allowances for everyone aged 65 and over will be increased by £430. Nearly 3 million pensioners will gain from this, at a cost of £200 million in a full year.

Secondly, I also propose to widen the 20p lower band to £3,200. That increase is twice the amount necessary for indexation for inflation. One in five of all taxpayers will now only pay tax at the lowest rate of 20p.

The tax measures that I am announcing in this Budget—all the tax measures that I have described—reduce revenue by £1 billion in 1995-96, but that is because I have had to provide £605 million, as I have said, for the transitional relief for business rate payers. I have said many times that I would like to go further and that I will in due course go further. Conservative Members are tax cutters by instinct. But I have also made it clear over and over again that tax cuts can come only when we can afford them and when it is in the interests of our industrial economy that we should make them.

That means two things. We have to continue to improve further our long-term economic performance. That is why in my Budget today I have introduced numerous measures—boring the hon. Member for Bolsover—to strengthen the economy and make sure that recovery is sustained and that we become a powerful manufacturing and industrial economy.

The second requirement is firm control of public spending.

PUBLIC SPENDING AGGREGATES

All my efforts to help businesses and help the unemployed will be to no avail if I did not keep a firm grip on public spending.

I have already dealt with spending by each Department. But I have not yet described what will happen to public spending overall as a result of our decisions. Last year's spending round delivered substantial cuts in overall public spending. This year's has not been easy because of that.

Public spending control is not only about controlling costs. It is about choice of priorities. That is the language of politics.

Within this year's settlement, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and I have succeeded in producing real increases in resources for priority programmes such as the national health service and the police service.

We have also managed to protect the delivery of public services generally by focusing our search for savings on administrative costs.

We have avoided our tight settlement last year being turned into a wasteful one by ensuring that success in lowering inflation does not simply increase the volume of spending on programmes.

I am glad to tell the House that that approach has allowed us to make overall savings which are even greater than those achieved last year.

Last year, we managed to reduce the control total by £8 billion over the three years. This year we have done a bit better—not 10, not 15, not 20, but another £24 billion off the control total over the next three years on top of last year's reductions.

Last year we reduced public spending plans so as to reduce general Government expenditure by £15 billion over a three-year period. This year, on top of last year's reductions, we will reduce general Government expenditure by £28 billion. That is a total reduction in Government expenditure over the four years covered by my two Budgets of £43 billion.

Those savings have allowed me to reduce my projection for the public sector borrowing requirement. Taking into account the tax and public spending measures, I now expect to be able to reduce borrowing from £30 billion to £21½ billion in 1995-96, from the previously forecast £21 billion to £13 billion in 1996-97, and from £12 billion to £5 billion the year after that. This reduced borrowing should provide an added stimulus to business confidence, strengthen the recovery further and give us the healthy public finances that we need to put our economy and our economic policy on course.

CONCLUSION

This Budget keeps Britain firmly on track for real economic growth that can last. This Budget concentrates on strengthening British businesses. This Budget will help to create more jobs. And it will lay the foundations for sustained rises in prosperity. I commend it to the House.

Provisional Collection of Taxes

Motion made, and Question,

That, pursuant to section 5 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968, provisional statutory effect shall be given to the following motions:—

(a) Tobacco products (rates) (motion No. 6);

(b) Hydrocarbon oil (rates) (motion No. 7);

(c) Vehicle excise duty (rates) (motion No. 12)—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50 (Ways and Means Motions), and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I now call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to move the motion entitled "Amendment of the law". It is on that motion that the unified Budget debate will take place today and on succeeding days. The remaining motions will not be put until the end of the Budget debate next week, and they will then be decided without debate. After the Finance Bill has been brought in, the House will be invited to dispose of proceedings on a motion dealing with public expenditure, which will have been debated along with the Budget resolutions.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That is it expedient to amend the law with respect to the national Debt and public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description of services of whatever description.—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

4.57 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I intend to deal with my response to the Budget in three parts: first, its effect on living standards; secondly, the degree to which it reduces social injustice and cuts unemployment; and, thirdly, its impact on the long-term economic strength of the country.

We have seen the reaction—the cheers—from hon. Members on the Conservative Benches, but I suspect that there will be two distinct views on the Budget. One will be the Conservative politician's view and the other will be the view in the homes, workplaces and streets of this country, because whatever is said by the Chancellor, this Budget will go down in history as the VAT-on-fuel Budget.

Let me deal straight away—*[Interruption.]* It only shows how out of touch the Conservative party is if Conservative Members do not think that the question that people are asking, and will be asking tonight, is, why did the Chancellor not take the chance to live up to his election promise.

Let me deal straight away with the Chancellor's compensation proposals. Let us just see how generous they really are. As I understand it, there are only two parts. First, there are the social fund cold weather payments, which will apply, of course, only when the temperature is very low and only to certain groups of people. There are many groups to whom that payment will not apply at all.

As for the home energy efficiency scheme, let us make it clear exactly how much it amounts to. It amounts to £10 million, to be set against the £2.7 billion that the Chancellor is raising from value added tax. Furthermore, he announced what he described as very generous retirement pension help. I think I am right in saying that that is only the normal indexation to the retail prices index, plus the compensation already announced. Even the extension of help for old-age pensioners which the Chancellor announced earlier amounts, on average, to about 10p a week, or £6 a year. How can that possibly compensate for the enormous rise in VAT?

Next April, everyone's fuel bills will increase by 10 per cent., on top of the price rises and the 8 per cent. VAT already levied. Let us remind Conservative Members—indeed, we will not cease to remind them—that they

[Mr. Tony Blair]

fought the last general election on a specific pledge that they would never raise VAT. They have broken that pledge, and they will never be trusted on tax again.

Let me tell Conservative Members that the Opposition will provide the House with a chance to speak for the people of this country. When we table an amendment allowing hon. Members to vote on the VAT rise, we will challenge all members of the Conservative party—both Conservative parties—to keep the promise to the electorate on which they were elected. If they break that promise, the country will have been warned that the Conservative party imposed VAT on fuel and power when it promised that it would not, and that it cannot be trusted not to impose VAT on food, children's clothing, books and papers if it is ever elected again.

That, however, is not the end of the tax rises that the Chancellor did not mention in his Budget. Next April, mortgage tax relief will be cut to 15 per cent., which is another breach of a specific manifesto pledge; moreover, the married couple's allowance is to fall. The Chancellor did not mention that either. Car and home insurance taxes are to rise—and all that will come on top of last year's and this year's taxes. In two years, the average British family will have experienced a "sting" amounting to nearly £1,000 a year—7p on the standard rate of income tax. That is the betrayal that the British people will never forget.

In many of the interviews that the Chancellor has given recently, in what used to be described as Budget purdah, he has been honest enough to confess that he has "delivered very little to Mr. and Mrs. Smith up and down the country." I believe that that is a reference to what Conservative central office calls "the elusive feel-good factor", which was mentioned in the now notorious Maples report.

I shall tell Conservative Members why there is no feel-good factor. I shall tell them why Mr. and Mrs. Smith do not feel good. Mr. and Mrs. Smith feel bad about what the Government have done. They feel bad because the mortgage tax relief has been cut by a Government who promised that it would not be cut; they feel bad because it costs more to drive, to insure their car or home and to take a holiday; they feel bad because they must pay the VAT on fuel, and they feel sickened that their elderly relatives must pay it, too.

There is a real world out there, and it is a mile away from what the Chancellor described. It is a world of mass unemployment, temporary contracts and enforced part-time working. That is the world in which people live, and these are the tax rises that will hit them next year. It is a world in which one job is often not enough to make ends meet—a world in which living standards will fall as a result of this Budget, in which crime and the fear of crime have risen, in which the transport system has ceased to serve people and in which the national health service has been sacrificed on the altar of the free market. As living standards have fallen, people have seen the results of social decay and injustice all around them.

Let me now deal with the Chancellor's so-called "Budget for jobs" measures. Let us analyse them, and see just how much they amount to when balanced with the problems. The Chancellor talked of a deprived underclass; I believe that many people hold the Government responsible for the 15 years in which that underclass has come into being. He claimed that his measures were very generous. Let me tell him that his national insurance holiday—after two years of unemployment—is what the Opposition asked for, but we asked for it to be granted after one year.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Labour welcomes it.

Mr. Blair: Of course we welcome it, but why did the Chancellor not adopt the other alternative that we proposed—a proper tax rebate on national insurance, and one for employers, which would have allowed us to return a substantial number of the long-term unemployed to work?

The Chancellor said that there had been a big expansion of community action. I understand that 57,000 people are involved in the scheme this year and that next year the number will be reduced to 40,000. The only increase is on last year's plans. Furthermore, I think I am right in saying that the unemployed people who will be assisted will be assisted from a reduced budget. A press release has just been issued by the Department of unemployment—I mean the Department of Employment—*[Laughter.]* That was, I think, an entirely justifiable slip. The press release states:

> "We will increase the number of unemployed people who get jobs as a result of the programme from a reduced budget".

The Chancellor's generous help does not appear, on analysis, to be quite as generous as he said. On any basis, the problem of the long-term unemployed will remain.

The Chancellor says that he cannot find more money to deal with that problem. Let me tell him one or two things that he could have done. He said today that he could deal with certain loopholes—the loopholes that he used to dismiss so abusively in years gone by. Now, he can suddenly find £1.5 billion over three years—I think that that was the figure.

Let me tell the Chancellor about some of the other loopholes that he could have closed. Why could he not act against the abuse of executive share options? Why could he not withdraw tax relief for private medical insurance, into which £100 million goes each year? Let me tell the Chancellor—this illustrates the choice that must be made between the two parties—that that in itself would have been enough to kick-start a proper programme such as the one that we have described for the long-term unemployed.

Because of offshore trusts and the abuse of inheritance tax, ordinary families are being penalised while those at the top of the income scale are not. The same applies to abuses in the privatised utilities. The national grid was valued at £1.5 billion; it is now worth £4.5 billion. That increase has not been earned. It is a windfall increase, of the same order as the current salary increases at the top of the income scale.

At the bottom of the heap, owing to long-term unemployment, are families with children who are becoming so poor that in certain areas mortality rates are rising. Some of our children are suffering from malnutrition. We believe that, while there exists a single possibility of raising money properly by ending abuses, it is intolerable for the Budget to leave gross abuses of the tax system unchecked, or to refuse to ensure that its burdens and advantages are more fairly distributed when families are living on or near the breadline.

The injustice, however, is not just at the expense of the poor. One of the most interesting reports published in the past couple of weeks was produced by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, and it dealt with the impact of tax changes on ordinary families between 1985 and 1995. Using that period is being generous to the Government, because it leaves out the VAT increases that the Government introduced in 1979 in breach of their promise not to do so.

What is shown by the 10 years, 1985 to 1995? That is what we have made all the sacrifices for. It shows that the bottom 40 per cent. of the population have lost as a result of the tax changes and a further 20 per cent. have barely gained. So, a majority have either lost or stayed still and it is only the top 10 per cent. who have gained substantial sums of money. They have gained over five times the amount of the next percentage down. That is what has happened, despite the huge proceeds from the sale of oil and assets which, taken together, amount to £8,000 per family in Britain. That money could have been given to families and could have been put in the building society and they would have done better than they have done out of the Government.

What of the final test—the long-term economic strength of the country? It is true that some of the economic indicators look up. I must tell Conservative Members that I do not believe that anyone in the country gives them much credit for any recovery that there is, but even this Government could not keep the country in recession for ever.

It is true that borrowing is substantially down, but let us not forget who put us in financial chaos in the first place. Now is the time to look at the Government's record in perspective. After all, they have had nearly 16 years—not 16 weeks or 16 months—to get it right.

At the start of the 1980s, the Conservative party's economic promise was based on four elements: first, it would cut unemployment; secondly, it would deliver competent economic management; thirdly, it would improve public services through privatising and commercialising; and, fourthly, greater wealth at the top would trickle down to the rest and reduce poverty. Some Conservative Members still believe in that, but the country does not believe in it any more.

Sixteen years on, let me give the Government some inescapable facts—what might be called killer facts. Unemployment is up, we have had the two worst recessions in living memory, public services are weaker and people are fed up with privatisation. Although there have been massive gains for those at the top, middle income Britain faces a 7p rise in the basic rate of income tax, and poverty and inequality have hugely increased.

The economic strategy for the future is not that which they have pursued in the past. The real test of the Budget is how we rebuild our economy, equip our people and our industry and give them the security and confidence to prosper. The Budget was silent on how to invest in our people at school and at work, to motivate them, extend their potential and treat them fairly as proper partners in the enterprise.

We must expand and modernise our industry, renew our infrastructure, harness and use for all the country the benefits of new technology, regenerate economic activity in areas such as the inner cities, the coal communities and shipbuilding communities, which have been hit by structural change, reduce inequality and provide a more unified and cohesive society. That is the agenda of the 1990s. It is an agenda not of crude market dogma but of partnership for the future. That is what the people of the country want the Budget to do. They want help with the problems that they really face in the real world, not what Conservative politicians say.

We can now see ever more clearly the dividing lines on which the next election will be fought—Labour as the party of people against the Tories as the party of privilege; Labour as the party of investment against the Conservatives as the party of waste and high unemployment; Labour as the party of social justice against the Tories as the party of social decay; and Labour as the party of strong public services against the Conservatives as the party of privatised dogma. Those are the choices that the country faces and, after today's Budget, more than ever before people will turn to Labour.

5.14 pm

Sir David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on his second Budget speech. I am afraid that I cannot extend my congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition. At his party conference recently, he had a great deal to say about new Labour. This afternoon, we heard nothing more than old Bolsover from him. There is nothing very new about the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

Like last year's speech, my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget speech was commendably brief. No doubt, to some extent his speech will be condemned by the media as rather dull, but I believe that it was right in the circumstances. I must confess that I like some of the measures that he introduced more than others. None the less, his basic Budget judgment has been right and is sound.

My right hon. and learned Friend announced further help with VAT for those on state benefits. That is the additional help that he promised last year. We will, of course, have an opportunity to look at the detail tomorrow, but as my right hon. and learned Friend said, it means that those at work will be paying VAT on fuel and the pensioners will not.

There has been great hypocrisy about this issue. The effect of VAT on domestic fuel has been grossly exaggerated. During the past 12 months, the retail prices index has increased by less than it has for many years and that index includes the effect of the increase of VAT on domestic fuel.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir David Knox: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman at this stage.

Mr. McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point, please?

Sir David Knox: Yes.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman supports the Government's decision to impose VAT on fuel, but he is making no comment about the fact that VAT is imposed not just on the cost of the fuel but on the standing charges as well, which have been increasing dramatically. So, by paying VAT on the standing charge as well as on the cost

[Mr. McCartney]

of the fuel, pensioners are having to pay a double tax. That is leading to some pensioners having to pay more on standing charges and VAT than the cost of the fuel itself. What does the hon. Gentleman intend to do about that?

Sir David Knox: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman for an intervention, not for a speech. He knows as well as anyone else that it was always intended that VAT would be imposed on the whole bill. The hon. Gentleman also knows that, if it did not happen that way, the whole system would be open to abuse. We would probably find that if VAT had not been put on the whole bill, the standing charge would have comprised most of the cost on fuel bills.

Before being interrupted, I said that the effect of VAT on domestic fuel has been grossly exaggerated. I said that the retail prices index has gone up by less in the past year than it has for a long time and includes the effect of VAT on domestic fuel. I understand that the Labour party wants to impose some sort of tax on domestic fuel at some stage. I cannot really see the difference in effect between the Labour party's tax and VAT.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals to help the unemployed. I have always taken the view that the principal help for the unemployed is through sensible demand management. However, demand management is not enough on its own and other measures are undoubtedly needed, particularly to help the long-term unemployed who have specific problems in returning to work.

I welcome also the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend chose not to increase the duties on beer, wine and spirits. I should have preferred it if he had managed to reduce the duties. Many publicans and others in this country face real problems with people bringing in cheap alcohol from other European Union countries, creating unfair competition for British publicans and others. I hope, therefore, that European Union negotiations to equalise rates throughout the Union will be pursued with great vigour in the months ahead.

I am not so sure about the petrol duty increase which was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. Like many other hon. Members, I represent a rural constituency and people there are heavily dependent on their cars. The constant upping of the petrol duty imposes a heavy burden on many of my constituents.

After the dust of the Budget has settled, it will be judged, not on its detailed proposals but on its effect on the British economy in 12 to 18 months' time. In my view, the eventual judgment on the Budget will be that my right hon. and learned Friend's caution was exactly right in the circumstances.

It is true that my right hon. and learned Friend has been able to present his Budget in more favourable economic circumstances than have obtained for a long time. Usually, a Chancellor faces a situation where either fast economic growth and falling unemployment are accompanied by rising inflation and a deteriorating balance of payments, or low inflation and an improving balance of payments are accompanied by low or negative growth and rising unemployment. Today, possibly uniquely, all the economic indicators point in the right direction. We have fast economic growth, falling unemployment, low inflation and an improving balance of payments. Although the present economic position is extremely good and the outlook is favourable, there is no room for complacency. As we have found out to our cost so often in the past, economic problems are never permanently solved.

It will be extremely difficult to keep economic growth, unemployment, inflation and the balance of payments moving in the right direction, ensuring that expansion neither gets out of hand nor slows down. In performing that balancing act, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is not helped by the media or by many commentators, particularly those from the monetarist school, whose views are dominated by the short term. I get tired of reading articles written by supposed economic experts who tell us that inflation has been cured and that, consequently, the Chancellor no longer needs to bother about it. We have heard that before. It has always been wrong before and it is wrong again today.

The consequences of any economic decision, be it of a monetary or a fiscal nature, take from 12 to 18 months to become effective. The task that faced my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor today was to introduce measures to deal with what he considered would be the position in 12 to 18 months' time. Because inflation is low today does not mean that it will be low early in 1996. A wrong decision in this Budget could well spark off a bout of inflation then. Indeed, it was because my right hon. and learned Friend considered that inflation might be a problem then that he rightly increased interest rates about two months ago.

In his Budget, my right hon. and learned Friend has taken further steps to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement to ensure that economic expansion does not get out of control. I have always believed that the Budget should be used in that way. In times of recession, the Budget deficit should be increased. In times of boom, the deficit should be reduced or even eliminated. That is sensible, counter-cyclical economics.

Of course, my right hon. and learned Friend will not get every economic decision right. No one ever has and no one ever will. After all, economic forecasting is a notoriously inexact science, as he said in the debate yesterday. By looking ahead to try to anticipate the situation, as he has done since he became Chancellor, and as he has done again today in his Budget speech, he has a much better chance of being right than any of his predecessors, whose policies have all too frequently been no more than a response to the current position.

More damage has been done to the British economy by responding to monthly or even quarterly economic statistics, which in any event are invariably wrong, than by anything else. My right hon. and learned Friend has broken clear of that. It is important that he should not revert to such bad habits, however tempting it may be and however strong the media pressure may be for instant action.

One of the great successes of the current economic recovery is that it is largely based on higher exports. At the depth of the recession, there was great concern that the recovery would be accompanied by a deterioration in the already serious balance of payments position. After all, a worsening balance of payments has been a feature of all past recoveries.

This time, as we moved out of recession, exports have risen much faster than imports. As a result, there has been a considerable reduction in the deficit on the current account of the balance of payments. That improvement must continue, as we are still in substantial deficit. It can best be achieved by maintaining a competitive exchange rate without inflation, which means that interest rates must not be increased by too much and that fiscal policy as well as monetary policy should be used in the battle against inflation. Today's lower public sector borrowing requirement forecast is a step in the right direction.

I welcome the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor did not reduce taxes in the Budget. It would have been ridiculous to do so when some tax increases in the pipeline have yet to be effective. Moreover, tax cuts would have increased the PSBR and that would almost certainly have upset the financial markets and perhaps necessitated higher interest rates. The Budget will ensure that steady economic growth will continue. It is important that it should do so, for it will be possible to reduce unemployment to an acceptable level only if growth continues.

The reduction in joblessness of almost 500,000 in the past two years is welcome, but unemployment at about 2,350,000 is still much too high. I never cease to be amazed at the complacency throughout the country about the much higher level of unemployment that has obtained in the past 20 years. I emphasise the past 20 years because unemployment did not occur only under this Government. Throughout that period, unemployment has been more than 1 million. In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, it was around the 3 million mark.

Unemployment at those levels is not inevitable. From 1945 to 1974, we had full employment. The number of people out of work fluctuated, but it rarely exceeded 500,000. In 1955 and again in 1965, it was as low as 1.1 per cent. of the working population, about an eighth of what it is today. That shows how far we have moved from the high level of achievement in the 30 years after the war. We must aim to return to those days as soon as possible, for unemployment is a social scourge and is divisive. It is impossible to have one nation if one in 12 of the working population is out of work.

Unemployment is also economically wasteful. If we are not using all the available labour in the country, we are not maximising national output and that means that the nation is forgoing wealth that it could otherwise enjoy. The task facing my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is, therefore, to ensure that demand is at such a level that the potential supply of labour, capital and enterprise is fully used. That will bring economic success and social harmony to our country and I know that that is my right hon. and learned Friend's aim.

5.28 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) praised the Chancellor, but, in doing so, gave a magnificent indictment of the previous 15 years of Conservative government, although the Government have, apparently, at last got it right.

The Chancellor clearly wished to give the impression of solid caution, prudence and steadiness at the helm and that we are on the road to long-term recovery; the reality is that no one believed him. People know that he is taking more taxes out of our pockets today—seven additional taxes in the current financial year totalling more than £6 billion—and that he intends to hang on to them to cut tax in advance of the next general election. Today's prudence is to pave the way for financial profligacy before the election. The idea that it is laying the foundation for solid and sustained growth does not square with the Government's record of the past 15 years or with the Chancellor's attitude.

The hon. Member for Moorlands referred to inflation. Everyone welcomes the low inflation that we have had for 18 months, but most of the reduction in inflation had little or nothing to do with Government policies but more to do with a highly competitive economy clawing its way out of recession, the effect of world recession and low world commodity prices. Those factors are not under the Government's control and could always change direction. Indeed, as the world economy recovers, they are likely to do so. The Government could then want to introduce tax cuts just at a time when it would destroy sustained economic recovery. We all know what happens in those circumstances: money is clawed back immediately after the general election, once the public have been conned into voting a certain way. The people of Britain will not be taken in so readily again.

We are already hearing reports of capacity constraints in industry. Investment in industry, as a percentage of gross domestic product, is at a historical low. That is not the foundation for sustained, long-term recovery; it is an indication of a manufacturing base too much reduced to provide the platform on which growth must depend.

The Chancellor has reaffirmed his commitment to taking the extra tranche of value added tax on fuel, despite the fact that he had enough room to manoeuvre within the Government and gave back sufficient revenue to have wiped out that increase at no net cost to the Exchequer. He did not do so because he was determined not to give people the response that they were seeking—the recognition that it was an unfair tax—but instead to hang on to the money to finance future tax cuts.

Interestingly, however, the Chancellor did not take the same attitude when he suggested the possibility of a new tax—the landfill tax. He told us not to worry because it is an environmental tax that will immediately be ploughed back in tax cuts elsewhere but not, apparently, in respect of the imposition of VAT on fuel. That is testimony to the fact that VAT on fuel was not, is not and never will be an environmental tax; it is merely an unjustifiable raid on our pockets by the Chancellor. To tell those of us who live north of the border that the increase is not a burden when our heating bills are up to two thirds higher than average is to add insult to injury.

We need borrowing discipline, but the Chancellor should not expect us to be fooled by the fact that he was able to announce falling borrowing. Anyone who has presided over this particular stage of the economic cycle would expect borrowing to fall; it could only be the result of irresponsibility if it did not.

The Chancellor also suggested that he had made enormous savings, but he was able to do so only because he got the forecast wrong last year and the outturn has been better than anticipated. In those circumstances, the forecasts that he has made for the next three years are not to be relied on because, if anything goes wrong with the forecast of GDP, growth or inflation, he will be knocked off course and will not have the necessary money to play with.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

One or two of the Chancellor's proposals need clarification. There is no commitment to long-term investment, which the country needs to sustain the Government's commitments. Cuts have been made in the roads programme with no corresponding investment in, for example, public transport, as the Liberal Democrats would have wished. Cuts have also been made in the housing programme, despite the increasing problems of homelessness in many parts of the country, and in local government expenditure, and despite the fact that, at least in Scotland, local government is facing the cost of a reorganisation that nobody wanted. The Government are effectively passing the buck to local authorities, on whom they load more responsibility but from whom they expect more restraint.

The forecasts have been wrong in the past and they might be wrong in the future, so we need to investigate the claims that the Chancellor made in the Budget. He said that he hoped to secure £5 billion of extra investment under the private finance initiative, but he did not tell us how much of that £5 billion will come from the private sector. I think that we should be told. On the strength of the record to date, I suspect that it will not be very much, and it will not be very much unless the Government are prepared to offer a more attractive deal. It is a sensible way to unlock private funds, but not as practised by the Government to date.

Housing benefit reform is long overdue. The Government in effect provided private landlords with a charter to rip off the homeless and people who did not have access to the housing market or to local authority housing because it had been sold. Those landlords were paid out of taxpayers' money. Interestingly, the Government are now reintroducing rent control by the back door, and not before time.

Perhaps the biggest insult of all is to be found in that part of the speech where the Chancellor poured forth a profusion of words, which is always a sign of little substance. I refer to the part of his speech that contained a plethora of gimmicks and gizmos to deal with the problem of unemployment. In the end, it amounted to very little. The number of long-term unemployed might be reduced by 5,000, according to the Government's own forecast.

I cannot think of anything more insulting to someone who has been unemployed for two years than to be told that the Government have a plan for him that involves a national insurance holiday for his potential employer, which he will be able to claim in 18 months. The Government's commitment in this respect falls not within the framework of the present Budget but the one after. It is no solution at all. The Chancellor says that he has been able to tackle such problems, but he has not told us how.

In summary, the Budget contains nothing new. It is a standstill Budget from a Chancellor who is anxious to hang on to all the extra taxation that he can and who does not understand the meaning of the phrase "long-term investment". It must be recognised that stop-go cannot be sustained in the future any more than it has been in the past.

If we are to prevent inflation from taking off, and if we are to get people back to work and keep them there, we need to invest in industry now, but there is nothing in the Budget to promote investment now, when it is needed. If we fail to invest, and as the recovery continues and our competitors become sharper as their recovery begins to gather momentum, we shall find that the old problems of capacity constraints, skills shortages and rising inflation will take hold again.

We need to improve the skills of our people so that we can innovate and compete and ensure that we have the products and services that will enable this trading nation to pay people at a higher rate and sustain long-term tax cuts rather than short-term tax cuts intended to get one party through a general election. The Government got away with it once; they will not do so again. The Budget will fool no one. It does not provide the necessary investment now or the justification for tax cuts at any time before the next election.

5.38 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I am always glad to follow the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). I shall miss his presence on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of which he was an amiable and agreeable member. His speech, however, was strong on rhetoric, but a little thin and vague on detail. I am no wiser now about precisely what the Liberal Democrats would do than I was before. We shall, no doubt, hear more detail from Labour Front-Bench speakers.

The hon. Member for Gordon is a little cheeky to say that we have improved the competitiveness of industry, that the recession is over, that things are looking up and that we are coming out of the recession, but that it has nothing to do with the Government and is all to do with world events. Whenever we pointed out that the recession was a world recession, he would, say that it was not and that it was all the fault of this wretched Government. He cannot have it both ways.

I believe that it is sensible to join the Budget with the public expenditure round rather than to have them at different times, although that poses certain problems, which were well highlighted in an article in *The House Magazine* by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). He pointed out the difficulties of getting representations properly made and considered before the Budget. What seems to happen nowadays is that we have a long recess, we then roar into the Queen's Speech and before we know where we are, we are engaged in the unified Budget. That probably provides insufficient time for people to make representations to us and for us to discuss fully with the Chancellor and his team what our views are.

I am still old-fashioned enough to believe in a period of purdah, which served this country well. The Chancellor and Treasury Ministers simply listened silently to what people said and then made up their minds, rather than initiating matters by flying kites all over the place, causing some uncertainty in the financial world. Having said all that, however, I think that we must stick with a unified Budget.

The Budget will be widely welcomed by those involved in the serious business and industry of this country. The one message that I got, more than anything else, was that, for heaven's sake, what we want is some degree of stability. We want to know where we stand on taxation. We hope that we have a stable currency. We want to know where we are on all the provisions made by the

Government for business and industry, and we want reasonably stable interest rates. The Budget can be commended on those grounds.

Throughout my parliamentary life and before, I have taken an interest in Budgets on two particular grounds. First, I have been a long-term advocate of wider share ownership throughout our community. We have seen ups and downs. The reason why I have argued strongly for wider share ownership is that I believe that it is in the interests of freedom and democracy that people should own a stake in the country, whether in property or in shares in industry and business. I judge a Budget on those grounds as well and I commend the Chancellor for improving the PEP—personal equity plan—provisions. This has been a useful and helpful way in which to encourage savings.

Secondly, we should recognise that there are 1 million more small businesses than there were in 1979. They have probably suffered more than any other sector in the recession, but they are sufficiently resilient and they will recover most speedily. I welcome the measures taken to encourage small businesses through schemes such as the venture capital scheme. I also welcome the raising of the ridiculously low VAT threshold, which will now start at £46,000. I have always argued in favour of a higher level because small businesses do not have the time to fiddle around with endless bureaucracy and taxation. The Government are to be commended not only for that change, but for the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, which will be a very great help. Likewise, small businesses need stability and they need to be able to get on with their business.

There is some very good news all around. We have low inflation, low interest rates and rising exports. I point out to the hon. Member for Gordon that one of his distinguished colleagues, Lord Jenkins, introduced a Budget after another devaluation. One thing that he advocated more than anything else was that recovery should be export led. That is exactly what is happening now and it is extremely good news.

Today some of us on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry met construction industry exporters. The construction industry is having a difficult time at home, but exporters are doing extremely well and they are anxious to do better on Britain's behalf. They were critical of the Export Credits Guarantee Department provisions, especially in respect of new markets in third-world countries. They said that the present provisions were too tight and too bureaucratic, and compared unfavourably with the provisions in France, in Germany and elsewhere. I am glad that that has been recognised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and I welcome and praise his provisions concerning the ECGD, which will make it more amenable to exporters. I hope that there will be good results from that.

Exports are up by 10 per cent., productivity is up by 5.5 per cent. and investment is up by 6 per cent. Altogether, it is good news, but why is that fact not percolating through to the ordinary man in the street? Why do our constituents not seem to see things in the same way as business and industry? Here, I give a note of caution to my right hon. and learned Friend.

I do not believe that the message will get through until there has been some recovery in the housing market. Negative equity and the absurd boom and bust we have suffered recently have left the worst possible taste in the mouths, minds and hearts of many people. The reason why they do not have the confidence to invest in property or to acquire property is the fear of unemployment and the fear of redundancy, which strike hard. On that score, I believe that we are moving in the right direction.

Unemployment went down by 400,000 last year. The concentration on small firms is immensely important because we shall not get new employment out of the great firms of this country; it is only through the growth of small firms that unemployment will be reduced. That growth will take quite a time and, meanwhile, we must make it clear that the housing market is stable and we must encourage the construction industry to develop.

Nobody wants to go back to the absurd situation of house prices going through the roof. People started up small businesses in the vague hope that the houses in which they lived would provide future capital. That is madness and we do not wish it to happen again; it should never happen again. We want, however, to get the housing market on the move again. I tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor that that depends on interest rates being reasonably stable and I hope that he will always have that in mind.

Inflation is, of course, a menace that must be watched all the time. As commodity prices have increased by about 25 per cent., I anticipate that further rises in interest rates may be necessary at some time in the future. Having said that, they must be carefully applied. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor always to recognise two factors: first, the need to contain inflation and, secondly, the need to restore confidence at all levels, from the lowest upwards. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend appreciates that because it is the most crucial matter for us to consider now and in the future.

I sum up by congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend on helping savings and on maintaining stability for industry. Industry wants stability and a period of calm. The Government have not gone berserk over taxation, and nobody wants that. I have not had a single letter asking for a reduction in taxation. The odd eccentric has asked for taxation to be put up—usually rather well-heeled eccentrics, and there are not many of them. By and large, business, industry and the public want stability so that they can plan for the future. On that ground, I believe that the Budget passes the test of the time and I very much commend it to the House.

5.49 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) has been a Member of the House for many years. I distinctly remember him taking his part in cheering Mrs. Thatcher, as she then was when she was Prime Minister, during the period when easy money was flowing out of everybody's ears and bumping up the price of houses. Of course, the hon. Gentleman is reaping a bitter harvest as people are now acutely aware of what happens when, due to mismanagement of the economy by the Conservative party, interest rates shoot up to 14 or 15 per cent., as they did, plunging countless householders into negative equity. Indeed, many people are still in that situation.

Sir Anthony Grant *rose—*

Dr. Marek: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman as I mentioned him by name. It is true, however, that there

[Dr. Marek]

was no dissent among Members on the Government Benches in 1985, 1986 and 1987 under Lord Lawson and Mrs. Thatcher, the then Prime Minister. The Conservative party now has to live with the fact that the electorate has rumbled it and will not vote for it again.

Sir Anthony Grant: I accept my responsibility for having supported Budgets and, indeed, encouraged the reduction in interest rates at the wrong time. But so did the Opposition, more so than I ever did. As I subsequently pointed out, the panic throughout the world after black Wednesday or Thursday or whenever it was in 1987, when everybody was in a panic and Finance Ministers all over the globe suddenly reduced their interest rates, was a very great mistake.

Dr. Marek: I accept the hon. Gentleman's generous comment as he takes his share of the blame in supporting Budgets in the 1980s, but he cannot say that Opposition Members did. I remember that we were incensed by some of the Budgets when free handouts were given to the very wealthy through executive option schemes and through a lower top rate of income tax—some of which was deserved although, of course, it has gone too far.

The problem with this Budget was not what the Chancellor said, but what he did not have to talk about at all—the decisions which were taken before and which will come into effect next year. Principally, of course, I am referring to VAT on fuel, which is going up by 9.5 per cent., as has already been mentioned. I do not apologise in any way for repeating the proposition that the public have rumbled the present Government. They will not vote for the Government again because they realise that the Government cannot be trusted. It was made very clear before 9 April 1992, by Government Members, the Prime Minister and everybody else, that they did not intend to impose value added tax on any of the tax-free sectors of goods. As soon as they won the election, of course, VAT on fuel was proposed.

The Budget was forecast to be dull and dreary, and to a large extent it was. Perhaps for that very reason, however, I found today's Budget less repulsive or repugnant than previous Budgets. Measures for job seekers are all right as far as they go, but they will not necessarily create the jobs needed. Industry has to create jobs. It is a subsidiary matter to ensure that the jobless are encouraged to apply for jobs and to train and retrain, and what the Chancellor announced in that area had my support. However, that will not create jobs in the first place.

I was disappointed about proposed measures for job creation as there is to be no change in corporation tax and no incentive to invest. I firmly believe—there is a clear difference between me and the Government here—that it is through investment that we shall create jobs. The Chancellor could have gone for taxing dividends, which would have been an incentive for companies to put more of their profit into investment rather than shelling it out as dividends. Unfortunately, there is nothing like that in the Budget and no changes in advanced corporation tax.

Business rates are to go up. The Chancellor made great play of that. They are to increase by up to 7.5 or 10 per cent. Business rates, which companies have to pay, are among the biggest banes of society. They are huge and they set our country apart from what goes on elsewhere in the European Union. The greater scope that the Export Credits Guarantee Department will have to cover, including different risks, will help. I am not sure about venture capital trusts, but no doubt a little help will be given there. It will cost £150 million only, which is not very much.

At the end of the day, the Budget will not create jobs and start the engine of the economy. It is only by starting the engine of the economy that we shall create jobs, more people will be able pay income tax and public expenditure will fall because fewer people will have to rely on the state through income support or family credit.

I would have been delighted for the country if I could have said that the Budget would create jobs, but I am sorry to have to say that it will not. Indeed, we shall be again stuck with public spending restrictions. Any real increases in the funding of the national health service will be illusory. No doubt, in the support rate, at which I have not had time to look, there will be efficiency savings in the own resources that the health service already has, which will be taken into account in the figures. Any half per cent. increase will be swallowed up, of course, because the rate of increase in funding demanded by the NHS is always higher than the retail prices index, for well-known reasons. The medical index is always higher.

The Chancellor took great pleasure in saying that overall savings will be £24 billion over the next three years. I do not understand that at all, because the country is crying out desperately for investment in our infrastructure. The railway service is falling to pieces. In my area, trains are regularly half an hour or 45 minutes late and today a train carrying some visitors of mine broke down at Crewe. Timetables are not integrated. There is no doubt whatever that the railway system is in desperate need of investment and new equipment. The sense of professionalism and morale, which the staff have always had, is under great strain.

The Government are not going to help that at all. They are more interested in privatising Railtrack, which I think that the Opposition will be able to thwart. When we form a Government, we shall be able to set maximum prices for access charges to Railtrack. If our Front-Bench spokesmen make it clear that we intend to do that and make it clear that we shall call in any planning applications for speculative development gain on city-centre railway car parks and not allow those gains to take place, I suspect that, with a little luck, we may save the nation from the disaster of Railtrack being sold to the private sector. Instead of infrastructure development and infrastructure renewal, however, we are to save a further £24 billion overall in the next three years.

The real Budget, of course, was the Budget that the Chancellor did not talk about—VAT on fuel being increased to 17.5 per cent., the married person's allowance being reduced, mortgage tax relief being reduced and the other taxes which have been introduced, such as that on insurance and travel by aeroplane. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said, it is equivalent to an increase of 7p in the pound on income tax. That was what the Budget was about, but the Chancellor did not have to say a word about it because the increases had been announced previously, to take place in the 1995-96 financial year.

The Chancellor could have tackled tax abuses by increasing the number of tax inspectors and not sacking 4,000 Customs and Excise officials, which is the plan. A

few years ago, each tax inspector collected about £77,000 in unpaid taxes and the figure is probably a lot higher now. Each tax inspector would be worth his or her weight three or four times over—not in discovering loopholes found by people who do not want to pay taxes, but simply in chasing unpaid taxes, which would be paid immediately the tax inspector called on the person who had not paid his or her taxes. Why did the Chancellor not mention that?

The Chancellor could have introduced a stamp duty on share transactions after 1996. That would have realised £1 billion. For dogmatic political reasons, however, the plan is still to get rid of stamp duty on share transactions, which will create the very type of economy that we had to suffer in the 1980s when Mrs. Thatcher was Prime Minister—short-termism. No one thought about what was going to happen tomorrow. If a company's analysts said, "Sell tomorrow", it did not matter if people were going to lose their jobs or what the company itself thought about what would happen when its pension fund or shares were sold. If the analyst said "Sell" in respect of the pension fund, that is what happened.

Our rip-roaring economy ended in disaster. We badly need a dose of long-termism and fiscal policies designed to make people think in the long term rather than the short term. Stamp duty on share transactions achieves that, of course, and it would keep £1 billion per annum, but for dogmatic reasons the Chancellor is prepared to do away with that.

I want to reflect on what has happened in 16 years of Conservative government. I shall not be able to mention all the statistics, but I will refer to a few. What happened to manufacturing output between 1979 and 1994?

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): It is at record levels.

Dr. Marek: I do not think that that is a proud record. Manufacturing output was just 9 per cent. higher in the second quarter of 1994 than it was in 1979. If the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) thinks that that is a record, it is a pretty poor one. In 16 years, we have been able to increase manufacturing output by only 9 per cent.

Mr. Hendry: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman noticed last week's announcement to the effect that manufacturing output is now at all-time record levels. Will he contrast the fact that manufacturing output has risen over the past 15 years with the fact that between 1974 and 1979 it actually declined?

Dr. Marek: Those points are well known. We had the oil crisis in 1975-76— *[Interruption.]* It certainly was not very funny when we had that crisis. I was talking about percentages. Of course the level will be the highest ever, because we are getting richer as a country, but our relative rate of becoming richer as a country is rather poor.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Marek: I will give way in due course, after I have responded to the hon. Member for High Peak. As a member of the European Union, our relative increase in manufacturing output is rather poor. As I said, the increase has been 9 per cent. over 16 years. That is not a record; it is a rather poor and dismal performance by anyone's standards.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman has not acknowledged the fact that manufacturing output declined between 1974 and 1979 as a result of trade union militancy, which all but wrecked manufacturing industry in this country. This Government's trade union reforms have allowed manufacturing output to rise to an all-time high, as my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) rightly pointed out.

Dr. Marek: I shall not repeat the point. Manufacturing output may be at an all-time high, but that has nothing to do with the Conservative party. It has to do with the general prosperity in western Europe, of which we have partaken to a much smaller extent than at least nine of the other 11 countries in the European Union.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) is aware that the Benelux countries, France and Germany overtook us years ago in terms of standard of living. Italy overtook us in that respect a few years ago and Spain is going to overtake us. I suspect that it will not be long before Greece, Portugal and Ireland overtake us.

Manufacturing output has increased by only 9 per cent. in 15 years, despite £123 billion of accumulated revenues from North sea oil. Has manufacturing output increased by only 9 per cent. because we have been paying for unemployment? The answer to that must be yes. Between 1974 and 1979, about 1 million people were claiming unemployment benefit. Since 1979, however, although the unemployment figure has gone up and down, it has never been below 1.5 million. The average has been about 2.5 million, and that is despite the 30 fiddles and changes to the statistics perpetrated by the Government.

The most telling point is revealed in the table of taxes as a percentage of gross domestic product. That table always appears in the Red Book and it is a nice big table this time. Between 1974 and 1979, the maximum tax as a percentage of GDP was 36¼. By 1981-82, it had risen to 39¼ and it was never been below 36¼ until 1992-93. That was the effect of our catastrophic recession.

Labour is the party of low taxation—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] If Conservative Members had been listening, they would realise that they cannot challenge my figures. The figures are probably in an annexe to chapter 4 of the Red Book. Before Conservative Members laugh, I respectfully urge them to examine the Red Book to see whether I am right. I believe that they will discover that my comments are pretty accurate.

United Kingdom manufacturing investment is still poor. It is about 80 per cent. of what it was in 1979. In addition, the Government have had getting on for £60 billion in privatisation receipts. A very interesting table of gross fixed capital formation gives the figures for 1979 through to 1992. For every year that the Government have been in office, in terms of gross fixed capital formation the United Kingdom has been below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average, below the average of the European states of the OECD and below the average of the European Union countries. That is telling. It is not just for one or two years: it is for every year from 1979 until the present day.

[Dr. Marek]

The Government have been unable to increase investment to get our country going, to charge the engine of the economy and bring unemployment down. That has not been possible; nor do I think that the Government wanted to do it, despite what the Chancellor said earlier.

The Chancellor said that lorry duty rates will be unchanged while vehicle excise duty on cars is to increase by £5. That is very disappointing. It is no use having taxes on dumping rubbish in holes in the ground and trying to be environmental while being anti-environmental elsewhere by increasing not the price of petrol, but vehicle excise duty. I am also against the proposals because, by and large, according to the Government's figures, cars cover their track costs by two and a half times. Some lorries, however, and especially some of the big articulated lorries, do not cover their track costs even on the Government's own figures, which do not include environmental costs.

The Chancellor's proposals in that respect are very regressive. I accept that nothing can be done about it now that the Chancellor has made his announcement, but he cannot get away with being thought of as a green Chancellor or a Chancellor who worries about the environment. He has a long way to go and I suspect that he could probably take lessons from any Opposition Member in that regard.

My next point concerns duty on alcohol and tobacco. The Chancellor very carefully said that he was going to increase tobacco duty by 3 per cent. plus inflation so as to discourage smoking, as we all wish—there can be no doubt about that. However, he then said that a great deal of smuggling and bootlegging occurs across the channel and that, for that reason, he would not increase the duty on beer, wine or spirits. The problem is that tobacco produces the real gain for the bootlegger and smuggler because the volume is so much less. I suspect that the Chancellor was trying to pull the wool over our eyes when he made his comment. I will give a simple example. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee is considering this difficult subject at the moment and I do not pretend to have the solution. However, the Government have a problem. A packet of hand-rolling tobacco costs £1.78 in Belgium and £7 in the United Kingdom. That is a huge price difference. As a result, bootlegging or smuggling accounts for about 20 to 25 per cent. of the hand rolling tobacco market in the United Kingdom.

The Government must do something to remedy that situation. Yet there is nothing about it in the Budget speech. We need more Customs officers; yet the Government plan to sack 4,000 of them. Where is the sense in that? The only solution is long-term harmonisation. I understand that we face problems in this area because the tobacco industries in some European Union member states are state owned and, unlike the United Kingdom Government, their Governments do not get their cut from tobacco taxation. Nevertheless, I hope that the Government will adopt my suggestion: harmonisation is the only solution.

When I was shadow spokesman in this area, I remember Ministers and Paymasters General saying, "Oh no, we don't believe in harmonisation; we want nothing to do with it". But the chickens have come home to roost: 25 per cent. of the hand-rolling tobacco industry is already in the hands of bootleggers, there is criminal activity in the north-east of England, and bootleg cigarettes and, to a smaller extent, alcohol are making inroads in Government revenue. The Government have a chance to confront this problem now and they must take that chance.

The Budget does nothing for the average working man or woman and very little for the average unemployed man and woman. I have conceded that it contains a few measures which will make it easier for the unemployed to assess whether they will be better off in employment, but that will not create jobs. The Budget will not do anything of substance for the British people; it is an opportunity missed. That should not surprise Opposition Members because, at the end of the day, the Conservative party has always been the party of the rich and the privileged who feed off the rest of the country.

6.11 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) exemplifies the old-fashioned failed politics of envy. Let us get back to the real issues of a strong Budget which will create jobs, cut unemployment and prioritise the expenditure of taxpayers' money on the national health service, the education system and law and order.

I was delighted with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget, delivered this afternoon, and its stress on increasing resources for what the electors want: a strengthened health service, better resources for law and order and improved education facilities. I was particularly pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend drew attention to the underlying strength of the economy, which has allowed him to increase spending on those three priorities.

The figures show that British exports have grown by 8 per cent. and investment has grown by 5 per cent., while consumer demand has grown by only 2 or 3 per cent. It is particularly important to note that underlying inflation has fallen to its lowest level for a generation and that that strength has ensured a continuing fall in the level of unemployment— a decrease of 450,000 since December 1992. I have no doubt that our continuing economic strength over the next few years will mean that people will no longer need to look over their shoulders in fear of losing their jobs and that the feel-good factor will be restored to the economy.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said, we are the only country in western Europe in which unemployment has fallen in the past year. At the same time, according to the national employment survey, the number of people in employment has increased by 226,000.

My right hon. and learned Friend is correct to ensure that the Budget strategy continues to concentrate on keeping down the rate of inflation. We all remember the terrible economic disasters perpetrated by the last Labour Government. It is no use Labour Members trying to rewrite history and blame the oil crisis of the mid-1970s for their manifold sins and wickednesses. Trade union militancy destroyed the British manufacturing industry and it was Mrs. Thatcher's trade union reforms of the 1980s which secured our present record levels of manufacturing output. We shall maintain those reforms, and we have won the battle of ideas to such an extent that

the Labour party now says that it will not try to reverse them. The measures are crucial to the Chancellor's continuing sensible economic management system.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. In the face of that economic miracle, will he explain to the House why between 1948 and 1979— a Labour Government were in power for half that time— the British economy grew at a rate of 2.7 per cent., yet since 1979, the average growth rate has been 1.7 per cent., which is 1 per cent. lower than for the previous 30 years?

Mr. Hawkins: It is because previous Labour Governments were not quite as ridiculous in their economic mismanagement as the Labour Government of 1974 to 1979. The hon. Gentleman is the former leader of a city which, under his leadership, mismanaged its economy by wasting vast amounts of money on stupid ideas such as the world student games. One would think that the hon. Gentleman would have learned from his mistakes, but it appears that he has not.

The Chancellor is right to continue a policy of eliminating Government borrowing entirely by the end of the decade. It is essential that we concentrate on that valid objective.

I was particularly pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend announced extra help for pensioners. As the Member of Parliament with the greatest number of pensioner constituents, I know that the people of Blackpool, South will welcome the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend has been able to increase help for pensioners over and above indexing for inflation.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No. I have given way previously and we must make some progress in the debate. As a result of the Budget, pensioners in my constituency will see not only an increase in their benefits but a substantial increase in cold weather payments as well as further increases over and above the likely inflation rate to be introduced in April 1995 and 1996. Everyone who receives an old-age pension will get that additional help, which I have no doubt will be widely welcomed.

Further steps will be taken to expand the private finance initiative in future years, especially in transport. This will benefit the British people enormously. Private financing of rail projects will feed the future development of our transport infrastructure.

If the hon. Member for Wrexham wants to see proof of the success of private investment in transport, he should look to the United States and the development of station premises such as Union station in Washington DC, where private sector funding has provided much better facilities for the travelling public. He could look at similar examples in other countries which have involved the private sector in their transport infrastructure. In only a few years' time, he will see precisely the benefits of that policy to this country.

I sometimes wonder where Opposition Members think that investment in capital projects comes from. It comes from profits that are made by the private sector. It does not come from Government subsidy, which is an appalling waste of taxpayers' money and a mistake that Labour Governments have always made.

I welcome the Government's steps to move from direct to indirect taxation. The move from taxes of compulsion to taxes of choice is widely welcomed by British taxpayers. Before the last election, the Opposition proposed to increase taxes of compulsion in excess of anything that we have seen from the Government, so it ill behoves them to criticise the Government for reluctantly imposing taxes. The Government will return to their tax-cutting tradition in years to come. Labour Members have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. They will continue to put forward ever-greater plans for taxes of compulsion that they will waste on subsidies. That is the lesson that the Labour party will not accept.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The hon. Gentleman supports indirect taxation, which, in relative terms, bears much more heavily on the incomes of the poor. That is why successive British Governments have resisted VAT on vital items such as food and children's clothing. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, when he lauds indirect taxation, he lauds a system of taxation which, in relative terms, hits the poor hardest?

Mr. Hawkins: I do not accept the hon. Lady's specious figures. I am very much in favour, and I will remain in favour, of taxes of choice rather than taxes of compulsion. I repeat what I have said: Labour Members will never learn the difference between the downside of taxes of compulsion and Government subsidy as opposed to taxes of choice. That is the mistake of political philosophy that they always make.

Dr. Marek: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No. I have been generous in allowing hon. Members to intervene, but I must make progress, as many hon. Members want to speak.

I am particularly pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend has stressed the importance of spending not only on education but on training, especially for the young unemployed. I want an even more accelerated fall in the number of unemployed. I am concerned that, in the drive for greater efficiency, we should not allow disproportionately greater unemployment in certain areas such as my constituency and the surrounding area in the north-west.

I inject a note of caution. My right hon. and learned Friend correctly drives for greater efficiency in the civil service. However, there are areas, one of which is my constituency, where the civil service is an important part of the local economy. That point must be borne in mind when considering measures such as those that my right hon. and learned Friend has announced.

My constituents welcome the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend has been able to announce increases in resources available for the single regeneration budget. It is right for me to mention that my constituency has a bid under the single regeneration budget scheme, which I will discuss with my right hon. and hon. Friends in the next week or two and which I hope will succeed.

I have mentioned my interest in the increase in education provision. It is welcome that, under the Conservative Government, the rate of young people going on to university has increased from one in eight to one in three. It is important to continue to expand resources for education.

[Mr. Hawkins]

I very much welcome the 3 per cent. increase in resources for the police in 1995-96. It will go down especially well with everyone that more police will be released for front-line duties and that chief constables will have greater freedom to decide the allocation of their resources.

I welcome many of the measures that my right hon. Friend has announced in relation to the various benefits that will be available to get people back into work, in particular the changes to family credit and the further measures which have followed the jobseeker's allowance. I take great pleasure in the further cut in national insurance contributions, which will help employers with small businesses.

Once again, I inject a slight note of caution in relation to my right hon. and learned Friend's concerns about the smuggling of tobacco and the different duties that apply in the United Kingdom and in continental European countries. I want those duty differentials brought down to zero. I want more measures to cut the smuggling of tobacco. It is a serious problem in my constituency, and large amounts of tobacco are being smuggled through Manchester airport. On behalf of my constituents, I recently had a meeting with my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury about that matter.

Also, I wish to express some concern about the changes that my right hon. and learned Friend has announced in relation to gaming duty. The last attempt to set gaming duty rates was several years ago. Nevertheless, the responsible nature of many amusement arcade owners has been shown by their great contributions to charities in recent years. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to take account of the legitimate side of that industry while clamping down hard on rogue operators in years to come.

I broadly welcome the Budget as a Budget for jobs and a Budget which rightly concentrates priorities on matters that are important to the British people, such as education, law and order, help for pensioners and the NHS. I support the Budget.

6.24 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Calling the Budget a Budget for jobs is like calling a vampire a blood transfusion expert. I suppose that the public should be grateful that the governing party has taken time off from its continuing civil war even to produce a Budget. Conservative Members have accused Opposition Members of propagating the politics of envy. On the contrary, the Conservative party is a slave to the politics of envy. Far too many members of the Cabinet envy the Prime Minister's job. We have a lacklustre, stand-still Budget presented by a Chancellor who is saving his money for cynical pre-election tax cuts and saving his energies for positioning himself to succeed the Prime Minister.

A Conservative Member said that ordinary people would not believe in the recovery unless there was an upturn in the housing market. That is absolutely true, especially in respect of London and the south-east, an area that I know well. However, the sad news is that an upturn in the housing market will not happen. I refer hon. Members to page 24 of the Red Book, the Government's own document, which states:

> "Housing market turnover increased strongly in 1993 but has fallen back this year. House prices have moved erratically with no pronounced trend up or down. In October they were at much the same level as a year earlier."

The Government should leave to one side all the things that they have inflicted on the British people—people have suffered from the housing boom and the reckless financial deregulation of the late 1980s. If no one else, the people in London and the south-east who are burdened with mortgages that they can hardly repay, who have been the victims of repossession and who are stuck with negative equity, will never forgive the Government for their economic incompetence. Conservative Members are right; people will not believe in the recovery, particularly in London and the south-east, unless there is an upturn in the housing market. The Government's figures, and their own statement, make it clear that such an upturn will not happen.

Of course, under the Conservative Government, the state of housing is a very sad story. For all their gimmicks and all their professed interest in homes and home ownership, the Government's record on building houses for the British people is deplorable. Since 1979, gross housing investment in England has fallen by 56 per cent. The victims of the Government's appalling record in the provision of private or public sector housing are ordinary people and the homeless.

The Budget will not turn matters round. The Red Book makes it clear that there will not be an upturn in the housing market. Home owners will be badly affected by cuts in mortgage interest tax relief. People looking for social housing or housing in the public sector will have their hopes dashed by the reduction in housing corporation capital provision.

Let me dwell for a minute on cuts in housing corporation finance. The Government, having savagely slashed local authorities' capacity to build social housing for rent, have made much of their commitment to the housing association sector. What they have done to that sector is particularly cruel. They have encouraged it to expand and encouraged new housing associations to develop, but many people in properties in those developments—particularly in London and the south-east—are dependent upon housing benefit. Cuts in the Housing Corporation budget have forced new associations to charge higher and higher rents, and they are less able to house the very people whom the housing association movement was meant to serve. The cuts in Housing Corporation capital provision are a tragedy for the housing association sector, and a betrayal of the hopes, which the Government encouraged, that that sector would provide social housing.

Then, of course, there are the cuts in housing benefit. It comes ill from a Government who took away rent controls to complain about landlords exploiting tenants. It also comes ill from a Government who have used housing benefit as a means of allowing people access to housing now to turn round and cut the benefit. We have yet to hear the details of the cuts in the benefit, but I believe that the consequence will be many more homeless people who are unable to gain access to housing and many more people in housing misery.

We also see in the Budget that the housing revenue account subsidy provision is to be reduced, and that local authority credit approvals for housing renovation are to be cut. What is the Budget saying on housing? It is saying that the housing market will remain flat and that people who have a mortgage will have their tax relief cut. It is saying that housing associations will be forced to charge even higher rents, and that they will be unable to build more property. It is saying that councils will be unable to renovate their huge stocks, some of which are in an appalling condition.

The Budget is certainly not a Budget for jobs, and nor is it a Budget for housing. I represent one of the poorest areas in the country, and housing problems form 60 per cent. of my case load. Few things cause more misery and damage to family life—which the Government are supposed to be in favour of—than the misery of homelessness and poor housing. Far from doing anything about that, the Budget continues Government policies, which undermine people's access to decent housing, whether in the private sector, the housing association sector or the local authority sector.

A key feature of the Budget is that it is supposed to be a Budget for jobs. The Chancellor, with his normal bravura and bravado, listed a whole series of measures which we are supposed to believe are earth-shattering means of getting people back to work. The things which one must watch in this Budget, as in all, are the figures. We must look not at the grand descriptive phrases or at what the Budget is supposed to be about, but at what the Red Book says. It states that the Department of Employment's spending will go down. I want to know how, if the Budget represents a great leap forward in helping the unemployed back to work, the Department will help in that with less money.

What the Chancellor announced today is a whole series of gimmicks, many of which are not even new. They are old gimmicks which are proving to be not terribly effective. Family credit will be increased, payments of housing benefit are to be accelerated—how the Government are going to accelerate payments of housing benefit when it is local authorities who are responsible for administering it I do not know—and family credit will be paid to people without children. There is also community action, work trial, jobfinder's grant, Workwise, 1-2-1, jobmatch and Workstart—a positive alphabet soup of gimmicky measures.

The unemployed want not gimmicks but a Government who are genuinely committed to the return of full employment, which this Government are not. Even in their own terms, there is something deeply unpleasant about the Government seeking to put people back to work by forcing them—whether by changes in disability allowances or by the increasingly stringent benefit arrangements—back into the labour market to work for poverty wages. If there is a theme to the gimmicky ideas for getting people back to work it is that they are about subsidising poverty wages.

It is old fashioned, and Government Members will sneer, but I believe that if one does a decent week's work, one ought to be entitled to a living wage.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Is the hon. Lady saying that she would prefer that people stayed on benefit for the rest of their lives? I hardly think that that would be a happy experience for anybody.

Ms Abbott: The hon. Gentleman perhaps does not know that it is a burden on the economy to keep people unemployed. The level of unemployment is almost entirely responsible for the growth in the public sector borrowing requirement. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me finish—I did not interrupt him.

In the long run, it is better for individuals, for society and for the economy that people get a decent living wage from doing a week's work without having to be dependent on handouts and benefits. It is degrading for men and women who have worked for a full week still to have to look to the state for handouts. I believe that the Labour party's policy of a minimum wage—on which we fought the election and on which we shall sincerely fight and win the next election—is not just a humane policy, but one that tends towards social cohesion.

Why should women work in menial jobs, such as cleaning in the service industries or in supermarkets? *[Interruption.]* The House hears from the millionaire hon. Member for Welwyn and Hatfield (Mr. Evans). He does not care about people who are living on poverty wages—no doubt he made his money out of paying poverty wages.

The Government talk about putting people back to work, but they are concerned only with coercing people to work for poverty wages. That policy will not in the long run build a strong economy and create a cohesive society.

Although we heard the long list of schemes, and although the Chancellor tried very much to boost and promote his little package of gimmicks, we must look at the Red Book and at what the panel of independent forecasters have said. The panel is forecasting not a drop in unemployment but that unemployment at the end of this year will be 2.5 million, and that there may possibly be a drop in 1995 of about 250,000.

It is easy to forget that the figure of 2.5 million is a gross underestimate of the total who are unemployed. Since 1979, the Government have changed 12 times the way of counting the unemployed, to make people disappear off the employment figures. So when the independent advisors say that they are looking to levels of unemployment of 2.5 million in the near future, that is an underestimate of the level of unemployment with which people are living.

The shadow of unemployment haunts every family in the land, as well it might. It costs Britain £9,000 to keep someone unemployed for a year, and it costs every family £1,000 a year to keep somebody on the dole. The gap between the highest and the lowest-paid workers is larger than at any time since 1886, and more people in work are reliant on means-tested benefits than ever before. The Government ought to be ashamed of those facts, but they seem to think that they are some sort of benefit.

Since 1979, the number of long-term unemployed has more than doubled. It is a bit late for the Chancellor and his cohorts in the Treasury team to weep about the long-term unemployed. They are the Administration who have doubled long-term unemployment in their period in

[Ms Abbott]

office. Let us be clear that long-term unemployment has not doubled following a fit of absent-mindedness on the part of politicians. Mass unemployment was a deliberate economic weapon of the Government to keep wages low and, as it transpired, to curb the trade unions. No one is fooled when the Chancellor and his colleagues belatedly express concern about high unemployment.

This is not a Budget for jobs, and it is certainly not a Budget for housing. It is a standstill Budget introduced while the Government bide their time until the appropriate moment to introduce what they believe will be election-winning tax cuts in the run-up to an election.

Of course, what worries people, particularly at this time of year as winter approaches, is the rise in VAT on fuel. Conservative Members claim to prefer indirect taxation, which they call taxes of choice, to direct taxation. I ask Conservative Members what choice pensioners have about turning on their gas fire or central heating when it gets cold. The problem with VAT on fuel and the reason why it strikes the public as particularly unfair is that most people have absolutely no choice about expenditure on heating. The rise in VAT is wrong because indirect taxation bears more heavily on the income of the poor. It is wrong that the poor, the disabled and people on benefits should have to bear the fiscal burden of the Government's economic incompetence.

The Budget offers no hope to the jobless or to my constituents in Hackney. I believe that it will be dismissed by the public as merely a blip, when the important story is the on-going civil war in the Conservative party. Ministers on the Treasury Bench should be ashamed when they look around them and see the destruction and human tragedy that they have wrought with their divisive and ultimately ineffective economic policies.

6.41 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I do not intend to follow the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) down all the many byways that she explored, but I shall make one observation to her. During the past generation, unemployment has risen throughout Europe. Wherever there are left-wing socialist Governments within the European Union, unemployment is much higher than in Britain. In socialist Spain, for example, almost a quarter of the work force is out of work. We have had five Labour Governments in the history of Britain. Unemployment has risen in all five. Nothing that the hon. Lady had to say convinced me that if we ever had the misfortune to have a sixth Labour Government, the same would not happen again.

I intend to spend three or four minutes on the fiscal position before devoting the main part of my speech to monetary policy. This was an excellent Budget. The overwhelming requirement was for the Government to tackle the overweening level of Government borrowing. That is exactly what the Budget has done so much to achieve. Borrowing is an evil which crowds out private sector investment and leaves a burden for future generations. It is remarkable that the colossal fall in borrowing has been combined with several well-targeted measures directed at those genuinely seeking work, the more vulnerable members of the community and, above all, small businesses, in which most new jobs are generated.

In international terms, we are close to the bottom of the league of borrowing as a percentage of gross domestic product. Our total national debt represents only about six months' GDP. The Budget will go still further and move us, I hope before too long, from second place among the 20 countries listed in this morning's paper to the top.

We have been able to reduce Government borrowing, not because of fisticuffs behind the bike sheds between Treasury Ministers and spending Departments but because of a series of well-crafted policies. Many of us on the Conservative Benches were delighted to hear that the housing benefit scam, under which the landlord and the tenant can connive to take large sums of money from central Government, sometimes without the local authority even showing any concern, is to end.

It is right that we should crack down on mortgage benefit, although I hope that the Government will focus the policy firmly on people taking out new mortgages. Some people with existing mortgages who are in financial difficulties face distinct problems. The reduction in mortgage benefit is a good thing because it will discourage building societies and banks from lending to people at the margin who should not take on the commitment of a mortgage, with the taxpayer underwriting it. I also welcome, as I am sure all Conservative Members do, the greater involvement of private capital in capital projects, which again will help to ease the burden.

I have only one negative point to make on the fiscal side. It will not surprise my hon. Friends, but I feel bound to make it. Once again, we have seen a further squeeze on defence spending in the new third year of the programme. Even indexed against the retail prices index, which is not a realistic index for any form of Government spending, because wages and salaries follow living standards rather than the RPI, there has been another small 0.4 per cent. cut. We have much smaller armed forces now. We reduced them for a good reason, but we must provide them with the money to be adequately equipped and trained. Nevertheless, I commend my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget for achieving a remarkable balance between a massive and welcome cut in Government borrowing and a series of well-crafted policy changes.

That brings me to monetary policy. An interesting thing is happening in monetary policy at present. We have a clear divorce between the advice from the Bank of England which, even more strongly in its off-the-record briefings than in on-the-record material, is clearly in favour of another rise in interest rates and the clear advice of the independent panel of forecasters that we should hold steady for a while on interest rates.

I have an interest to declare once again. While other people have been rushing out to buy their lottery tickets, I have just doubled the bet that I have on the money market on interest rates. I firmly believe that the Government should hold interest rates for some time yet. Let me tell the House why.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Because the hon. Gentleman wants to win his bet.

Mr. Brazier: The question that the hon. Lady should ask is why I have just placed the bet. Only one serious economic danger faces us today. It is not a danger that we should underestimate. The danger is that we could underestimate how successful we have been in curbing

inflation. First, if one compares this recovery with the three previous ones, the monetary profile is so different that it is difficult to exaggerate. Monetary growth in broad money as the last recovery developed was between 15 and 20 per cent. Monetary growth in broad money this year—calculated by annualising the past six months—is a mere 2.5 per cent. We have never before during this century had an economic recovery in which the banks have had serious difficulties lending their money.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my hon. Friend accept that the one thing that manufacturing industry in Britain does not want is another rise in interest rates, which would deter any further investment? Although there has been a rise in investment, it is from a low base. We want more investment in manufacturing industry. That certainly will not be achieved if there is another rise in interest rates.

Mr. Brazier: My hon. Friend has just anticipated almost my next sentence. The second major difference between this recovery and the last one is where recovery comes from. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor alluded to the important role of exports in this recovery. Another major difference is the fact that the output of investment goods has grown so much more quickly than the output of consumer goods. Indeed, in the last quarter it has grown at double the rate of growth of output of consumer goods. Investment is occurring now. There is some difficulty in sorting out the figures. There are various different ways of measuring investment, but it is clearly there. As my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) rightly said, if interest rates rise further, investment could be jeopardised.

The fourth big difference between the current recovery and the previous one, to which several hon. Members alluded, is in the housing market. The fuel of our last three inflationary booms has overwhelmingly been monetary growth driven by large quantities of inflation and tax-assisted borrowing, driving up house prices. Today, house prices are, at most, level in money terms; they may even be falling in money terms, and the level of transactions is definitely falling.

As I represent an east Kent constituency, I am especially conscious of the fact that there is an enormous overhang of empty property in north-west France. Not only are second home owners selling their leafy cottages in my part of the world and, I suspect, in other parts of England, to buy cottages for a third of the price in France—now advertised by estate agents in England—but a growing number of retired people, including two sets of friends of mine in the past 12 months, are taking the opportunity to move to France and realise a huge capital gain.

All those factors illustrate how dramatically different the monetary profile of the current recovery is from the previous one. If we allowed officials in the Bank of England to persuade us to fight this war in the way that it was fought the last three times and increased interest rates now against the current background, we could seriously damage a tremendously healthy export-led and investment-led recovery.

I shall quickly dispose of the three opposing arguments produced principally by the Bank of England "school of thought". The first is the rapid growth in narrow money. I do not go quite as far as Professor Tim Congdon in believing that that measure is always a waste of time; it has some value. However, there is an especially good reason for distrusting it now.

If there is a big transfer of employment, resulting in a much greater proportion of people being in low-paid part-time work, and large numbers of people enter the work force for the first time who are low paid, many of those people are paid in cash, not simply because of the black economy but because they do not have bank accounts. That is bound to mean that the small proportion of the overall broad money figure that represents notes and coins increases. It does not have a macro-economic inflationary knock-on effect, however.

The second argument that is frequently mentioned is based on business surveys. Astonishingly, the most prominently mentioned of those is the dreadful purchasing managers' index. As a former statistician, I ask, how could anyone take an index that has operated for as short a time as three years—it has been in existence for less than half an economic cycle—as a serious measure showing which way the economy is going?

The third and final major argument concerns the capacity issue. As a monetarist, I am always inclined to be slightly suspicious of the capacity argument, because I believe that inflation is principally a monetary phenomenon, but capacity issues are, anyway, principally concentrated in manufacturing. Whereas the service sector is 60 per cent. of the economy, manufacturing is only about 20 per cent., and new capacity can be put in more quickly than it used to be a few years ago. We have a good level of manufacture of investment goods. Plenty of empty business property remains available. Factories can be equipped and brought on stream much more quickly than they used to be, and the greater use of shifts, and so on, can assist in doing that.

The current recovery is quite different from previous economic recoveries. I have put my money where my mouth is; instead of buying lottery tickets, I decided to invest a bit of the Brazier finances on a bet that we shall not need to increase interest rates as fast as the markets believe that we should.

The current recovery is different from the previous one. It is a healthy recovery; it is an export-led recovery; it is an investment-led recovery, and this is an excellent Budget to cap it.

6.53 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I do not intend to follow the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) along the monetary theme that he developed, because many of my constituents do not have enough money to talk about betting on interest rates; they have problems finding the means to afford a reasonable standard of living.

I was interested to hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer say that he intended to lift the personal allowances for tax payments on some pensioners. Obviously, I shall wait with interest to discover how that will affect pensioners throughout the country, especially in my constituency.

Earlier this year, I received a letter from a pensioner couple who advised me that they were getting

"a rent rise of £3 in April".

That was the result of the Government's insistence that councils increased their rents greatly in excess of inflation—and I am speaking of properties for which

[Mr. William O'Brien]

people pay much more than the economic rent. At one time, Conservative Members used to say that people should pay an economic rent. Council house rents greatly exceed economic rents.

The couple advised me:

"At the same time our pensions are going up approximately £2.20p, so we shall be 80p worse off"—

that is 80p worse off before value added tax was added to energy costs—

"as the prats in the government say we get £4 a week interest on every £1,000 over £3,000, that is 25 PER CENT",

for which reason they receive less housing benefit than they should.

I wonder what the attitude of Conservative Members will be to that development, whereby pensioners who have savings to help them through their retirement are being told that on every £1,000 savings exceeding £3,000 it is estimated, for benefit purposes, that they receive 25 per cent. interest. Only fools would say that that is a fact, but that is what happens as regards interest payments on pensioners' savings.

I wish that the Chancellor would listen to some of the problems that many of the retired people throughout the country experience. Recently, a chap called Hunter, who lives in Sharlston in my constituency—you must know the district quite well, Mr. Deputy Speaker—came to my surgery. He received an increase in his British Coal pension of £1.55 per week. His housing benefit was reduced by £1.09 and his council tax by 50p per week. That pensioner, after receiving his pension increase, is £4 per week worse off. He also suffers from the increase in VAT on fuel.

I also know of a widow whose state pension increased by 15p per week. Her housing benefit was reduced by 26p per week. The lady says that that has happened for years—the increase in pension has been absorbed by the reduction in housing benefit. The Government's policy of reducing housing benefit when pensions increase is adversely affecting a substantial number of people who are on pensions and who rely on pension increases to try to improve their standard of living.

A family of three live in the area of Ossett in my constituency. The father and son are disabled; the son is physically disabled and incontinent. The mother and wife has to be the carer, looking after the two other members of her family. The son reached the age of 25. He has a mental age of eight, but the family lost £4 per week in housing benefit because he reached the age of 25. Government rules say that housing benefit is cut when a lodger reaches the age of 25, because Ministers allege that that person makes a contribution to the household.

There is no question of tolerance in such a position. There is nothing in the Budget to help the families whom I have described. There is nothing to help them to avoid the poverty trap. We are talking of the most vulnerable people in society—the mentally and physically disabled—yet the Government attack them by reducing their income and their benefits. During the Chancellor's lengthy speech, he made no mention of any help for them.

The people whom I have described have to pay the increase in VAT on fuel charges. Indeed, they will suffer the most from that increase. Age Concern, in a parliamentary briefing, said that it believed that

"VAT on fuel should not be increased to 17.5 per cent. But, if the increase goes ahead, we are concerned with the way the compensation package will be implemented."

Every hon. Member should share that concern.

The Government promised to compensate people on benefit for the increase in VAT. On 27 October, I put a question to the Paymaster General, who replied:

"The House decided to implement VAT on fuel bills in two stages. It did so in the knowledge that a generous compensation package gives extra help to all pensioners and widows, disabled people"—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1994; Vol. 248, c. 994.]—

who qualify.

In the main, it is those who are in receipt of income support who qualify. Ministers—in this case, the Paymaster General—give misleading information. They seem to be under the impression that all pensioners receive the hand-out to compensate for VAT on fuel. That is not the case. When the Secretary of State for Social Security speaks in the Budget debates, he should clarify the position for those who are denied the extra benefit to compensate for VAT on fuel.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition analysed the increase proposed by the Chancellor and showed that in real terms it would amount to about 10p a week for a single pensioner. I hope that there will be an opportunity for hon. Members to vote on such a pernicious tax. It shows beyond any shadow of doubt that those who will suffer and be hurt the most will be those who can ill afford the extra cost imposed by the Government.

The Chancellor missed the opportunity offered by the Budget to redress the problems faced by many pensioners. It is not just the cut in housing benefit or the VAT on fuel bills—in the early years of the Conservative Government, following the 1979 election, the Government took away the concessionary television licence from a substantial number of pensioners. That concession had been promoted by the Labour Government. I hope that Ministers will deal with that problem.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that the last Labour Government failed to pay the pensioners' Christmas bonus in two of their last four years in power?

Mr. O'Brien: I remind the hon. Gentleman that since 1979 this Government have not increased the Christmas bonus by the rate of inflation and are therefore denying pensioners £55.70. I shall take no lectures from the hon. Gentleman on the matter, because the bonus is £10 now and it was £10 some 15 years ago. Had it been uprated in line with inflation, it would now be worth £65.70.

I also remind the hon. Gentleman that in 1979 a single pensioner received a pension of £23.30 per week. In 1994, he is receiving £57.60 per week. Had the pension been uprated in line with inflation, it would now be worth £76.70. The hon. Gentleman should remember that pensioners have not been robbed just of their pension. He voted for VAT on fuel; he supported the withdrawal of concessionary television licences; and he supported the reduction of housing benefit. If he has any shame, he should feel ashamed of what has happened to pensioners since the Government came to power. When the opportunity arises for the hon. Gentleman and others to support the pensioners on the question of VAT on fuel, I hope they will join us in voting down the proposed increase. Last night, I presented a petition on behalf of

1,000 of my constituents asking the House to vote down the increase to 17.5 per cent. next April. I hope that my constituents who signed that petition will receive the support of the House to stop the VAT increase.

Because of the Government's policies, in 1994 local housing authorities are making a profit, for the first time, for the Government from housing rents. Local authorities pay net housing subsidies to the Treasury. The Government have a new tax—on council house rents. We are all aware that the Government have increased rents well above the rate of inflation.

Now, council house and housing association rents are not economic rents but what we term "market rents". But the people who set the market rents are the Ministers who stand at the Government Dispatch Box. Councils are told what rent increases they must make, not because those increases will pay for other benefits for council house tenants but because the Government will benefit from them. It is another tax that people have to endure because of Government policy.

Again, the Chancellor had the opportunity to redress that situation and to be fair and honest with tenants about the levying of rents and housing benefits. For tenants not on housing benefit, the increase in rents above the rate of inflation is totally unfair. It is undemocratic because those people have no vote on the rent increases. For tenants on housing benefit, a rent increase above the rate of inflation drives them further into the poverty trap and becomes a greater and more serious problem. For tenants on a partial rebate, the rate of taxation is probably higher than in any other sector of the community.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer missed a golden opportunity today. He could have helped millions of people who are in the poverty trap, losing housing benefit and have no way of escaping the policies that the Government introduced. Local authorities and housing associations face tremendous difficulty in improving their properties and providing affordable housing. Because of the Government's restrictions, they may not spend their money to develop new housing and improve the housing stock. Some council houses have only one electric plug in the kitchen. Local authorities want to improve on that and carry out improvements, but because of the policies outlined by the Government, they are denied the opportunity to do so.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to the home energy efficiency scheme, yet in properties in some local authorities, the heating is provided by boilers, and by other means, that are 20 years old. Those local authorities want to take out those old boilers to improve their heating efficiency, yet, because of Government policy, that is not permitted. Therefore, in addition to VAT on energy, many people are living in houses that are uneconomical because of the heating system.

I put it to the Ministers on the Treasury Bench that what we have witnessed today is an opportunity lost. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had the golden opportunity to bring into practice some of the policies that would have helped the people to whom I have referred.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): My hon. Friend is talking about local authorities and local government. If he just casts his eye around the Chamber this evening, he will see behind him our hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham), the former leader of Coventry city council. In front, he will see our hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe, (Mr. Betts), the former leader of Sheffield city council. On the Whips' Bench, he will see our hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton), who was leader of his council. Will my hon. Friend just think for one moment about all the local authorities that dispose of their waste and put it in a big hole? The Chancellor of the Exchequer will tax every local authority in Britain that actually empties every dustbin. No local authorities incinerate their waste; they put it in a big hole.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Interventions are supposed to be brief and to the point.

Mr. Stott: For the first time in 15 years.

Mr. O'Brien: I appreciate the point made by my hon. Friend. The fact that we are threatened with a tax on waste for landfill sites in 1996 has not gone unnoticed. The Chancellor said that a consultative document would be published on that matter. We are waiting with bated breath to see what is in it.

It is true that we will witness a further tax on people who have no alternative but to have their waste disposed of by their local authorities. The Secretary of State for the Environment, in a written answer to a question which I tabled, said that no assistance is given by his Department to people who want to dispose of recycled materials. He said that it was for the market to decide.

As I said earlier, market rents do not help people on low incomes. They do not help the people whom I want the Minister to help. I hope that he will take that into consideration when he replies, and I hope that some amendments will be made to help the people who will suffer worst under this Budget.

7.15 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on introducing a Budget for growth, recovery and sound finance.

It is profoundly depressing to listen to Opposition Members simply regurgitating old ideas from the past. We recognise that the debate must be very difficult for them, because, increasingly, they are not allowed to talk about policies: their leader cannot decide whether he wants to have them or not. He will have one policy on one day and will trim and change it the next, according to what he thinks may be popular with the electorate. Opposition Members are left like some old record stuck in a groove, regurgitating the ideas that they have peddled in the past.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hendry: I should like to make progress, but I will certainly give way later.

We heard from the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)—sadly, she could not remain to hear the speech that followed her own—about how the housing recovery will not happen. It must be difficult for her to find things to be gloomy about these days. Not long ago, Opposition Members were telling us that the recovery would not happen and that it would not last. They then told us that inflation would not come down and that it would not stay down. They then told us that the trade deficit would not fall as we came out of

[Mr. Hendry]

recession. They kept on telling us that unemployment would not come down. They increasingly find that they are short of things to complain about.

Mr. Etherington: I hope that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that it is even more depressing for Opposition Members to hear Conservative Members constantly reiterate the benefits of policies which have failed for most of this century but which we keep on getting.

Mr. Hendry: The hon. Gentleman, sadly, did not recognise that manufacturing output and exports are now at their highest level. We have the most favourable circumstances in terms of inflation, interest rates and business confidence that I have seen in my lifetime. The hon. Gentleman may be a good number of years older than me, but it is a shame that he has not learnt a bit faster.

Conservative Members have to listen to Opposition Members peddling the same old mistruths about how things are bad, yet all round the country we find them getting better.

We listened, too, to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who talked about manufacturing industry. How sad, I thought, for businesses in his constituency, which are doing their very best to win new markets, to produce the best goods at the best price and to train their workers, to find their own Member of Parliament talking them down. Why cannot Labour Members be like my hon. Friends the Members for Cheadle (Mr. Day), for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) or other hon. Members who fight every inch for their manufacturing industries because they believe in manufacturing and want to help them to do better and win new markets?

We then had to listen to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). I fully accept his sincerity, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) pointed out, the Labour Government not only did not pay the Christmas bonus twice, but did not index it according to inflation. Opposition Members still say that we should have done that.

Ours was not the party that delivered inflation at 27 per cent. and ours was not the party that cheated pensioners of their savings, which became less valuable every year because of the inflation rate. We take no lessons from the Labour party about pensions, given the way in which it has dealt with them.

Mr. William O'Brien *rose—*

Mr. David Evans *rose—*

Mr. Hendry: The hon. Member for Normanton has had his opportunity, but I happily give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield.

Mr. Evans: Will my hon. Friend confirm that in 1978, under that lot over there, inflation was running at 27 per cent.? Never mind about pensioners' savings; at that rate, they were devalued.

Mr. Hendry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Every Labour speaker has spoken of Labour's wish to cut £2.3 billion of Government revenue over the next year, but has any of them said how the cut should be paid for?

Mr. O'Brien *rose—*

Mr. Hendry: Hear me out.

Have Labour Members proposed the imposition of a single tax? Have they proposed the saving of £2.3 billion elsewhere? We know that they will not do so. They are merely going for the media soundbite—the little slot on the six o'clock or the nine o'clock news and the opportunity to issue a little press release in their local newspapers. They have not the decency to tell the House how they would make up the shortfall that they would create.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I hate to contradict my hon. Friend, but one promise that Labour seems to have made is to tax higher earners. Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to tell us how much income we might expect that to produce. Would it cover the extra spending?

Mr. Hendry: It is always hard to tell. I imagine, however, that if we asked the Leader of the Opposition—who is married to a very high earner—he would be able to give us a good deal of information, and I hope that he will declare an interest when he comes to talk to us about that.

Let me return to the subject of pensioners. I particularly welcome the raising of thresholds for their payment of tax. In my submission to the Treasury, I stressed that I wanted those thresholds raised to make a bigger difference between those who have saved to contribute to their pensions throughout their lives and those on income support. The pensioners whom I find it hardest to talk to are those who have done all we that asked of them—who have saved in order to take up pensions, and who now find that if they had spent the money on an extra holiday or a slightly higher living standard they would be almost as well off. I commend my right hon. and learned Friend's decision to ensure that such people receive the benefits of their savings in their lifetimes.

I also commend the measures to encourage people to return to work. I declare an interest, as an unpaid director of a training charity dealing with young long-term unemployed people. I welcome the initiative to allow a year's break from national insurance contributions for employers of those who have been without work for two years or more, which will make it significantly easier to encourage them back into work and will make it a realistic possibility for them to take jobs.

I am pleased about the expansion of the constructive schemes. It is sad that the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington should describe those measures as gimmicky; they do not seem gimmicky to someone who is on such a scheme—someone who has been unemployed for some time, and then finds that the Government have introduced a scheme designed to help him to gain a new skill, try a new job and find a way back into work. That is not a gimmick; it is someone's life. It is demeaning and condescending in the extreme for Opposition Members to be so cruel and hurtful to people who are doing their best to return to work.

I want to say a little about the Housing Corporation budget. I am joint chairman of the parliamentary all-party group on homelessness, and I know that any cut in Housing Corporation funding will be viewed with concern, but I think that we should look at the proposal in context. We must take into account a Conservative manifesto commitment to build 153,000 social houses for rent over the three years after the election—a target that will be comfortably met. We must also take into account the lower building costs produced by building companies that are anxious to find work, and the lower interest rates which mean that housing associations can borrow from the money markets.

We should, however, go further and make it possible for the Housing Corporation to give grants to private developers so that they can build social rented housing as well. Again, I declare an interest as chairman of a company that deals in private rented accommodation—not that it would benefit, but builders should be entitled to put in bids to show that they can build better and more cheaply, and let at lower rents, than many housing associations.

I hope that we shall also encourage housing associations to recycle their money by providing their tenants with a right to buy, and that we shall enable the smaller housing associations to have a bigger slice of the cake: they tend to be leaner, and more directly connected with the issues in their local communities. Above all, we must try to encourage the Housing Corporation to put its funds more directly into refurbishment. There are 700,000 empty houses in the country, and it is ridiculous to claim that every year we need to build 100,000 or 200,000 new houses.

Every time the Government build more houses, Shelter says, "That is not enough: we must have more." If the Government built the 100,000 houses that Shelter wanted last year, Shelter would say, "We did not want 100,000; we really wanted 200,000." Shelter is the only organisation that can call one month of bad figures a trend and, when presented with two years of declining homelessness figures, say that it is still too early to predict the true position. We must enable the Housing Corporation to make better use of existing stock.

This Budget is not about short-term solutions; it is about getting the long-term economic structure right. It proposes measures that will build on the recovery that is so clearly already in place. In my constituency, businesses that are working to gain new markets, employ new people and lower our local unemployment rate faster than the national average will welcome many measures in the Budget. They will be delighted by the measures to control the growth of business rates; they will be delighted by the proposed extension of the export credit guarantees; they will be delighted by measures that will help them to employ new people, especially those who have been unemployed for some time; and they will be delighted by my right hon. and learned Friend's commitment to a rescue culture.

For too long, we have been concerned about the fact that the banks seem ready to pull the plug before they have had a chance to see whether businesses might have a long-term viable future. As we emerge from recession, fewer companies will be in that position, but all Conservative Members will welcome the Budget initiative.

This is a Budget for recovery, a Budget for sustained growth and a Budget that my constituents will welcome.

7.27 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I am interested by the litany that I have heard today from Conservative Members. I think, however, that I should begin at the point where the Chancellor began. He said that inflation was last at its current level during a certain World Cup; but, as we know, a Labour Government were in power then.

Conservative Members have made much of the so-called misdemeanours and mismanagement of Labour Governments. Let me remind them that it was not a Labour Government, but a Tory Government, who created the three-day week. A Tory Government, too, could not manage the OPEC negotiations when oil and petrol prices started to rise.

Mr. Duncan *rose—*

Mr. Cunningham: I see that the hon. Gentleman is keen to intervene, but a Tory Government were undoubtedly involved. Their actions, certainly in the 1970s, led to a Labour Government eventually having to approach the IMF. Conservative Members keep throwing that at us, but would we not like to return to the days of Labour government in the 1960s and 1970s—the days when only about 300,000 people were unemployed? Would not we like to get back to the days when more houses were being built than ever before—that was considered a terrible record for a Labour Government—and when homelessness was at a minimum? Would not we like to get back to the days when more hospitals were being built and more doctors and nurses were being trained?

Conservative Back Benchers would like to brainwash us into believing that the Government's economic policies are working. I have heard Conservative Members say that this is the right Budget every time this Government have introduced a Budget, yet no Budget has been right.

I want to deal with the areas that concern me and my constituents. Some hon. Members have mentioned invalidity benefit, for which, under the new arrangements, about 200,000 people will not qualify. A vast number of people will lose out on the jobseeker's allowance. More important, if an individual is given a card to go for a job but does not get it, benefits officers can ring the employer to find out how he got on. If the employer says that the individual did not try very hard, he may lose his benefits.

I want to show how vindictive the Budget really is. Hon. Members have touched on housing benefit. Many families on the poverty line rely on housing benefit. A short time ago, some Conservative Members said that housing benefits were being abused in Coventry. An investigation took place, but in only a few cases could any abuse be demonstrated.

The Government are reneging on their promise to first-time buyers. What happened to the Government's slogan about a home-owning democracy? Many young people who have taken out mortgages over the past two or three years will find themselves confronted once again with another reduction in the help available for mortgage repayment.

Mr. Duncan: Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman has just said, the way in which housing benefit has operated

[Mr. Duncan]

guarantees that private sector rents will rise to meet the level of housing benefit that is set. The greatest guarantee for someone wanting to start on the mortgage ladder is a regime of low interest rates, which we now have amidst the sustainable recovery that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor outlined so well today.

Mr. Cunningham: It is not for me to defend the housing benefit system that the Government introduced, particularly in the context of the abolition of rent controls. The Government abolished rent controls on the basis that a fair rent should be charged and that market forces should determine its level. I am showing that the changes will have a regressive effect on the poorer members of society. They will affect many people in my constituency.

Once again, local government will have a sledgehammer taken to it. The Chancellor's speech emphasised the need for efficiency in local government. We all want to encourage efficiency in local government, and some of us do, but before the Government start preaching about efficiency in local government they should become more efficient and set a good example. I have not seen much efficiency from central Government.

The Government have made much of the fact that there will be a 3.5 per cent. increase in funding for the police. Let us look at what they have not funded. They have not put much money into funding for safer cities and they have cut legal aid. I could go on and on.

In reality, the Budget must be judged against last year's Budget. It is designed, once again, to make the poorer members of society pay for the Government's follies. It should have been based on need rather than greed. That is how I would sum up the Budget.

7.34 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): The headline in a Conservative party brief that I have just looked at suggests, in a rather defensive tone, that this may be a "steady as she goes" Budget. This has indeed been a "steady as she goes" Budget and I welcome that. It is exactly what we need at this stage. I welcome three particular aspects. There was help for the long-term unemployed, more help for small companies—we have done a great deal to help them in recent years—and a continued reduction in the level of public spending and public borrowing.

The experience of the Conservative Government in the early 1990s shows how difficult it is to keep public spending under proper control. We all know that Conservative Governments believe in keeping public spending down. Sadly, we allowed it to go up to unsustainable levels and that is one of the most important reasons why the Government have had some serious economic difficulties in the past few years. The key thing for this Budget was that the recovery should be nurtured and sustained.

The headline in a recent issue of *CBI News* said:

"Recovery in progress: Do not disturb."

That probably sums up more than anything else what we needed from this Budget and that is exactly what we have got.

The Red Book shows that the Government are forecasting growth of about 4 per cent. in 1994 and of about 3.5 per cent. in 1995. The London Business School has forecast that manufacturing production will grow by an annual average of 4.3 per cent. between 1994 and 1998. That is extremely encouraging and I hope that the forecast is accurate.

Inflation is 2 per cent. now and in his speech my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said that inflation will be going up next year. In years gone by we might have expected him to say that it would go up to 5 per cent., 10 per cent. or 15 per cent. What he said was that next year inflation is forecast to rise to 2.5 per cent.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does the hon. Gentleman think that the damage has already been done with inflation? What about the thousands of people who have lost their homes or had to give up their jobs because of inflation? You have had 16 years to deal with inflation and you have inflicted misery and injustice on the people of this country. You will not be forgotten because you are still inflicting that misery with—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is addressing me.

Mr. Riddick: I know that you are a powerful figure, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was not aware that you were responsible for all those things.

I accept the admonition of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). It is deeply regrettable that we allowed inflation to get out of control and that at its height it reached 11 per cent. However, that contrasts with inflation of about 26 per cent.—

Mr. Duncan: It was 27 per cent.

Mr. Riddick: Yes, as my hon. Friend said, inflation was 27 per cent. when the Labour party was last in office.

We must not forget that inflation went up to high levels in the early 1990s because of our involvement in the exchange rate mechanism and Lord Lawson's efforts to prove to the then Prime Minister that we should join the ERM. As a result of those efforts he lost control of monetary policy. The Labour party wanted us to join the ERM. At the time it was calling for interest rates to be lowered still further, which would have made the inflation problem even worse than it turned out to be.

Returning to today's economic position, interest rates are at competitive levels. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said, investment in plant and machinery is increasing by about 5 per cent. British exporters are expanding in existing markets and winning new orders in new markets.

Earlier this year, I led an all-party delegation of Members of Parliament to India. Yesterday, I talked at a Sino-British trade fair in Harrogate. It is interesting that British companies are doing much more business in both those countries than they have done before. They are exporting more goods and services to India and China and to many other countries throughout the world. They are setting up companies in those two countries, in many cases joint venture companies. It is extremely good news that the recovery is export and investment led.

The most important point is that the fall in unemployment is the result of all those favourable economic indicators. Unemployment has fallen by 450,000 since the end of 1992. Last month, it fell by 330 in my constituency of Colne Valley—the biggest monthly

fall in unemployment there for more than six years. The number of people who are unemployed in Colne Valley is now at its lowest level since June 1991. That is obviously extremely good news, but more needs to be done. I hope that the downward trend in unemployment in my constituency and in the country will continue.

I welcome the specific measures in the Budget to help people who have been unemployed for a long time and the measures to help people on low pay. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has introduced measures that exempt employers from national insurance contributions for the first year and that cut the national insurance rate for employees earning less than £205 per week by 0.6 per cent.

My right hon. and learned Friend rather lost me when he talked about the expansion of job schemes to help people back into work. He talked about job finder's grants, work trials, Workstart, Workwise and 1-2-1 schemes. I am sure that all those schemes will play a useful part in helping the long-term unemployed. I welcome the fact that the Government have shown their terrific commitment to getting people back to work. I also welcome the extra help that my right hon. and learned Friend announced today for small businesses. The venture capital trust scheme will be useful in attracting new investment into small firms.

Exporters will welcome the extra cover that the Government will provide through the export credits guarantee scheme and the fact that guarantee premiums will be 10 per cent. lower. The Government, however, can only do so much in terms of specific measures to stimulate enterprise and to help generate wealth. They need to create the right economic environment. We have that now, as we had in the mid-1980s. It was a tragedy that, because Lord Lawson played around with interest rates to prove his point about the exchange rate mechanism, we lost control of the money supply and suffered from everything that flowed from that.

The right economic environment is now in place. Monetary policy is firmly under control. Inflation is low. Companies in this country want, more than anything else, long-term stability. That is what they need to have the confidence to plan for the future. Those plans must not be knocked off course by sudden changes in Government policy.

The Government must ensure that we have reasonable personal tax rates, so that people have incentives to work, and reasonable corporate tax rates, so that companies are encouraged to make profits. Where necessary, the Government must make supply-side changes, as they have done in the past. They reformed trade union law so that trade unions operated in a responsible way as opposed to the irresponsible way in which they operated in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Government have privatised a number of firms, including British Airways, British Gas and British Telecom. Many of those companies have improved their performance as a result of being taken away from the control of politicians and bureaucrats, which I welcome.

Deregulation is another matter on which the Government must act. We have made some strides on that front, but more must be done. Too much Brussels-inspired regulation is still being introduced and the Government must do all that they can to ensure that unnecessary regulation is resisted.

I suppose that the most important point is that the Government must allow companies to run their businesses without unnecessary impediment. The British people are entrepreneurial, innovative and hard working. We should let them get on with it. In the past two years, they have gone out and done so because the Government have created the right economic conditions. As a result, those companies have gained market share, won export orders, generated more wealth and created more jobs.

Government can be destructive. Policies that harm British businesses and that destroy jobs may be introduced. I fail to understand why the Labour party continues to be so wedded to the social chapter and to the minimum wage, particularly when it hears clear evidence of the results of the minimum wage in other countries. Unemployment rates for young people and unskilled people are much higher in France and Spain than in this country as a direct result of the minimum wage.

It is interesting to compare job-creation achievements in the United States of America with those in the European Community. In the past 20 years, about 30 million new jobs have been created in the USA as against 5 million new jobs in the European Community. Most of the new jobs in the EC were created in the public sector. The reason for the gap is that the American companies operate in a much freer market system and labour market than do British and European companies, which are shackled in unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy. The key point is that continually improving productivity is crucial to companies retaining competitiveness.

A recent manufacturing bulletin published by the Confederation of British Industry shows clearly how productivity in this country has improved in the past 15 years. A graph in the bulletin shows that, since 1979, the British worker's average output has increased quite markedly compared with that of the German worker. In 1979, the British worker's output was about half that of the German worker. Now, however, it stands at about 90 per cent. of that of the German worker. More needs to be done, but that is a significant improvement that I obviously welcome.

Britain is now an attractive country with which to do business and in which to invest. As we know, inward investment has played a large part in creating new jobs here in recent years. In its recent annual report, the Yorkshire and Humberside Development Association states that in 1993-94 38 overseas companies invested in the region, as a result of which nearly 6,000 jobs were created or safeguarded. Those companies would not have come to Britain if we had had all the regulation that the European Community wants us to impose on companies.

The British economy has made sound progress in the two years since we left the exchange rate mechanism. Further progress needs to be made so that we can get more people back to work and create more wealth so that our standard of living rises. The Budget has made an important contribution in that respect, and I am happy to give it a warm welcome.

7.50 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I shall deal with the three key issues in the Budget: the economic prospects for this country and the general economic situation; taxes; and public expenditure. They are the three issues on which the Chancellor also concentrated.

[Mr. Clive Betts]

Listening to the Chancellor and to the Conservative Members who have spoken since the Budget announcement, one could believe that there was nothing wrong with the British economy, that we have nothing but success and that everything is going in the right direction. I wonder whether Conservative Members talk to the majority of their constituents who have to face the problems of everyday life in Britain in 1994. Conservatives Members must be the only people in the country who believe that everything is going well; most of my constituents believe that the country is going rapidly downhill while the Government simply sit and watch and take no effective action to solve the problems that they are experiencing.

We have heard the Government praise themselves for how they have brought about economic recovery, a recovery from high inflation, from even higher unemployment and from a £46 billion public sector borrowing requirement. There is little mention of the fact that they created the problems in the first place. Indeed, having created problems of such dimensions, it is hardly a great achievement if they manage to make a modest improvement.

The Chancellor and Conservative Members give us a snapshot of the current situation, but we do not get a longer-term perspective on how the economy has been performing. Our economy went into recession sooner than that of our economic competitors in Europe; that recession was the deepest since the war; and Britain came out of recession first only because we went into recession first. It is, therefore, hardly surprising if, judging by some short-term and immediate indicators, we are currently seen to be performing better than some European countries. However, if one looks back over the past 15 years, a different picture emerges.

The Chancellor said that inflation was back to the level of the 1960s, but he did not say that unemployment was not back to the same level. It is hardly an economic miracle to get inflation down to 2.5 per cent. when unemployment still stands at around 2.5 million even on the Government's own figures, which they have adjusted so many times since 1979. Indeed, it would be a source of amazement if inflation had not come down, given the fact that the unemployed had paid the price for it.

What should surprise us is that while unemployment still stands at around 2.5 million the Government are already talking about the economy overheating. They are already admitting that there are bottlenecks in the economy and constraints of capacity, which mean that the recovery has to be slowed down to the point that interest rates are being increased. The reason is that productive capacity of the economy is now so small in relation to the number of people who want jobs that we cannot provide all the jobs that they require.

I have visited firms in my constituency and I admit that they now say that things are better than they were a year ago. Yes, there are more orders, one or two firms are taking on more employees and certainly those in the export markets have seen improvements, but I cannot visit the firms that no longer exist. Britain has lost many firms and jobs but not because those firms were bad and could not produce the goods. Many were squeezed because they had taken the initiative and invested only to find that, because of the lack of real opportunity for venture capital in this country, the price of borrowing increased and they went out of business.

Mr. Day: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that the phenomenon of unemployment and companies going under in the recession was peculiarly British?

Mr. Betts: I am saying that, in the 15 or 16 years that the Government have been in power, the failure of Britain's economic performance has been comparatively much greater than that of the developed economies in the European Union and elsewhere. I shall provide the hon. Gentleman with some figures if he will be patient for a moment.

One of our problems is our past failure to invest in our infrastructure and industry. Our failure to invest in our people has produced a shortage of capacity and a lack of skills, which is all too evident on the ground and shows in international comparisons.

Mrs. Lait: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that, in recent years, the north-east, Scotland and the north-west have suffered least from the recession, simply because of the investment in roads and industrial building already made under the Government's regional development policy?

Mr. Betts: That is incredible. It cannot be said that the north and Scotland did not suffer, but the reason why the south suffered more in the latest recession was that the recession hit the service sector hardest and that sector had developed to a greater extent in the south-east. That does not mean that constituencies such as mine and cities such as Sheffield have not suffered, too. We have lost manufacturing jobs in the past few years, but we also lost jobs in our service industries. The north suffered more in the recession of the early 1980s, but we were also hit by the recent recession, with the result that the capacity no longer exists for recovery. That is highlighted in the longer-term figures, although Conservative Members may want to dispute them.

The British economy grew by 2.7 per cent. in the 30 or so years between 1948 and 1979. The Labour party was in power for half that period. Since 1979, the economy has grown by 1.7 per cent., or 1 per cent. less. That is the reality of the economic miracle that Conservatives mention so often. They also talk about other economies having similar problems, but, on average, the economies of the Group of Seven countries grew by 2.4 per cent., or 0.7 per cent. more than the British economy. In other words, had the British economy grown at the same rate as those of our G7 competitors, we would have a 10 per cent. larger capacity than we currently have. Those figures highlight the failure of the past 15 years. They are not my figures; they are the official figures accepted by the Government.

It gets worse if we examine the current position. Let us not talk about the current 4 per cent. growth, which represents only a snapshot; let us talk about the fact that, in the five years from 1988-93, the British economy grew at a rate of 0.5 per cent. That is an abject failure by comparison with any of our overseas competitors. Investment as a percentage of GDP has fallen from 18 per cent. in 1979 to 15.5 per cent. today and investment in plant and machinery has fallen by 28 per cent. since 1990. They are the problems facing our economy, but the Budget does not contain one proposal to tackle them.

The manufacturing capital stock of our country is 0.5 per cent. higher than it was in 1979—0.5 per cent. higher after 15 years of Tory Government. In France and the United States, the figure is 20 per cent. higher; in Japan, it is 65 per cent. higher. That is a great difference. How can we create decent jobs that pay decent wages with such a level of investment in our economy and such an economic performance?

Since 1979, we have lost 3 million jobs in manufacturing industry; one third of the jobs have gone. That is a higher percentage than is the case for our industrial competitors. Where are the Government's economic policies in the Budget to arrest that decline and do something to create the jobs that people want, certainly in my constituency? In reality, the jobs around are part-time jobs, often in the service industries, which pay far lower wages than the jobs we have lost in steel, engineering and coal. That means a lowering of living standards for many people. There are real problems for people which, again, the Budget did nothing to address.

The Government have talked about the 400,000 reduction in unemployment. In the same period, we have lost 400,000 jobs. There is a problem out there which has not been addressed. The 400,000 reduction in unemployment is not matched by an increase in jobs. There are real difficulties out there which, again, the Budget does nothing to address.

On the standards used by the world economic forum on competitiveness, Britain came 18th out of 23 OECD countries. It is no wonder that our living standards are falling and it is no wonder that people do not feel better off when, having had average living standards above those in the European Union in 1979, we are now only above Spain, Ireland and Greece. For how much longer will we remain above those countries?

There is a theory prevalent among Conservative Members—the Governor of the Bank of England reflects it on occasions—that all we have to do is to get inflation down. It is believed that somehow, by some miraculous process, higher growth and more investment will follow. I do not subscribe to that view. I do not think that the German economic miracle, to which Conservative Members constantly refer, shows that either. It is more the case that if one has constant, long-term growth, improvements in real living standards and increases in real wages and profits, one takes inflationary pressures out of the economy. By sorting out investment and growth, one will then deal with inflation. Dealing with inflation may be admirable in itself. However, if, as the Government have proved to us, it is done at the price of the unemployed and if there are no mechanisms for working from low inflation to growth, because it is believed that it will happen of its own accord, we shall get nowhere in improving our long-term prospects.

There were tax increases today. The increase was £10 a week for the average family in April and it will be another £7 a week next April. That is the tax increase in the pipeline. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition rightly said, for the majority of people out there, the Budget will be remembered as the Budget that acknowledged and nodded through the second instalment of the imposition of VAT on fuel, unless Conservative Members have the courage to vote next week for an amendment that will give them an opportunity, once again, to reject the second increase and to do something for the pensioners, the disabled and the poor in our society. Those people will have to pay far more of the cost than is the case for other sections of society.

Today, the Chancellor announced help for people with the VAT increases. That was little short of misleading. He added the promises of compensation for pensioners already given into today's figures. There is no new money for pensioners in the overall compensation figures; the Chancellor merely restated what had been said before.

One of the only two new initiatives was the increase in cold weather payments, which only apply to some pensioners. The way in which they are administered leaves much to be desired and they are paid only if the weather is cold enough. They do not go to help with the general increase in fuel bills. The other new initiative, the home energy efficiency scheme to help people with their heating bills, amounted to £10 million out of a total tax take from VAT on fuel of £2.5 billion. That is little short of insulting to the people who will suffer the real damage from that VAT increase. There is no change there in Government policy, but there will be a real change next April in what ordinary families have to pay for their fuel. Damage will be done to their living standards.

The changes in mortgage tax relief next April, which had been announced previously, will hit living standards as well. I am in favour of the changes in mortgage tax relief. I would like that relief to be abolished and I do not believe that it does anything to improve housing conditions and living standards. However, I would have liked the money to have been used to deal with the real housing problems and not to have gone simply to fill the black hole that the Government have created through their problems with the public sector borrowing requirement.

The Government claim that they are all in favour of tax cuts and that the Conservative party is the party of tax cuts. Why do they not address the reality? In 1979, 34.3 per cent. of our gross domestic product went on tax; in 1995-96, the figure will be 37 per cent. Once again, a party that claims to be the party of tax-cutting has failed to deliver its promises. It has failed completely to address the real issues that have faced the country in the past few years.

We can recognise the basic unfairness of the tax increases that the Government have introduced. The people who benefited from the tax reductions at the end of the 1980s were the richest sections of our community. The people who have felt the biggest impact of the tax increases, especially VAT on fuel, are the poorest sections of our community. There have been broken promises on VAT and broken promises on the Government's overall tax take. It is no wonder that when we talk to people outside the Chamber, we find that they have no confidence in the Government. They are still frightened for their jobs and for their homes, and they are frightened because of the tax increases they have had and the tax increases still to come.

The Government's public spending record does not bear examination. The reality is that public spending is 44 per cent. of our GDP, which was exactly its level in the last year of the previous Labour Government. The difference, of course, is that social security spending has risen from 22 per cent. to 31 per cent. In return, investment in the public sector has fallen. The Government have transferred public sector investment in long-term benefits for this country into payments for the

[Mr. Betts]

waste of unemployment. That is what has happened to public sector spending while the Government have been in power.

It is interesting, in view of his record of involvement with housing, that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is now sitting on the Government Front Bench. He cannot be proud of a Government who have cut expenditure on housing in the public sector by 57 per cent. during their period of office. Social house building has fallen from 131,000 properties to 37,000, a cut of 72 per cent. The further reduction today in money for housing associations is a disgrace alongside the reduction in credit approvals for local authorities.

I do not know who comes to the surgeries of Conservative Members. I know that the biggest number of people who come to my surgery—other Labour Members have the same experience—are people who want housing and who cannot get a home. They include homeless families and young couples living with their parents and in-laws. The social tension that that causes is alarming. Conservative Members behave as if there were no problems there. They seem to believe that there would be enough houses if only we managed to get rid of vacant properties. Most vacant properties are in the private sector or are owned by Government Departments.

The cuts today are a disgrace, especially when set alongside the backlog of disrepair. The local authorities produced an excellent booklet last week in which they calculated a £50 billion backlog of disrepair, only £10 billion of which was in the local authority sector. The real disrepair is found in homes owned by the poor and the elderly, and in older housing. Even to deal with the mandatory grants currently lodged with local authorities would require £500 million extra spending each year for the next three years. That is the amount required to deal with the worst unfitness in the private sector, not the total backlog of disrepair. What do we have? We have more cuts in the credit approvals, which means even longer waits, even for the mandatory grants given according to the Government's own standards.

The Government's proposals on housing will seriously damage people in very real ways. Of course, the poverty trap needs attacking. Of course, the way in which housing benefits are withdrawn is wrong. At present, when people earn an extra pound, they lose 97p in council tax and housing benefit. The same applies to pensioners with a small occupational pension. That is a disincentive to work. However, the proposals today to leave people eligible for housing benefit for four weeks after they get a job does not address the fundamental problem. After those four weeks, many people will still lose because of the interaction of income tax increases and benefit loss. There is no proposal to date to deal with that. Instead, we have a further proposal to take money out of local authority rent accounts. In my view it is immoral to ask local authority tenants to pay for the benefits of other local authority tenants, when other benefits in our society, including benefits for private sector tenants, are paid for by all taxpayers. That is discrimination against one sector of the community, which is wrong. All that the Budget does is to worsen it.

It is surely the hallmark of the Government that they create problems for the community, then blame the community for those problems and introduce penalties to punish the community for those problems. That is exactly the position in the private housing sector, which the Government deregulated and encouraged to create market rents. Those rents have now risen and, due to people being on income support or housing allowances, the Government have seen the cost of funding those benefits rise. The Government then say that the people who are to blame are either the local authority staff who are administering the Government's own scheme of support to housing, or the tenants who are going into properties with such high rents. Why do not they accept that what is to blame is their deregulation of the housing market, which created those rent increases in the first place? It has not produced more homes to rent. It has forced rents up and the Government are paying the price. Their solution, of course, is to make local authorities or the tenants pay the price, either by the tenants losing their homes or by local authorities paying the cost, which means cuts for other services under finance capping. That is the reality of what the Government are proposing.

Then, there are measures relating to income support for people with mortgages. Again, what an appalling position in which to put people. Did not the Government recognise that some people on income support who have a mortgage will simply not be in a position, if they get a job, to take out insurance? It is quite possible that they will be denied insurance or that insurance will be at such a high premium that they will not be able to pay it. The people who I am thinking of are those who get a new mortgage today, when they are in a job. They may lose their jobs and go on to income support. They may then be offered the possibility of a temporary job, which are the norm for many people today when re-entering the labour market. Who would provide insurance for someone with a temporary job to insure their mortgage payments? No insurance company would give someone with a temporary job that sort of facility. What will happen is that the individual will say, "I am not going to go back into work on a temporary basis if it means that the next time I become unemployed, after losing my temporary job, I have no insurance and the Government will not cover, through income support, my mortgage payments. I might as well remain unemployed so that my mortgage payments are being covered." That is a major disincentive to people going back to work and it is time that the Government addressed it and halted the stupid proposal that they have made today.

The issues of real concern in the Budget include the local authority settlement—a 0.9 per cent. increase. It is not an increase of 2.2 per cent. because that includes the community care grant. For local authorities, that means cuts of more than 1 per cent. on top of the cuts that they have suffered, or their communities have suffered, in past years. All of us can see the real problems today in every local authority. There are increases in class sizes. Class sizes are up to 35 students—up to 38 in my constituency. We can all see the inadequate funding of community care. We can all see people coming out of institutions—rightly in most cases—to find that there is inadequate support to enable them to live in the community safely from their point of view, as well as that of their neighbours. The under-funding is chronic in local authorities of all political complexions.

The Budget will not address those problems. It will squeeze local authority spending further and it will increase class sizes. Conservative Members should not

talk of increasing the education budget, because if local authorities have not got the money, it will not go into schools. It is as simple as that. The Government know it and they should stop being dishonest with the people of this country in pretending that it will. Once again, local authorities are being used as scapegoats because it is easier to pass the problem on to someone else.

Conservative Members should not lecture people about partnership initiatives. The Government can claim the credit for one or two initiatives, but local authorities invented partnership initiatives. That is where those initiatives began in the 1980s. Why have they stopped? They stopped because of part V of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which introduced so many restrictions on partnerships that it effectively killed them off. The Government are now having to bring in proposals to rectify the damage that they did to partnership initiatives through that legislation.

No doubt, next year, or perhaps the following year, the tax cuts will arrive as the bribe for the election to come. For every individual who will accept that those tax cuts, when they come, are the result of the Government's economic success, 10 people will see them for what they really are—a cheap election bribe, which the public have already paid for out of their own pockets. It will simply deepen the whole community's distrust in the Government.

On all the tests that the Government have set for themselves in improved economic competitiveness, there is not one figure over the past 15 years which justifies their claims. Claiming to be a party of taxation cuts, it has broken its promises since the previous election. Since 1979, taxes in this country have not been cut. They have been altered, they have been made more unfair, but they have not been cut. Conservative Members claim to belong to a party which cuts public expenditure. They have failed. They have cut investment and the real benefits to be gained from public expenditure. They simply transfer that expenditure on to the waste of subsidising the unemployment that they have created. They have failed to improve economic performance, they have failed to cut taxation, and they have failed to cut public spending. They have failed by their own tests and their own standards. The Government have failed the people of this country and it is time that they went.

8.15 pm

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Before I come to the main part of my speech, I must respond to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). He said an awful lot. His speech contained some very instructive comments if one listened carefully. The first half of his speech was a grave criticism of the Government for increasing taxation. He then went on to list a whole number of issues on which he thought that the Government should be spending more money. There lies a contradiction in the hon. Gentleman's thinking, which is at the heart of the Labour party's present difficulties. It is easy now, two years from an election, for Labour to hide behind that facade. Come the election, however, Labour Members will have to square that circle, and they will not be able to do it. Come the next election, it will be very different from what the hon. Gentleman seems to think will happen. If I were him, I would not count my chickens until they were hatched. I remember Labour politicians doing that before.

We were also accused by the hon. Gentleman of being totally out of touch and of not speaking to our constituents. I certainly speak to my constituents as, I know, do the vast majority of my colleagues. I live right in the heart of my constituency, in the same sort of house as the vast majority of my constituents. I visit the local pub, I visit the local clubs, and I know the exact difficulties that people are facing. The question is how one deals with them.

This Budget is part of a long process of dealing with the problems felt by average people. I readily recognise that the Government, and therefore myself, are highly unpopular. But that does not mean that one should abandon the policies that one believes are right, just because one believes oneself to be unpopular. In politics, one should also have conviction, and it is my conviction that this is the right Budget for this country and this economy at the present time.

I shall comment on a couple of the main provisions in the Budget which I know will bring great joy to small businesses, certainly in my constituency—the constituency which has small businesses to which we never talk. Not far from my constituency in Knutsford—outside the boundaries of Cheadle, but quite near—there is an organisation called the Forum of Private Business. A meeting was organised in the House last week, at which a large number of Conservative Members were present. We were briefed on the problems of small businesses, in relation especially to the question of insolvency and the way in which banks deal with small businesses in those circumstances. Indeed, I have met area management representatives of banks to plead with them to take a very different and more tolerant line towards many small businesses, especially in the depths of recession through which we have gone through and in which small businesses have suffered.

I am delighted that the Government have taken on board the problems experienced by small businesses. The 28-day moratorium will help deal with the problems that we debated in the meeting upstairs with the Forum of Private Business. These small companies, which are basically sound trading organisations, may well be in difficulty on a short-term basis because a larger company has not paid a bill on time. I am pleased that the Government have announced something that will help those businesses enormously.

I am also pleased about the proposals to help people back into work. Getting back into work is another of the problems that my constituents—who I never talk to—raise with me at my surgeries. A constituent recently told me that he could not afford to take a job simply because he would lose his benefit and would have to work a month without receiving any money. It is an obvious disincentive if someone is willing to work, and wants to work, but that person must experience a month in which he cannot cover his costs because he has no income until the monthly cheque arrives. The Government have accepted that difficulty, and the proposals will definitely help my constituents to ease themselves out of dependency on benefits and into a job. I welcome that as a practical step forward in terms of defeating the scourge of long-term unemployment.

The nation has had to address the Budget deficit in general, and I applaud the Government for the way in which they have addressed it and the speed with which they have brought the projected Budget deficit down.

[Mr. Stephen Day]

Despite the pressure, political problems and unpopularity that that has created for the Government, we have still managed—the Opposition never give credit for this—to increase funding for the national health service. We have done that year after year. I seem to recall that the amount of new money announced for the NHS a few years ago actually exceeded the amount that the Opposition were demanding, but even then they accused the Government of underfunding the NHS.

I take great pride in being able to say that I do not belong to a private scheme and rely totally on the NHS. I have been lucky enough to have good health and not to be a great burden on the NHS. However, many people are not so lucky as I am. Thank God, because of the success of the NHS many people are now alive who would not have been alive 10 years ago. Happily, people are walking around today who would not have been with us 10 years ago. They have had costly operations which have rightly been provided by the NHS.

The Government have never backed away from a commitment to increase NHS funding. No Labour Government ever matched the increase in NHS funding in real terms provided by this Government. I welcome the Government's continued commitment to the NHS by the further increase in funding. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said that he thought that the extra money would somehow be lost in efficiency savings, as though that was a crime. Why should we not have efficiency in the NHS? It is taxpayers' money that is being spent and they deserve to have it spent efficiently. So long as the money that is saved by removing inefficiency is directed to patient care, which is what has happened within the NHS under the stewardship of the present Government, we should welcome and applaud that. We should certainly not denigrate it, as the hon. Member for Wrexham did.

The Leader of the Opposition rounded off his speech in his usual way by saying how he felt that he identified with the feelings of the people. According to him, the people feel that the Government are not exactly their best friend. He agreed with that, and it was easy for him to do so. He recounted a list of things that he believed that people wanted. He said that they wanted fair taxation and a fair national health service. He always says things like that, but he never tells us how he would deliver such things. That brings me back to the point that I made to the hon. Member for Attercliffe. At some time in the future, those points must be addressed.

I took particular offence when the Leader of the Opposition said that the Conservative Benches represented privilege while the Opposition Benches represented the people. As one who was educated at a state school and proud of it, I find it hard to take someone who has had the privileges and advantages of a private school—and good luck to him—making such comments about my party and me, and many others like me on the Conservative Benches, who did not have the advantages that the right hon. Gentleman has enjoyed in life. As a general election approaches, the people will not accept such bland statements as proving the real differences between the two parties. Such statements are, indeed, manifest nonsense.

We have also heard criticism of the Government's approach during their 15 years in power. In a way, I am glad that Opposition Members raised that point because, as they were allowed to raise it, I believe that I can respond to it. One does not often have an opportunity to talk about the 15 years of Conservative rule, of which I happen to be very proud. It will take more than a soundbite from the Leader of the Opposition to convince me that this country is anything other than far better off than it was when we came to power.

There are many reasons for that. I do not believe that everything that the Government have done is correct. No party could get everything right. Parties comprise human beings, and human beings make mistakes. On occasions, I have accused the Government of making mistakes—

Mr. Wray: Are you saying that you are proud of what you have sold off? Are you proud of all that public ownership that you have sold off? Are you proud of the privatisation of the water industry in England? Are you proud—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I should not have to repeat this more than once. I remind the hon. Gentleman again that he must address me and not direct his remarks directly to the hon. Member concerned.

Mr. Wray: Is the hon. Gentleman proud of all the people who lost their homes as a result of the high interest charges? The Government encouraged people to buy their homes when interest rates were at 7 per cent. and 8 per cent., but two years later people had to pay 16 per cent. and two years after that they lost all that they owned. Is the hon. Gentleman proud of that?

Mr. Day: The hon. Gentleman has referred to many things and I am very proud about the vast majority of what he listed. I will respond directly to his points.

With regard to the privatisation of the state industries, most of them have been a great success. No one can convince me otherwise. British Telecom is providing a service in competition with other companies. It has improved service to the consumer beyond recognition. British Steel used to employ many people, but unfortunately they were manufacturing steel which no one wanted and at the wrong price. Standing up, waxing lyrical and crying crocodile tears about people losing their jobs does not save those jobs or secure their future. What secured the future for the steel workers was creating a company in the private sector, which we are now proud to call British Steel, which sells steel around the world that people want and which provides real secure jobs. There may not be as many jobs as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) and I would like. I would like to see more jobs in British Steel, but we shall not obtain such jobs by resorting to the old way of politicians—the last people in the world who should do so—deciding where money should be invested.

Mr. Betts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Day: I will give way in a moment. British Leyland is a classic example of why politicians should never be allowed to decide which companies receive investment. State control of British Leyland proved a disaster. The cars became a joke, no one wanted to buy them and the company was riven by strikes and restrictive practices. If the hon. Member for Provan is asking the country to go

back to that state of affairs, I hope that he will say so regularly on public platforms up and down the country. If anyone is out of touch with the real issues, it is the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Betts: My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) referred to the privatisation of various utilities. There are certainly steel firms in the private sector. One in my constituency of Sheffield is extremely successful. But the company has a big problem with the privatised monopoly in the electricity industry, which last year effectively increased prices to stainless steel producers by 20 to 40 per cent. The regulator proved powerless to stop those increases. Is that not a problem that the Government have created, but which they are doing nothing to resolve?

Mr. Day: The hon. Gentleman has reminded me that I want to talk about water, which was mentioned specifically. The privatisation of the gas and electricity industries has produced real benefits for the consumer. Gas prices have fallen. I am not trying to mislead anyone: I accept that the imposition of value added tax has wiped out the reduction in prices to a considerable extent, but a price advantage to the consumer remains even after VAT is imposed to the full limit. Both industries are far more responsive to customers' needs now than when they were state owned.

The Government are looking to introduce more competition in the supply of gas. That competition is overdue and should have been sought when we first privatised the industry. I would believe Opposition Members when they criticised the Government about privatisations if they also made the commitment to reverse them if, God forbid, they ever came to power. Despite their rhetoric, however, they will not reverse those privatisations because they know deep down that the benefits of privatisation are indisputable.

I recognise also that what I say is not accepted easily in the country—it is probably not recognised by many of my constituents, who would vociferously disagree with me—but I believe that what I say is right and it will take more than sniping from the Opposition to make me change my mind.

Water was mentioned specifically. The privatisation of water is unacceptable to many people because they believe that water is God-given and free. It is certainly God-given, but it was never free. Water must be supplied. Great benefits have accrued to the people of my constituency, and to Stockport borough in general, from the massive investment that has been made to replace lead pipes and to create a new sewerage system. The sewers in Stockport and south Manchester were collapsing because the public system had let the public down. We are now seeing long overdue investment. There is no point in Opposition Members grumbling about privatisation. When they were in power they did not provide the money to spend on those utilities. That is why the sewers in my constituency were crumbling. However, a private water company has invested money to provide the water service that we should have had years ago. That is the reality of the situation, whether the Opposition like it or not.

When hon. Members think about the Budget, they should consider how we have arrived at our present economic position, which the Opposition would love to inherit after a general election. But it will not be that easy. If Opposition Members came to power, they would find one of the best economic situations ever seen in this country. They know that that is true, but they will not get up and say so. As they will not say it, I have said it for them. It is what they think, but it is not what they say.

The Opposition cannot deny that this country's true economic situation is reflected by the magic figures of low inflation and greater inward investment. Whatever Opposition Members say, I do not believe that the British people will throw away those advantages at the next general election. If they were to elect the Labour party, its policies would destroy everything that has brought about our economic improvement.

The Labour party would immediately bring in a minimum wage and sign us up to the social chapter. It would immediately increase spending. When we look at the tax proposals in the Budget, I ask hon. Members to think—

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): They would put up taxes.

Mr. Day: Exactly. I ask the whole country to think about where we would be if a Labour Government had been elected at the last election. In addressing the budget deficit, the Labour party would have increased taxes to the same extent as we have done. But they would have gone beyond that. The public would have been paying taxes to deal with the budget deficit, plus taxes to pay for all the spending promises that the Labour party made. Opposition Members talk about the Government's failure to deal with the budget deficit—that is nonsense in itself—but the idea that somehow the deficit would be smaller under a Labour Government is preposterous. That is at the heart of the difference between the Conservative and Labour parties.

I have no doubt that this Budget is right for this year. If the Government were playing politics with the finances of the nation and introducing tax cuts just to win favour with the populace before an election, it would be much easier to sustain the argument politically if we had cut taxes this year. Then Opposition Members could not have said, "Oh, you are cutting them just before the election so that you can get votes". That would have been the easy option. If we had done that, Opposition Members might have been right to say that we were playing politics with tax policy and the Budget. But we have not done that and they are wrong. I commend the Budget to the House.

8.37 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): One of the problems with a debate such as this is that one does not have time to reflect on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement before one is required to speak about it. On that basis, my speech may be a knee-jerk reaction. It is also good to read other people's views and widen one's knowledge on the subject before speaking in a debate, but that is not always possible.

Like many others, I welcome the economic recovery which the Chancellor graphically spelt out—at perhaps inordinate length—this afternoon. However, I do not welcome what I perceive to be the effect of the economic recovery on society in general.

There have been two recessions since 1979 and, therefore, there have been two economic recoveries. Both of those recoveries led to increased unemployment and a widening of the wealth gap between the rich and the poor.

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

We are told that unemployment is decreasing—although there seems to be a problem with the equation, because as unemployment comes down, jobs are disappearing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) has pointed out, that is a puzzle.

Although one welcomes a decrease in unemployment, what is not welcome is the nature of many of the jobs being created. I am not one of those who say, "Jobs at any cost." Since the Government came to office, the difference between wages in the north-east and those in other parts of the country has caused us to drop from third out of eight to second-last out of eight in wage rates. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) for obtaining those figures. One problem is that if reasonable, decent jobs are replaced by part-time low-paid jobs, although in numerical terms it might appear that there has been a decrease in unemployment, the relevant area loses revenue. That has knock-on effects for the whole region.

One thing that the Government cannot claim is that in this, or in any other Budget since 1979, they have done anything to eliminate regional disparities. There has been a total, absolute and dismal failure on that front, and nothing that I have heard today implies that that will change.

Much has been said today, as it has been for many weeks, about the problem of VAT on fuel. The matter relates mostly to pensioners and others on various forms of income support. I agree with my hon. Friends that the compensation on offer is inadequate. The Chancellor said that those people are not as badly off as they might have been because there have been price reductions in certain fuels or because prices have not gone up for four or five years. That was a poor argument, and unworthy of this place. Everyone has had that benefit, not just pensioners and others on income support.

Another group of people who receive scant mention in this Chamber are the relatively badly-off, who do not claim any benefits whatsoever and who are just above the poverty line. They will not receive relief from the increased VAT on fuel, and they represent many millions of people. Taking their families into account, they are a sizeable proportion of the population. They are being neglected. It is all very well the Chancellor pointing out what is being done for one section of the poor. He omitted to mention that nothing is being done for another section which is perhaps not quite as poor but is still very badly off.

On VAT in general, since 1979, the Government have systematically reduced direct taxation and systematically increased indirect or regressive taxation. Financial pundits call it regressive taxation because it redistributes wealth from the poor to the rich. That is the problem. I do not pretend to state present Labour party policy on the subject, but the country would have been better off and there would have been less inequality if income tax had been 7p in the pound more. The wealthy would then have made a more viable contribution to society. They obtain the most benefits from it, so it is only right that they should make the biggest contribution. Instead, we have had the reverse, which has led to many millions of people being made worse off. That problem promises to go on because there is nothing in the Budget to address it. There will be much of the same.

We are told that everything is successful and that we shall continue to build on it. However, although I said that I welcomed the economic recovery, it was an economic recovery from a very low base. A 4 per cent. improvement sounds good, but 4 per cent. of what? It is certainly not as good as the relative figure for our European competitors. They started in a much healthier position than we did.

I was rather surprised at the way in which the Chancellor jumped from subject to subject. We are talking about a £5 increase in vehicle excise duties, but not for commercial vehicles. That was also the case last year. I take exception to that. I have long held the view that commercial vehicles are already heavily subsidised in several ways. That is why operators have been able to corner the goods market, and that is also why rail transport has had such a poor time, not just since 1979 but since the mid-1950s. I should have liked the vehicle excise duty to have been done away with altogether. It is a form of service charge. Why not impose that duty on fuel?

I am a great believer in the theory that those who use the roads the most should make the biggest contribution towards them. That can sometimes lead to some heart searching. I know people who live in rural areas, and the only way that they can travel to their work, which is not very well paid, is by way of an old banger—an old motor car—and an increase in duty will affect them. There will always be such anomalies.

It would be good if all taxation for transport were raised from fuel. Commercial operators who use great quantities of fuel, who use the roads 24 hours a day, seven days a week, would pay the proportion which they should pay for their use of the roads network. People will say that that will put up prices, but what about competition? The Government wax lyrical about competition, but, to be effective, competition must be fair. For almost half a century, our railway system has suffered from the disadvantage of having to fight a competitor which is being subsidised by motorists and taxpayers generally.

I trust that the Government—I hope that they are not in office long enough to make the decision—will consider the problem in the light of what was said in the recent report of the Royal Commission on pollution. Unless we do something, we shall end up with more environmental damage and more road crises. In the two and a half years since I was elected to Parliament, I have noticed that conditions from the north-east down to London have worsened dramatically.

The Chancellor's speech stresses doing everything for employers and relieving the burdens on them in every possible way, notwithstanding the fact that they are advantageously placed compared with employers in many of our European neighbours. Corporation tax is a good example of that. There was no mention of the people who need help—the deserving poor—whom the Government seem to have forgotten altogether. We hear about targeting benefits, but very little was said by the Chancellor about that group.

I give some guarded welcome to the proposed freeze on alcohol tax. I welcome what the Chancellor had to say about trying, in the next few years, to harmonise that tax with those of the European Union in general. That is fine, and no one would disagree that each country should compete on an even basis. I only hope that, in the few

years that that is likely to take, we do not see a drastic reduction in our capacity. That is happening at the moment, and we are suffering from unfair competition.

I believe that the Chancellor of the Exchequer used the word "smuggling". It almost defies belief that the Government would allow people to take large vans over to France, fill them full of liquor and bring them back saying that it is for their own personal consumption. Presumably if they are caught again in five years, someone will ask questions. That situation seems to be rather ridiculous, and it is very much a case of bad legislation. We have seen much of that.

I am concerned about the proposals on tobacco tax. I do not think that there is any history of punitive taxation working. Most smokers will pay the extra tax, and I do not think that the proposals will do anything to cut consumption. That will result from education, public opinion and informing children of the disadvantages of smoking. I ask only one thing. I should like the extra revenue produced from that source to be used for the purposes that I have just mentioned, including educating people and preventing the advertising of tobacco. It is not a simple subject and it will require more than one initiative to bring about the change that I am sure the Chancellor is looking for.

As I have said, I believe that many of the Chancellor's proposals regarding help for employers will exacerbate the problems of part of the low-wage economy. Many proposals have been put forward encouraging employers to pay even less, and for many of them—particularly in my part of the country—that is the last encouragement that they need. They are quite capable of doing that anyway. As I said, that encouragement has disparate effects in different parts of the country.

I noticed that, as always, the Chancellor was lauding the benefits of privatisation. I ask the Government to consider how, in the long run, we are to benefit from cutting public expenditure and putting all the services in private hands when, in the end, those services have to be paid for from taxpayers' money. My view is that privatisation will come home to haunt the Tory Government because, eventually, only two things can happen—it will either cost more for the same services, or the services will need to be reduced. We are already beginning to see that in the railways, and I fear that we shall see it in many other utilities as time goes on.

The Chancellor also mentioned spending a small amount of money on improving the standard of insulation in houses. I do not want to be churlish, but that was always going to be too little, too late. The finest way to reduce carbon and other emissions from heating houses is by high standards of insulation. We do not have those high standards, and for many years we have lagged behind other countries with not dissimilar climates. A much larger sum of money, and much more urgency, is required on a project that would at least provide much-needed employment.

Much has been said about the housing benefit constraints. I spoke on this issue—not at any great length—last week and, although I do not wish to go over the same ground, some things need to be repeated. The Government's policy of reducing housebuilding—particularly social housebuilding—led to the private sector growing. If that is coupled with the deregulation of rents, one has on the one hand a shortage of housing and on the other a deregulated private landlord system, which is a recipe for rising rents.

Anyone could have seen that. One did not need the experience of Treasury Ministers and their financial advisors to understand it. A 10-year-old child at school could have understood it if it had been pointed out to him. Apparently, however, the Government do not understand. They say that they are paying too much in housing benefit, and that that must be curtailed.

As a matter of simple common sense, is there anyone in the Chamber—I am willing to give way—who actually believes that anyone who lives in rented accommodation is in a position to bargain with his landlord to get a reduction in rent? Does anybody believe that? There are no takers. The Chancellor said that that is what would happen, but, apparently, no Government Member is prepared to back him.

It is absolutely scandalous that we are moving in this direction in housing. We hear talk about keeping up with what was stated in the Conservative manifesto, but the number of houses being built is paltry. My hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe mentioned the deteriorating state of the homes of the two thirds of the population who own their own homes. Somewhere along the line, that will have to be paid for, and there will then be a bigger housing shortage.

There has been much debate tonight about whether hon. Members listen to their constituents. I do not know what the position is among Government Members, but between 60 and 70 per cent. of the queries which I deal with in my constituency surgery, through correspondence and through telephone messages, involve problems of housing. Yet, according to the Government, we are building plenty of houses and there is no problem.

The problem has been exacerbated by the sale of council houses which have then not been replaced. That means that councils are struggling to deal with all the problems resulting from a reduced housing stock. The Housing Corporation and housing associations—admirably though they try—are unable to stem the tide.

Mr. Day: Since hon. Members began holding surgeries, has not housing always been one of the majority of subjects on which there are requests to see a Member of Parliament? I do not quite follow the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Housing has always made up a big percentage of the matters with which hon. Members deal.

Mr. Etherington: I can only refer to the two and a half years that I have been a Member and to what I was told by the previous hon. Member representing my constituency. I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman. It may be the case in his part of the world—it may be the case generally—but it is certainly not the case within my constituency.

The point I am trying to make is that it is a worsening situation, and it is worsening because of the shortage of housing. One of the commonest problems now is where a family splits up, and the wife and children perhaps go to live with her parents. When they then try to get rehoused in their own right, they find great difficulty. With so many marriages breaking down, one would assume that those in power would understand that if that is not curtailed, there must be additional housing. There is no other answer to the problem.

[Mr. Etherington]

I was disappointed that we did not have much more radical transport policy proposals from the Chancellor. We have all read in recent weeks about various ideas which are being considered, and perhaps the Budget has come a little bit too early to include those things. The problem is not being properly addressed. As long as we say that we will allow market forces to prevail—when those market forces are not in equilibrium—we will never make progress, and we will never do anything to improve the environment or the quality of people's lives.

The Budget follows all Budgets that I have heard since 1979, in that everything is based on trying to curtail public expenditure so that eventually there will be adequate money for proper and adequate investment. There has been, as was pointed out, tremendous curtailment of public expenditure just to allow the social security budget to function and to deal with the unemployed. In real terms, if one takes the social security budget out, there has been a disastrous reduction in public expenditure.

As was pointed out, public expenditure remains at about 44 per cent. of GDP, but what is the GDP? Perhaps it is not as good as we have been led to believe. Over the past 15 years, all of the privation that has been created—all of the people who have been put under the European threshold of decency—has not brought about a significant increase in investment. There is a reluctance to invest. I should have thought that after 15 years when the Government's measures have been seen to have failed, the Government might tackle the problem and perhaps consider other methods of achieving proper investment in industry.

Although I am not a conspiracy theorist, I sometimes have a lurking suspicion that, as the Government are an extension of the City and financial interests—that is how I, and most of the public, see them—it suits them to have a low-wage, low-investment economy. Until such time as I start to see real change in this country, I shall continue to believe that. I sometimes think that there can be no other reason. Why are people in Britain less willing to invest than our European competitors? They get a good return on their investment—better than in most other places—but it seems that what comes first is short-term expediency, maximum return on capital in the shortest time and minimum investment of capital, as we have seen in the public utilities since they were privatised.

The Chancellor was proud to mention that one in three children now go on to some form of university education whereas one in eight did so in 1979. That is excellent news, but when such figures are quoted, it would be interesting to know what money was put into the university system in real terms and whether it had increased in line with the increase in the number of people educated. I am told by various people whom I know within the university industry, if I might call it that, that nowhere do the resources match the additional requirements placed on those who work in the system. When that happens, it is only a matter of time before the additional burden catches up and a crisis begins. I hope that we do not reach that stage.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), who has left his place and who kindly gave way to me earlier, said that he was pleased about the £430 rise in the tax threshold for old-age pensioners. I am not, and I shall explain why. My views on the subject are almost exactly the opposite of those of the hon. Gentleman. There are some wealthy pensioners. Many pensioners are fairly well off, but the majority are not. There is a great divide among pensioners. If anyone doubts that, admirable information is available from the Commons Library on the subject. Although it might be dated now, it impressed me a great deal when I read it about a year ago.

Three million pensioners will be better off as a result of the raising of the threshold. That means that 6 million will be either no better off or worse off. I suggest that they will remain in the same position. I accept that my calculation is rough because we do not have the figures before us. I assume that a single pensioner paying 40p in the pound tax will gain about £3.25 a week and a married couple will gain £6.50, and that a single pensioner on the standard rate of tax will gain about £2 a week. If the Government were so keen to help pensioners, rather than doing it in that way, why did not they do what they always say that they want to do and target resources to the poorest?

The Government have targeted resources to the best-off pensioners, who do not need help. Those who pay tax are usually reasonably well off. The vast majority—6 million—pay no tax. If money is available, why do not the Government make it available to those pensioners rather than using a populist measure which looks good and might impress a certain number of Tory voters among pensioners? That question needs to be asked and I look forward to hearing the answer, if there is one, in the reply to the debate.

The Chancellor also said that he intended to close tax loopholes. I am sure that everyone welcomes that. If one tenth of the effort that is expended on prosecuting people on social security benefits were directed at dealing with various tax frauds in high society and business, a fair amount of cash would come in. The Chancellor says in the document distributed following his speech that a number of artificial schemes for avoiding tax will be stopped. I understand that "a number" can mean anything. It can mean all, none or part. If the Chancellor had stated that artificial schemes for avoiding tax would be stopped, I would have had more faith. The written word tells it all.

One thing that the Chancellor did not mention, although I have no doubt that it will be mentioned later in the debate, was that extra funds for science and overseas aid would be made available. I can well understand that the Chancellor might not want to mention that, because every citizen should be ashamed of our foreign aid record. It is deplorable, and I can well understand that, as it is so insignificant, the Chancellor did not even consider it to be worth mentioning.

I am disappointed in the Chancellor's speech. It seems as though all the problems from which we have not learnt will continue, and there will be an ever-increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor. We have no guarantee that the economic recovery will do anything about the disparities in society, and in many ways I regard the Chancellor's statement as being as big a damp squib as I have ever heard.

Mr. Day: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I omitted to declare, at the beginning of my speech, the fact that I am a parliamentary consultant for Unison. I apologise to the House.

9.5 pm

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): I agree with the hon. Member for Sunderland, East—

Mr. Etherington: Sunderland, North.

Mr. Coe: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon.

I agree with one important thing that the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) said—it is always difficult to comment shortly after a Budget. He is right to say that we must avoid knee-jerk reactions and slogans—the tabloid trail. I have long been aware that Budgets that have tended to end with Order Papers, bells and whistles have often taken a 180 deg. about-turn in the next 24 hours. This afternoon's Budget was a Budget of substance, and I believe that it will be seen in that light.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Sunderland, North on the subject of smoking. I think that hon. Members in the Chamber share the widespread anxiety about the growing incidence of smoking despite our health promotion strategies. The continuing resistance of some young women to getting the message about reducing smoking should worry hon. Members on both sides of the House.

However, I disagree with the hon. Member for Sunderland, North about one aspect. As a board member of the Health Education Authority for much of the 1980s, I have to say that punitive levels of taxation on cigarettes do have an effect: price increases have dramatically reduced smoking. There is information and evidence to support that in this country, throughout Europe and in the United States of America.

If I may digress for a moment, I should like to go a stage further. I should like changes with regard to generic packaging, and so on, and the hon. Member for Sunderland, North is right to mention the need for an educative programme. That is all part and parcel of it. Nevertheless, price increases have a significant effect and I know that the Health Education Authority, in its fight against smoking, will welcome the increase which was announced today.

I was interested in some of the comments of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), who is not in his place at the moment. He was a political inspiration to me in Sheffield. He and some of his colleagues who ran Sheffield city council during much of the 1970s and the greater part of the 1980s probably influenced me, more than any other single factor, to stand on the Conservative side of the Chamber. They used the city very much as a Stalinist experiment en route to greater things in this place, and I was interested to hear the new moderate tones, "all red-rosed and filofaxed". It was impressive. That is a terrific transformation.

I feel vaguely brave this evening, in opening my remarks, in welcoming the announcements this afternoon by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage of generous support and funding for the arts. I feel especially brave in saying that because my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is not here to intervene on me at every moment in the next few minutes—he being one of the country's great arts patrons.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman has seen his programmes on television.

Mr. Coe: I have, indeed, seen his programmes on television.

Sensible support of the arts was announced this afternoon—an extra £7 million in each of the next two years, made up of an increase of £5.15 million per year for the next two financial years. Also very welcome in that package is the increase of £750,000 in the business sponsorship incentive scheme, which has been so successful in matching private sector sponsorship in the arts. That will mean support amounting to about £1.5 million over the next two years.

I also welcome the maintenance of existing funding for the Sports Council over the next couple of years. That is allied to some structural changes at the Sports Council, such as upgrading the status of the regions where, frankly, they know best where to spend sporting money, whether it be on revenue funding or on capital programmes. There is to be an increase of 12 per cent. in the budget for the business sponsorship incentive scheme, from a planned £3.3 million to £3.7 million each year. That recognises how successful Sportsmatch has been in putting so much needed funding in place.

I should be remiss if I did not comment on something that slipped through my right hon. and learned Friend's speech without great comment. I have fond memories of sport, so I welcome his support for the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. His predecessor, our right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), reduced the pools betting duty by 2.5 per cent. on the basis that, at that time, the pools industry supported unsponsored art and sport by that amount. There cannot be an hon. Member in this Chamber tonight whose constituency has not had sponsorship in one form or another for either sport or the arts. I say that with some pleasure because, of the funding that has come to Cornwall, some 40 per cent. has found its way into my constituency. Right hon. and hon. Members should be pleased when former experiences serve them well when they come to the House.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was right to flag the real and permanent advances made under his economic stewardship. I unashamedly take this opportunity to repeat and affirm them. We know that inflation is at its lowest level for a generation. The hon. Member for Sunderland, North referred to the difficulties faced by the elderly on low incomes. I remind him that there is no greater hardship for anyone on a low income than being confronted by inflation, which for many years was out of control. It is the most debilitating and destabilising economic phenomenon to confront any community.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): Does my hon. Friend accept that in 1989 some 1 million pensioners were in receipt of supplementary assistance from the state wholly by virtue of the fact that the value

[Mr. Peter Butler]

of their savings, and therefore their subsequent income, had been wiped out by years of high inflation under the Labour Government at the end of the 1970s?

Mr. Coe: My hon. Friend is right and he makes a salient point. Contemporary history and some of the points of conflict throughout the century show us that a destabilised economy fuelled by inflation has led to many issues which, as a European nation, we never want to confront again.

I also welcome the serious reduction in the level of unemployment, particularly in the past year. I come from a constituency where unemployment is still too high and where there are deep pockets of resistance. The package of measures announced this afternoon by my right hon. and learned Friend meets the needs of many of my constituents. It probably would not excite some areas in the United Kingdom where the job market is relatively flexible, but where people are unfortunate enough to be unemployed, they manage to get back into employment remarkably quickly.

Unfortunately, there are still areas in my constituency where being unemployed for a year and a half or two years is not that uncommon. The moratorium on national insurance contributions for employers taking on the long-term unemployed must be welcomed, as must the general reduction in national insurance contributions for employers taking on extra labour.

My right hon. and learned Friend was also quite right to mention experiences that he has had in his surgeries and in discussions up and down the country. He knows, as do hon. Members on both sides of the House, that, on far too many occasions, we are confronted by constituents who look us straight in the eye and say, "It doesn't pay me to work. It is easier for me to be on benefits." Some of the transitional proposals about which we heard this afternoon, including the £10 family credit to encourage people to go into full-time jobs rather than into the part-time sector, are absolutely vital. It is not surprising that hon. Members look at those parts of the Budget that impact and impinge on their constituencies and their constituents in greatest measure.

The health and vibrancy of the Falmouth and Camborne constituency are based on the small business sector. In the whole of Cornwall, we have only one multinational company. The largest employer, aside from the docks in Falmouth, is Compair Holmans in the north of the constituency, which employs some 350 people. The overriding pattern of employment in my constituency is of small groupings. That is why I welcome—I know that the small business men to whom I speak regularly will welcome them—the package of measures that my right hon. and learned Friend put to the House this afternoon. If he has done little else, he has obviously listened to the needs and aspirations of the small business community, because I know that many of their wish lists—we all have wish lists before Budgets—were met, and in full.

Let me mention some of the issues that will confront the House in the next year. We know from previous speeches this evening, and certainly from the bulk of my right hon. and learned Friend's speech this afternoon, that if I, or any hon. Member, had talked in the Chamber a year ago about a growth rate in the economy of 4 per cent. and said that inflation would be at its lowest level in a generation—for 13 consecutive months it has been under 3 per cent., matched, I believe, only before 1964—and said that interest rates would remain stable for so long, and if I had talked about the dramatic increase in exports and said that they would not be matched by a dramatic rise in the number of imports, which has been the bête noire of our manufacturing base for so many years, with reasonable rationale, Opposition Members would have intervened and questioned my sanity.

We have had a remarkable transformation in the fortunes of our economy in the past year, and that has been under the steady, enlightened stewardship of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. There was nothing dramatically exciting in his speech, but it had three important qualities: it was considered, thought through and of substance. In days to come, as hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber debate some of those measures, they will recognise that.

9.19 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): I have listened carefully to Conservative Members. From their speeches, it would be thought that the present Opposition had caused the problems, but let us not allow them to get away with having made a mess of the country for 16 years, creating instability and poverty. They talk of 4 per cent. growth—what a price to pay!

If hon. Members go down the road, they will see people living in cardboard boxes. That is the society that the Government have created. While Conservative Members sit in their consultancies receiving two or three wages as well as their parliamentary salaries, my constituency remains one of the poorest in Britain. I hoped that the Chancellor would do something for the poor and would alleviate the misery that the Government have created.

Let us consider what the Government have done to the national health service, to the homeless and to students who receive loans, not grants. Young people aged 16 or 17 are begging on the streets because the Government took away their benefits. No, we cannot allow the Government to get away with it: they must be put out, and the sooner that happens, the happier I shall be.

I regularly visit my "elderly forum" in my capacity as a constituency Member of Parliament. When I last did so, those elderly people asked me whether I thought that the Chancellor would show sympathy for the old and the poor and remove the VAT on fuel. Who suffers from that VAT? The poor, the unemployed and the disabled, who must stay at home a wee bit longer than the able-bodied.

We have watched Conservative Members weep crocodile tears, but we do not accept what they have said. We wanted constructive action that would clear up the mess, but we were given nothing of that kind today. I hoped that some of the children in the deprived part of Glasgow that I represent would be given an opportunity. I thought that education might be given a substantial lift, so that children in deprived areas could be given the verbal stimulus that would allow them to take their place in society. They have suffered, seeing only the closure of schools.

Plowden said—I heard an Education Minister repeat it one day in the Chamber—that we must give priority to children in deprived areas, because their fathers and mothers before them had suffered and were living in terrible housing conditions, with some 600 or 800 people

to the acre. They suffered, and now their children are suffering in educational terms; they suffered through unemployment, and now their children are suffering.

I have never seen the like of the crime that is now being committed in the streets. It is like Dodge City in my constituency. People have guns, and every weekend people are killed; the number of drug addicts makes the morgue a commonplace. Is the Chancellor giving those people a chance? No—he does not even know what is happening.

Yesterday, I heard the Chancellor talk of fraud in Europe. He blamed the media and Opposition Members for the bogus figure of £6 billion. I was a member of the European Legislation Committee. I went to Luxembourg and asked the Commissioner at the Court of Auditors how much fraud there was. I was told that £6 billion was a conservative figure. That is where the figure came from, not from Opposition Members. It was reported back to the House at that time by the Committee Chairman. We asked the Chancellor to do something about the fraud because of concerns about the payments being made. The Chancellor said that only seven inspectors were looking after the 12 member states.

When we visited Customs and Excise, we discovered that the people working there had no training in the subsidies going to other countries. One ship that was at sea had a cargo of what was supposedly prime beef with a subsidy of £2.5 million. When we asked the person in Customs and Excise about that, he said that there was a subsidy of £5,000 to £7,000. That is what the Government have allowed to happen. It must not continue. We must get the Government out.

The Government tell us that the country is in the best state that it has been in for decades. They talk about 4 per cent. growth. Think about all the poor people. Many people were encouraged by every Tory local authority up and down the land to buy their own homes. They were told that it would give them security. When they bought their own homes, interest rates were 6, 7 or 8 per cent. but, two years later, they rose to 16 per cent. Those people are still paying and still suffering. They lost their homes and their cars. They lost everything. Do not tell Opposition Members about the 4 per cent. growth because it will never clear up the mess that the Government have left behind. That is the annoying thing. The biggest percentage of growth has been in the electrical industry and engineering, but the Government have destroyed the construction and manufacturing industries.

The Government have some training schemes. They train youngsters and then throw them back on the dole. The restart schemes simply involve asking stupid questions. Men of 40 have to spend an hour in a room with about 15 other people, many of whom are smoking. It is even unhealthy.

The Government think that privatisation is really working and that worries me. One of the Conservative Members talked about water privatisation. Surely, the Government should have learnt the lessons from the privatisation of water in England. The parasites took away public land and set up subsidiary companies. They sold off all the prime land and property and cut off the water from thousands of people. The profits they made from the high charges imposed on the poor were never invested in water or drains, but were invested in building, cars, insurance and many other things.

We will not listen to this trash about private enterprise making everything in the garden rosy. We do not want any privatisation or any water being cut off in Scotland. The people of Scotland will let the boards know what to do. The pro-fluoridation crowd has been subsidised by the Government. We have had a referendum in Scotland which has said that we do not want the fluoridation of public water supplies because we are right and they are wrong. The Government have spent millions of pounds. They even introduced the Water (Fluoridation) Act 1985 to breach the civil liberties of the individual.

Under the Water Act 1945, directors of water companies and of public local authorities are employed to treat water and to make it wholesome for drinking. They are not employed to treat people who drink the water. It is said that there is nothing wrong with the substance that the capitalists and the drug companies want to put in water to make a profit of about £3 million or £4 million and to get rid of poisonous waste, which is expensive to dump. The Government should be looking at waste and other issues.

I am going a meeting tomorrow to combat the pro-fluoridation campaign of Dr. Beal. I have always said that, if fluoride is a medicinal product, why does not it go before the Committee on Safety of Medicines? Section 130 of the Medicines Act 1968 defines a medicinal product as a substance that is mixed with another substance and given to an animal or a human being, irrespective of the way in which it is given. I am concerned about that sort of issue. The Government are not worried about the waste of money and they continue to do the things that they do.

The state of the health service that the Government have created should be looked at. Fundholding practices are another mistake. Our people, the people most in need, are suffering. I am worried that the leprosy of fundholding practices in England, where semi-companies have been set up which sell medical instruments to themselves, will contaminate Scotland. We do not want fundholding practices. We want people to go to their practices and to be treated for their disease. We do not want the practitioner to think that he will not make a quick buck if he spends a lot of money and runs out of funds.

Compulsory competitive tendering is another disaster—we have seen that time after time in local authorities up and down the country. It is easy for a rogue firm to put in a cheap tender when it pays cheap wages. We need the minimum wage to stop those parasites. Some Conservative Members are consultants for those companies, which pay wages as low as £1 an hour. We want that to be eradicated.

I am concerned about the gas and electricity industries where someone can receive a wage of £470,000. I would not make such a person a member of a community council. That is the sort of issue that we are worried about. All those big bucks think that they are a wee bit better than the rest of us, but the people down below are suffering hard and fast. They are dying for lack of attention, lack of compassion and lack of care from an uncaring Government.

The Prime Minister has lost his credibility. He should resign and take all his Cabinet along with him. I shall be happy when we get socialism back in this country, for the people, of the people and by the people.

9.33 pm

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I fear that I shall sound rather downbeat after my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Wray). Anyone who speaks five hours after the Chancellor has sat down deserves a medal—some would say for courage, but I think for foolhardiness.

The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) rightly said that Budgets might be greeted with great applause on the day, but after a few days, when the newspapers have been read and the Red Books examined, they might turn out to be something different. Having qualified my remarks with that defence, I shall proceed to take up only a few moments of the House's time.

The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne said that it was a steady, no-surprise Budget, which fitted in with the comments of the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). He said that he broadly welcomed the Budget, which I regard as a qualified response—the Chancellor might appreciate the Budget being "warmly welcomed" but "broadly welcomed" has ominous undertones or overtones.

I do not have the time or the inclination to follow the train of thought of the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), who refought the political battles of the past 15 years. It would be easy to fill in time refighting those battles—who was to blame for what and how good or how bad things were in the 1970s—but that is not the issue here. The fact is that the Budget is very disappointing. In fact, I would say that it is a bad Budget for many people. That can sometimes be necessary, but I am not sure that it was today.

The Red Book shows that the economic situation has improved dramatically in terms of Government receipts and expenditure. Here again, we could refight an old political battle. The Chancellor said that exports were very good but did not mention the disastrous retreat from the exchange rate mechanism. We could argue about whose party supported the ERM at the time, but there is no point in doing so.

Financially, things are good, or at least improving, but it still seems wrong to spend money on certain things. We see from the September increase in interest rates that the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor are worried, even at this stage, about the economy overheating. One can sympathise with the Chancellor not being willing to spend but it is clear that he has money to spend, so, we have to ask, why is he not spending it sensibly on things that will not cause overheating or inflation?

The answer lies in the speeches made today by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and by my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor during the debate on the Queen's Speech. They charged the Prime Minister and the Government with putting the Conservative party before the country. The serious issue is whether the Chancellor is being dull and steady this year because it is the right thing to do or because he wants to take no chances and save all that he possibly can so that he can have a marvellous tax-cutting Budget a few months before a general election in the hope—the vain hope—that the country will have forgotten his party's promises on tax at the previous election.

I know that at least one other hon. Member wishes to speak so I shall quickly deal with three issues on which I believe the Chancellor could and should spend money, although to do so would not cost anything. We are about to balance the books more quickly than was foreseen last year. Last year, the judgment would have been that we would come in on a slightly longer plane. I guarantee that when we read the figures next year, we shall find that they have changed anyway. Against that background, the Chancellor will wish not to spend in some areas although he will be willing to spend in others.

The first area with which I shall deal does not come under the heading of expenditure, but under the heading of receipts. What is unforgivable for people throughout the country is the increase in VAT. There is no financial reason, as the Red Book proves, for the second tranche of VAT being necessary. If I were a Conservative Member, I would contrast the cowardice of the present Chancellor of the Exchequer in dealing with the political albatross of VAT on fuel with the courage and political sure-footedness of the previous Chancellor and the present Prime Minister in dealing with the political albatross of the poll tax. The previous Chancellor and the Prime Minister moved quickly, whatever the cost, to remove the poll tax.

The Government have not moved to remove VAT on fuel despite the fact that they have the money. I think—and I am sure that you do, too, Mr. Deputy Speaker—of the harm that the Government are causing, especially to pensioners. If the Chancellor thinks for one second that the compensation that he has put on the table is enough, he obviously does not understand how pensioners in particular respond to quarterly fuel bills. The Chancellor cannot have been in pensioner households, as I have, for if he had he would know of the fear that the quarterly fuel bill causes in them.

I remember a pensioner constituent of mine whose gas was cut off because of some damage to his fire. I got him an electric fire and I went back the next day to make sure that everything was all right. I found him in bed, covered with blankets. I thought that the fire was not working. It was working, but the pensioner thought, "I am taking no chances. I cannot not afford to use the electric fire." He stayed in bed, covered in blankets. If the Chancellor does not understand how the VAT increase will affect the lives of elderly people on the estates who are petrified by fuel charges, he is totally out of touch.

There was no reason and no financial need for the increase. The Chancellor could have stopped the imposition of the second tranche. We shall watch the efforts of the Government, who have to cope with parties within their party, to find constitutional reasons to prevent us from tabling a motion next week that will enable us to vote on the VAT increase. We will table such a motion and we shall see whether a Conservative rebellion is like sunshine in winter.

Other areas about which a sensible, long-sighted and caring Chancellor should be concerned are training and employment. The Chancellor made great play of the training schemes and said that this was a Budget for jobs. From looking at the press release, it is clear that training for work has been not so much increased as focused more sharply. The Government focused invalidity benefit more sharply, which meant that the benefit was stopped for

thousands of people. If unemployed people are being promised that training for work will be focused more sharply, they should look for cover.

The Chancellor referred to Community Action. Is there an increase? My right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield dealt with that point in his speech. There is no increase. The scheme is a continuation of a programme that the Government had intended to end this year, as is admitted in the press release from the Department of Employment.

I am sure that the note for editors on work trials will have them filling their front pages with news about work trials. Do hon. Members know how long the work trials last? They last for three weeks. In three of the four wards in my constituency, there is unemployment of 28 per cent. to 30 per cent. The unemployed are hardly going to be chuffed about work trials that give them three weeks' work. The trials will cover 150,000 people and the small print of the press release states that they will be phased in over three years.

The key to this caring, considerate, long-sighted Chancellor is in the financial figures. In cash terms in the previous year, the Budget represented £3,461 million; next year, this Budget for work, this Budget for unemployed people will represent £3,483 million—an increase of £22 million.

That would be good news if it were true, but the press release states that those are real-terms figures. In other words, this year the Government will spend £3,286 million and next year, under this Budget for the unemployed, they will spend £3,227 million—about £60 million less. Why is the Chancellor not spending more money in the Department that is responsible for employment training?

The same sleight of hand is evident in education. I should like editors of the financial papers to look closely at the figures. Apparently, a 4 per cent. increase is proposed, but it is really a 1 per cent. increase in real terms. Apparently, £470 million is to be spent on education in cash terms, but in real terms the figure is £80 million. That £80 million is to be spent among all our universities, further education colleges and schools.

I suggest that Treasury Ministers should visit a school or further education college and meet those who have no skills but who we are trying desperately to train so that they can compete. The problem can be traced back to the classes of 30 pupils, to the lack of books, to the inadequate resources and to the state of school buildings. I shudder at the thought of sending children in my constituency to such buildings. That is the reality of education nowadays, yet the Government are spending £80 million on additional funding, spread across the country and including funding for their dogmatic schemes for colleges and so on, under which they take money from the state sector to give to their friends in other sectors. It is a disgrace.

We face skills shortages and it is feared that we shall not be able to sustain a recovery because we shall run out of skilled people. The Government have money available, which they dare not give away in this Budget, and one would have thought that they would sensibly invest it in areas that would allow us to make that sustained recovery a thing of the future, but they have not done so. One has to ask why. Do they not care? I should have thought that the answer was self-evident from the past 15 years, if I may be allowed to enter this political-historical war.

Yesterday, someone quoted the words of T. S. Eliot, who wrote:

"it is the greatest treason to do the right thing for the wrong reason."

Are the Government saving money because it has to be saved? No, they are doing so because they want to try to hoodwink people at the next election, as they did at the previous one.

9.48 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I begin by reassuring the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) that I, indeed, warmly welcome the Budget. I congratulate him, because, of the many hon. Members to whom I have listened, he seemed to be the only one who had the vaguest grasp of what the Chancellor had achieved and was planning to do. It was a shame that, thereafter, he proceeded to spoil all that knowledge by going back down the old-fashioned line of all the old socialists by suggesting increasing public expenditure—not recognising that the key to this Budget is, in fact, our success in controlling public expenditure, which will mean that the economy will grow and be infinitely stronger than it has been. I will not go into the arguments of the past 15 years.

The other thing that amazed me while listening to the speeches of Labour Members was that they never appeared to move past last year's Budget. No Opposition Member grasped what we were saying today. No one had any feel for the achievements created by last year's Budget which have allowed us to build on that for the coming year. In that respect, I warmly congratulate the Chancellor on the help that he is giving to small businesses and people in long-term unemployment.

Persuading people of the value of the sound money that we now have will be a lengthy process. I am reminded of "The Forsyte Saga" and Old Jolyon complaining about 5 per cent. on consuls. That was about the last time that we could rely on sound money for any great length of time. Sound money brings with it a completely different attitude to spending and saving. It provides a much stronger base on which to build an economy. As a result of the many generations in respect of which we built in an inflation psychology, we must still explain to people the virtues of sound money.

The supply-side measures, which will help small businesses enormously, are too numerous and have been welcomed by too many of my colleagues for me to repeat them. However, I particularly commend the moves towards improving conditions for venture trusts. Many of us have faced business people in our constituency surgeries who were desperate to find investment of between £50,000 and £500,000. That is the missing amount of equity. The venture trusts will fill that gap very well and I am pleased that the Chancellor has gone down that road, particularly by encouraging business angels.

It is also helpful that the Chancellor is moving the thinking in insolvency business from loan debt to equity as a way of stabilising businesses. The more we can encourage businesses to concentrate on equity as a means of investment, the more we will be able to get away from the debilitating reliance on overdrafts which has caused so many problems in recent years.

[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]

I very much welcome the simplification of the loan guarantee scheme, which has been a nightmare. It was very difficult for businesses to benefit from that scheme. Businesses will also be grateful for the changes in PAYE and national insurance payments from a monthly to a quarterly basis, for annual VAT returns and for the changes in the uniform business rate, quite apart from the pleasure—we hope—of getting the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Contributions Agency working together instead of, as so often happens, against each other.

An area of immense hope for the south-east in particular was the change in the emphasis on roads building. The hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) told us of the problems that he faces when he drives down from the north-east to London. He probably completes that journey marginally quicker than I travel down to Hastings. I do not want to repeat a very old argument, but we have a great need for better infrastructure and better roads. If the Department of Transport begins to move towards investment in smaller projects in respect of which accidents and congestion are the criteria, I would welcome that for my constituency.

The subject that I would like to talk about at great length is that of smuggling. Coming from the constituency of Hastings and Rye, which has been historically notorious for smuggling, I am conscious that the re-emergence of the problem is causing tremendous difficulty, not just in the south-east but throughout the country.

Although the actual evidence is difficult to find, I have anecdotal evidence—many of the representations from Customs and Excise to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee back this up—that the areas around ports, the big cities and, increasingly, the smaller towns are being affected by the ease with which one can buy smuggled alcohol and tobacco. A constituent told me of buying from a tobacco kiosk in central London a packet of cigarettes which came without polythene wrapping and without a health warning, indicating clearly that it was smuggled tobacco. It was not even sold by the back door; it was on sale to the public in the centre of London.

The proprietors of every pub, restaurant and cafe and every tobacconist in my constituency say that someone has knocked on their back door and offered them cheap alcohol and tobacco. Local tobacconists tell me— this is borne out by figures from Rizla, which is the principal supplier of paper for hand-rolled tobacco— that sales of tobacco paper have shot up, while sales of tobacco have disappeared. Rizla says that, while there has been an 11 per cent. decline in hand rolling tobacco sales, its sales have increased by 16 per cent. over the past five years. That is an indication of the scale of hand rolling tobacco imports.

Tesco has produced evidence to show that Kent, London, Anglia, south-western Wales, the midlands and Yorkshire— the geography is interesting— have been affected by a loss of beer sales. It is accepted that there has been a long-term decline in the sale of many alcohol and tobacco products, but the scale of that decline is quite dramatic.

I personally abhor tobacco. I am not a smoker and I would not do anything to encourage the industry. I have always believed that there should be a very high tax on tobacco. However, as I come from an area where smuggling was prevalent in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, I have done some research into how smuggling came to an end in that part of the world.

While prevention played a part, the history of the end of smuggling was tied entirely to a reduction in duty. In 1745, the duty on tea was four shillings per pound and the product was smuggled heavily. When Lord Pelham reduced the duty to one shilling per pound, the trade disappeared. I wish to quote from a very useful book entitled "The Smugglers", which says:

"When commodities in great demand with all classes were weighted with duties so heavy that few persons could afford to purchase those that had passed through His Majesty's custom-houses, two things might have been foreseen: that the regularised imports would, under the most favourable circumstances, inevitably decrease; and that the smuggling which had already been notoriously increasing by leaps and bounds for a century past would be still further encouraged to supply those articles at a cheap rate, which the Government's policy had rendered unattainable by the majority of people".

I would not for a moment say that we cannot afford to buy alcohol and tobacco, but when products are offered at a fraction of the price at which they appear on our shop shelves it is very tempting to buy them.

I turn to the cost of prevention. In the 18th century, the cost of prevention was considerably more than the cost of the articles that were recovered. The answer that I received to my parliamentary question on the subject said that approximately 240 staff— most of them excise verification officers— are employed in the area of prevention. Their annual employment costs are about £30,000, which makes a total of £7.2 million. The revenue value of seized goods in the 20 months to August 1994 was approximately £4 million. It seems to me that, yet again, prevention is not working and we need to consider very closely how we will deal with the excise case. I accept, of course, that we cannot and would not wish to reduce excise duty in the Budget; that would be most inappropriate. However, we cannot rely on our European Community partners raising their duties to our level. We need to make the practice unprofitable. I hope that, in the long run, the Treasury will deal not with the harmonisation but with the closeness of excise duties so that the problems of smuggling can be brought to an end.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

BROADCASTING

Ordered,

That Mr. Matthew Taylor be discharged from the Select Committee on Broadcasting and Mr. Nigel Jones be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Andrew Mitchell.*]

PETITION

Third-world Trade

10 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I present to the House a petition containing 3,000 signatures which has been collected by members of various church youth organisations throughout the country who are concerned about the impact of unfair terms of trade on developing countries. It is a very healthy sign today, when we are concerned with our own national economy, that many young people are worried about other young people in developing countries. The young people declare that

"the way world trade is carried out at present causes unnecessary poverty for many people in Third World Countries."

The petition goes on to state:

"The petitioners, therefore, ask that the House of Commons makes every effort within its power to ensure:

a decent and fair price is paid to Third World Producers for products and raw materials imported into Europe and the United Kingdom,

a lowering or removal of unfair tariffs and taxes on Third World imports to the UK which force up prices paid by consumers and make Third World products more difficult to sell,

agreement, at an international level, of a set of standards and rules governing the way transnational companies deal with Third World producers".

To lie upon the Table.

Car Boot Sales

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am extremely grateful for the opportunity of raising this important issue, particularly on such a significant day. At the outset, I state that I am, always have been and always will be a deregulator. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, this year I sat on the Committee which considered the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill. I was delighted to support my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), my hon. Friend's predecessor, in his role as Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, in pushing through the Bill and ensuring that more of our businesses had rules, regulations and red tape cut away from them. It was a good start, and I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister bringing forward further initiatives to assist small business with deregulation.

I abhor unnecessary rules and regulations which stifle initiative and enterprise. Some of the things that I abhor most about the European Community are the unnecessary rules, regulations and directives that seem to emanate from Brussels, whether they pertain to our farms or to how long a banana should be and what its curvature should be. All such regulations are unnecessary and should be done away with. Rules for rules sake, I can do without.

Nor am I a killjoy. I appreciate that, each week, 1 million people visit car boot sales. They are the enshrinement of Conservative philosophy. They are the free market bringing buyers and sellers together. An excellent editorial in *The Times* of 4 January 1994, entitled

"Keeping the car boots open"

states:

"If anyone doubted that the entrepreneurial spirit thrived in Britain, evidence can be seen in almost every city, town and village each weekend. Thousands of people turn up at their nearest sale to buy, to sell, to trade and sometimes just to browse. Every item has its price, often as little as 5p, and bargaining ensures as perfect a market as any economist could dream of.

Ordinary citizens can offload the contents of their attic or rid themselves of the clothes, toys and equipment that their children no longer need. Buyers can pick up bargains galore. Because there are no overheads—no rent, wages, advertising or marketing—everything is far cheaper than in the shops. And who can resist fantasising about finding a picture for £1 that turns out to be the work of a famous artist?"

I could not put it any better than that editorial. Frankly, car boot sales are fun—unless one happens to live next door to one, that is.

That is the basis of my request for the debate this evening. What was the origin of car boot sales? People genuinely want to offload their possessions in a relatively cheap way. Others want to pick up cheap items and bargains, and browsing in an assiduous way is an art form for some—picking up a jigsaw, wondering whether the 50p asking price is fair, wondering whether all the pieces are there and, if not, might not that add to the attraction of trying to put the jigsaw together? Car boot sales are a jolly good day out for many people.

Many charities benefit from car boot sales. Church groups, schools, scouts, brownies and even Conservative associations in the beautiful constituency of Brecon and Radnor—flattery may get me somewhere this evening—

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

have been known to hold car boot sales. No one can have any objection to an occasionally held car boot sale on behalf of those organisations. Those sales are not regulated and I do not believe that they should be. I have attended such sales myself, and they are harmless fun.

During the past five years, we have witnessed a massive growth in the number of car boot sales. Rural areas tend to be magnets for them and many farmers are earning additional and much-needed funds thanks to them. I have no objection to that either. We must make a distinction between the small and amateur car boot sales, and the commercial car boot sales which are able to operate for 14 days, thanks to the Town and Country Planning and General Development Order 1988, without any planning permission.

After all I said about the beautiful constituency of Brecon and Radnor, I must say that I happen to represent the most beautiful constituency in the United Kingdom—75 per cent. of it consists of areas of outstanding natural beauty. Let us think for just a moment about some of the sleepy villages and hamlets around the UK which are invaded, invariably on a Sunday, by car boot sales.

One of the local authorities in my constituency, Ribble Valley borough council—it covers most of the rural area—feels that it is powerless to control or prevent the sales, even with the array of rules and regulations which my hon. Friend the Minister will no doubt list for me to demonstrate that no more needs to be done.

Two villages have experienced tremendous problems with sales—Whalley and Gisburn. I shall refer first to a sale at Brookhouse farm in Whalley. Cars are parked there without concern for road markings or footways, and also on grass verges. It is not a matter of the police or the highway department dealing with it—they cannot get through the traffic in the first place.

The event takes place in a fairly rural area, but there are houses and residents suffer from the congested roads which are unable to take the volume of traffic, noise and pollution. Litter is another problem. I welcome the controls within the Environmental Protection Act 1990, but litter is sometimes dropped outside the field at the farm and local people are unable to control the litter problem. Another problem is that the route that leads towards the car boot sale is the only road which people can use to get from A to B. Because the car boot sales are attracting so many motorists, one is simply unable to get through without adding perhaps 40 minutes or so on to one's journey. Consideration should be given to the effect that that has on residents in sleepy rural villages. The inhabitants of a village must put up with so much traffic five or six days a week, but, when they want to rest on Sunday, they find that they are invaded by vehicles going to the car boot sales.

The argument is used that the police are able to regulate car boot sales if they so wish, but the police may find it extremely difficult to police all the other things that we are asking them to do these days. There is massive pressure on police time. It would be wonderful if we could assist the police in allowing local authorities to have some control over car boot sales.

Gisburn is another area which has suffered greatly because of the sales. We have famous the Gisburn races, which attract many motorists but happen only once a year. The Gisburn car boot sale happens Sunday after Sunday, and heavy traffic is passing through Gisburn on those days. We are all crossing our fingers and praying that, at some stage in the near future, we will get the Gisburn bypass to relieve that heavy traffic. Why should they be condemned to suffer even further because there are no controls over car boot sales?

I reiterate that I am a free marketeer. There is nothing wrong with the concept of car boot sales. The problem is their placement and local authorities' lack of sufficient powers to control them. I know that they have article 4 of the Town and Country Planning and General Development Order 1988. It is constantly cited as an adequate tool for controlling sales, but I believe that local borough councils should be empowered under planning legislation to withdraw permission for car boot sales or at least tightly control them. I have talked to local authorities elsewhere in the country which also believe that they lack control over car boot sales.

Under existing legislation, anyone who has a field or open piece of land can hold 14 markets a year provided that he gives the local council one month's notice under section 37 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. Markets can take place even if the site is unsuitable, for example, if it has poor road access or is near or within a residential area. That figure is far too high. I am not against such events so long as they are held in the right places. I want local councils to have the power to control car boot sales to ensure that they do not cause problems for local residents. Local councils are in the best position to make decisions about car boot sales because they know their areas best.

One reason why councils do not wish to implement article 4 is that they fear that if they refuse planning permission they will have to pay compensation to those who organise car boot sales. Recently, the chief legal officer of Ribble Valley council, Paul Timson, stated to me in a letter that that was one of the major reasons why local authorities were fearful of refusing permission. They fear that if the matter goes to appeal time and time again, they will end up paying massive compensation. Local authorities simply do not have the resources to meet such compensation payments.

Another problem with article 4 of the Town and Country Planning and General Development Order 1988 is that it gives permission to hold up to 14 markets a year on open sites. In a rural area such as the Ribble valley, there are dozens of potential sites. That gives rise to insuperable problems of control. As soon as a market operator exhausts his 14 days on one site he can simply switch to a neighbouring site.

As for other controls, section 37 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 is a useful provision as it enables the local authority to have knowledge of forthcoming events. However, it is of limited value because in most instances the local authority has no power to prevent the event or even impose conditions.

I am fully aware that North Yorkshire county council has introduced its own measures to control the problem of car boot sales and to deal with the fear that some of the goods may be stolen. I welcome those measures. I should encourage other authorities to examine what North Yorkshire county council has done and perhaps introduce similar measures. The council's private Act is good news for the police. It enables them to check on stolen property

and monitor traders. However, I believe that the vast majority of people who trade in car boot sales are as honest as the day is long. It a myth that car boot sales are packed with people offloading stolen goods. It happens, just as it happens in pubs and clubs. No one suggests that we close pubs and clubs simply because they have that problem.

Local authorities have the power to send their trading standards officers to car boot sales to ensure that certain standards are met. That has to be welcomed, but the matter goes back to cost. Not every local authority can afford to pay overtime to trading standards officers, particularly on Sundays, to monitor the many car boot sales that may take place in their area.

I asked one local authority why it did not use the battery of rules and regulations available to it. It felt that control would be more cast iron if the authority could place conditions on the larger, professional car boot sales. Such conditions might include controls on access and egress for traffic, noise and litter. In genuinely unsuitable areas car boot sales could be stopped without fear of the local authority having to pay compensation. It wanted all those controls to be provided in one car boot sales Act.

I am realistic about the issue and I am not asking for draconian measures so that local authorities can meddle in a sector that is currently free from overall control. However, I ask that all the powers are revealed which appertain to car boot sales.

Does the Minister think that it would be more simple and straightforward if control and supervisory powers were brought together under planning regulations? If that were done, we could achieve what, surely, we all want. Entrepreneurs would continue to be able to hold car boot sales, sellers would be able to sell their goods and buyers would be able to browse in search of bargains, but we would pay more regard to people who live in rural districts—the people who have to put up with the inconvenience that is caused when, Sunday after Sunday, cars invade rural areas without controls.

I seek a balance between the two groups, so that entrepreneurs can continue to hold their car boot sales and people can genuinely enjoy going to them, as they do, but so that people who live in those districts are at least able to appeal to the local authority if they feel that the sales are being held in the wrong place. I hope that a balance can be struck.

I shall listen carefully and hopefully to the Minister's reply. I hope that he will be able to help my constituents to look forward to a peaceful and quiet summer in 1995.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) for raising the matter and also for his support, as he has expressed it, for the Government's deregulation drive. I have listened to his speech with great interest and I think that he is entitled to claim a first, because I think that this is the first time that car boot sales have been the specific subject of a debate on the Floor of the House. I am glad to have the opportunity to set out the Government's view of what is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and one on which I know that feelings can run high.

Car boot sales began, like so many phenomena of our times, in the United States and spread to this country in the mid-1980s. They were originally a means whereby people could dispose of the unwanted contents, as my hon. Friend said, of their attic, or raise money for charity, or perhaps both. They were small, neighbourly events where most of the people knew one another and professional traders were conspicuous by their absence. They were no more regulated than the average church bazaar, which they often resembled, and there was no reason why they should have been.

Now, as my hon. Friend rightly said, all that has changed. It may be an exaggeration to describe car boot sales as big business, but business they certainly are. Their number has grown almost exponentially, they have become bigger, and it is probable that throughout the country the amount of business in professionally organised sales now predominates over that in amateur sales. New as well as second-hand goods are on sale, and car boot sales now attract such inevitable accompaniments of the British leisure scene as ice cream vans, hot dog stalls and even bouncy castles. They are held in every conceivable variety of venue—fields, commons, schools, airfields, car parks, warehouses, even the grounds of hospitals. Many are held regularly every week.

Car boot sales have grown to the stage where they make a measurable contribution to activity in the economy. Precise figures are lacking, but several thousand car boot sales are held every week, some of which attract more than 1,000 vehicles. Total turnover can only be guessed at, but it could be as much as £2 billion a year.

It is hardly surprising that that dramatic expression of the enterprise culture should have brought forth demands for regulation, as my hon. Friend outlined. I fully recognise that car boot sales can bring problems in their wake, many of them of the type that my hon. Friend mentioned. A trader at a car boot sale is probably anonymous and he is certainly highly mobile. It is often impossible to tell whether he is a professional trader or an amateur, and whether the goods that he is selling are of poor quality, unsafe, counterfeit or stolen. In such circumstances, whatever the position in law, the consumer's chances of redress are not high.

Policing car boot sales is not easy, not least because they are usually held at weekends, as my hon. Friend said. The concern on this score, which has been expressed individually by a number of local authority trading standards departments, is understandable. That concern has been echoed by their co-ordinating body.

Nor are objections to car boot sales confined to the quality or provenance of the goods on sale. Not everybody appreciates a car boot sale next door disturbing the peace of his Sunday morning, whether in the Ribble Valley, Brecon and Radnor or any other part of the country.

Many complaints have been made about noise, litter and traffic congestion. Doubts have been expressed as to whether all traders at car boot sales are wholly honest with their tax returns and the suspicion has been voiced that car boot sales are used by persons on benefit to provide an undeclared supplement to their income. Whatever the truth of those allegations, there is an image of car boot sales as a means of enabling villains to sell rubbish in conditions of squalor. It is therefore unsurprising that there are calls for them to be more strictly regulated, if not banned altogether.

[Mr. Jonathan Evans]

That is one point of view. I should like to consider the matter for a moment from a rather different perspective. Car boot sales have grown in number because they are popular. They are a response to demand—both from those who trade at them and from those who patronise them. People enjoy car boot sales, whether because they see in them a chance of picking up a bargain—whether one priced at 5p or the rare painting to which my hon. Friend referred—or whether they just see them as an inexpensive afternoon out with the family. It has been suggested that for some people the availability of cheap goods at car boot sales has made a real difference to the family budget.

Nor should the perspective of the traders be forgotten. For many people, car boot sales have come to make a significant contribution to their income. Some traders, I have no doubt, make their living solely by going from one car boot sale to another. I suggest that we should be very cautious about regulating—and, by implication, restricting—an economic activity for which there is clearly so strong a demand and on which an increasing number of people have come to depend wholly or partly for their livelihoods.

Against that background, let us consider the criticisms that have been made. Some people have suggested that goods may be of poor quality, and so they may be—but I suggest that most people go to a car boot sale with their eyes open and do not expect the level of quality or service that they would get at a normal retail outlet. If they buy a television set for £5 and it works, they have a bargain. If they buy a television set for £5 and it does not work, that is the chance that they take. It is not for the state to intervene in that sort of transaction.

More serious are allegations that goods may be unsafe or stolen. In the case of unsafe goods, in particular, I accept that it is not enough to invoke the spirit of caveat emptor; this is an area where the public have a right to expect protection. But controls do exist. It is as much an offence for a trader at a car boot sale to sell unsafe goods as it is for anybody else to do so. I accept that enforcement can be a problem, but we have to ask ourselves whether any of the controls that have been proposed would contribute to resolving that problem. Short of banning car boot sales altogether, which is not a solution that we should seriously contemplate, I do not believe that they would. Requiring car boot sales to be licensed would do nothing to control the type of trader attending them or the quality of the goods sold. Requiring individual traders to be licensed might make identification easier, but there would be a price to be paid in the cost of the licensing system—somebody would have to pay for it—and the bureaucracy that it would involve. The Government are not convinced that that would be justified by the extent of the problem.

Similarly, in relation to stolen goods, there is little evidence of car boot sales being used as outlets for stolen goods, although common sense suggests that they are likely to be from time to time. However, the police already have powers of search and seizure where necessary and I have had no suggestions that a licensing system would be an effective way to strengthen them. Of course, it can be argued that a trader who was convicted of selling stolen or, indeed, unsafe goods could have his licence revoked, but that would be a severe penalty and one easily evaded—the trader might simply start up again using a member of his family or a friend as a front.

I turn now to the objections that have been voiced regarding car boot sales as a phenomenon, as opposed to the objections that have been voiced regarding the behaviour of individual traders. I should make it clear at the outset that, for the reasons that I have already outlined, the Government do not regard car boot sales as somehow a bad thing which ought ideally to be regulated out of existence. Although we recognise the arguments of those who have pressed for greater controls, we take no stand of principle either for or against car boot sales. If people wish to gather at weekends to buy and sell new or second-hand goods, the Government do not see it as their business to deny them that opportunity.

That is not, however, to deny the very genuine concerns that have been expressed regarding what might be called the environmental effects of car boot sales, and it is that area to which my hon. Friend directed so much of his remarks. Car boot sales are generally exempt from planning permission, provided that they are not held on the same site on more than 14 days in any one year. The Government have no plans to change that. To reduce or abolish the 14-day exemption represents a serious restriction on the freedom of people to do as they wish with their own property. Of course, there is a balance to be struck here between the freedom of the landholder and the effect of the activities on the amenity and the environment. The balance here has been struck at 14 days, and I think that that is probably about right. It would in any event be wrong to shift that balance simply because some people object to car boot sales.

My hon. Friend may be aware that organisers of car boot sales have evaded the requirements of the planning legislation by simply shifting to a different field once the 14-day period had been used up. That point has yet to be tested in the courts, but the Government's view is that the controls apply to the relevant planning unit and that a farmer, for example, could not evade them in that way. It is, however, up to individual local authorities to decide whether to challenge such behaviour.

Then there is the question, again addressed by my hon. Friend, of litter, traffic and general nuisance. I am doubtful whether more than a small minority of car boot sales cause significant problems in those areas, although my hon. Friend referred to difficulties in his constituency. To the extent that they do, however, local authorities have powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to take appropriate action, as my hon. Friend said. I therefore do not see that additional controls are necessary.

Finally, car boot sales have been criticised as somehow constituting unfair competition to existing retail outlets. Although I can understand the feelings that have been expressed in this matter, I have to say that the Government do not regard the objection as well founded. Government, including, of course, local government, exercise a degree of control over retail outlets through the planning mechanism, but this is a question of planning, not of competition. When it comes to competition, the Government express no preference for any one form of retail outlet over any other. If people wish to take their chance at a car boot sale rather than take advantage of the greater security and comfort of a high street retailer, that is entirely a matter for them and not one in which the

Government would wish to intervene. In general, it is the Government's policy to encourage competition, not to restrict it.

My hon. Friend referred to the system of licensing of traders of second-hand goods under the North Yorkshire County Council Act 1991. I offer no criticism of that Act, which, indeed, seems to work well, albeit not without some cost both to traders and to enforcers. However, I am not persuaded that it is necessarily a suitable model for the country as a whole. Trading standards departments vary widely in their outlook, their resources, the type of area in which they operate and the problems that they face. What is suitable for North Yorkshire may not be suitable elsewhere. Moreover, the fact that North Yorkshire has had little trouble with its system may be due to the fact that the more dubious traders avoid the area. That, of course, would no longer be the case if the system became nationwide.

To sum up, the Government accept that the growth of car boot sales has brought problems in its wake, but we remain unconvinced that there is a need for additional controls to address those problems. Such controls would necessarily have to take the form of some sort of licensing, either of car boot sales themselves or of individual traders, or of both, and such a system would add to bureaucracy without necessarily curing the mischief at which it was aimed. Licensing of car boot sales themselves would be ineffective unless it was used as a covert method of cutting down on their number, which the Government would not necessarily wish to see. Licensing of individual traders would be complex and difficult to administer. There would need, for example, to be some sort of exemption for those who take a stall at a car boot sale not to trade but to dispose of unwanted household goods, and such an exemption would be difficult to police. For reasons that I have already suggested, withdrawal of a licence might not be an effective sanction. It is in any event the Government's policy to reduce the burden of regulation on business, not to increase it.

I listened very carefully to my hon. Friend's speech and I recognise the genuineness of the concerns that he has expressed. I also listened to the suggestions that he put forward for new legislation or controls in that area, but I have to tell him that I do not at this point believe that additional controls represent the right way forward. For that reason, although I note his remarks, I cannot promise him any further regulation in that area.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 30 November 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords].*

Order for consideration read.

To be considered tomorrow.

LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY HERITAGE FOUNDATION BILL.

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

River Thames

1. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the value and usefulness of the River Thames and its tributaries in London; and if he will bring forward proposals to make better use of it.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): We are preparing comprehensive strategic planning guidance to maximise the undoubted assets of the River Thames.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: As my right hon. Friend knows, the River Wandle, one of the main tributaries of the River Thames, runs through my constituency. Does he agree that the River Thames is much too often taken for granted and that it is under-used and under-recognised? Will he assure me that he will do his utmost to ensure that its aesthetic, historical and transport facilities are promoted to the full, perhaps in the context of the millennium fund?

Mr. Gummer: It is vital that we use all the Thames's assets and ensure that it remains a working river. We want it to carry even more waste out of London, which would otherwise be moved by lorry, and to ensure that it is used to the full. I am sure that my hon. Friend's point about the millennium fund can easily be passed on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Mr. Cohen: Why does not the Secretary of State improve his aesthetic appreciation and visit the Whistler exhibition at the Tate gallery, where he would see pictures showing that the River Thames was far more heavily used at the end of the last century than it is now? All the Government seem to be doing is pushing more lorries on to London's roads. Should not we be using the Thames more?

Mr. Gummer: The Thames was so dirty then that the House of Commons had to give up sitting on occasions because of the smell. I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that it is cleaner now than it has been for 400 years and we can now take salmon and other fish from it. Finally, the hon. Gentleman should not believe that he is the only person who has been to an exhibition.

Power Lines

2. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the environmental impact of power lines in the vale of York.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Responsibility for assessing the environmental impact of the proposed power lines in the vale of York belongs to the Department of Trade and Industry, which is the consenting authority for such projects. I understand that, as required, environmental statements were submitted with the planning applications and that, following consideration of environmental matters by the public inquiry, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was satisfied with the environmental information before him.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but I urge him to take a much closer interest in the proposed national grid power line through the vale of York, which people in North Yorkshire regard as a potentially serious blot on the landscape. It is not good enough for the Department of the Environment to fail in this instance to apply the planning criteria that would apply to other such applications merely because the issue is decided by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Does he agree that the public outrage is wholly justified, as the planning inspector considered that it was wrong for the ENRHON power plant to be given the go-ahead without an environmental impact assessment being conducted into the power lines through the vale of York?

Mr. Dowd: That was a bit of a kick in the teeth.

Sir Paul Beresford: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on pausing a little, but I can suggest to him an appropriate dentist.

I note what my hon. Friend says, but we must accept that there has been full consideration of all relevant environmental matters. The matter was put to a public inquiry, and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, who has to decide, was satisfied with the environmental information presented to him.

Radioactive Waste

3. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take in order to increase the safeguards to the environment from the leaching of radioactive substances from landfill dumps into which radioactive waste is deposited.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Robert Atkins): I am satisfied that

disposals of radioactive waste to landfill sites are properly regulated and that the public and the environment are fully protected.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware of the considerable dismay and concern that has arisen, following publication of the Government's consultation document on radioactive waste, about the possibility that waste currently going to Drigg could be redirected to landfill sites? Is he aware that from one such site in my constituency, Cilgwyn, water could leach through into the waterways in the neighbouring valleys and on to agricultural land, which would be wholly unacceptable from every viewpoint? Will he ensure that when considering the outcome of the consultation document, that dimension is taken fully into account?

Mr. Atkins: I understand why the hon. Gentleman raises the matter. No specific sites have been mentioned and no decisions have been made. It is a consultation paper. He will be aware, as will other hon. Members who take an interest in these matters, that the consultation is being undertaken because of pressure at Drigg in Cumbria on the low-level waste disposal. At many sites in the country such disposal of low-level nuclear waste has been made over the years, under all sorts of Governments. It would not be my intention to make the situation any more difficult. I emphasise again that we have not talked about any specific sites; at this stage, it is only consultation.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend recognise that there will be widespread acceptance and a widespread welcome for the consultation document, especially because of the kind of speculation that we have experienced in the past? Is he aware of, and would he like to comment on, the disgraceful and damaging speculation that has been indulged in, especially by the Liberal Democrats in the south-west in relation to Torbay? Of all the sites for landfill for radioactive waste, that must arguably be the most unlikely in the country, yet that has not prevented local Liberal Democrats from making absurd political capital or from trying to frighten the local population and visitors to Torbay.

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I speak with authority because Liberal Democrats in my constituency suggested that a site on the boundary of the constituency would be reopened for nuclear waste. That was an absolute fabrication and complete nonsense, and they frightened many people unnecessarily. My hon. Friend is entirely right to suggest that certain people not a million miles away from the Liberal Democrat Benches here should think carefully before making statements that are untrue and misleading.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I recognise the constraints placed on Ministers in the case of the Nirex deep repository application in the county of Cumbria, but will the Minister take an interest in Nirex's practice of bribing local organisations to win approval, thereby trying to avoid real resistance from the people of the county of Cumbria to its proposals?

Mr. Atkins: I know that the hon. Gentleman, like me, takes an interest in these matters for constituency reasons, so I shall look most carefully at anything that he says. However, I have no evidence of anything happening along the lines that he suggests. If he has evidence to present to me, I should like to see it.

Ministerial Visits

4. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which capital cities he has visited since becoming Secretary of State.

Mr. Gummer: I have visited 20 capital cities. The list is in the House Library.

Mr. Banks: While the Secretary of State was clocking up his air miles, did he notice that each of the capital cities had city-wide local government and its own equivalent of County hall? In London, we have neither. Does he share my considerable concern about the bizarre happenings surrounding County hall at the moment? As it seems that the deal between the London residuary body and the Shirayama hotel group was based on a fraud perpetrated by Shirayama, and as we may now be moving into an area of criminal conspiracy, will he, to protect London, County hall and perhaps even himself and his reputation, now order a full inquiry into the events surrounding the takeover and sale of County hall and into the events now taking place?

Mr. Gummer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his care for my reputation. I assure him that I have been to a number of capital cities, such as Paris, that do not have city-wide local government, so I do not think that that point is taken.

The point that the hon. Gentleman raises about County hall is important and I share his concern. It is an important listed building in a very important position on the River Thames. If there is any significant change of use in the building, a new planning application will be needed. I shall consider carefully whether I should call that in to determine myself. Obviously, I cannot prejudge any application, as no application has been made.

Mr. John Marshall: On his visits around the world, did my right hon. Friend discuss the impact of the private finance initiative, which we were told yesterday should very soon lead to an announcement of 100 new, modern trains for the Northern line in this great capital?

Mr. Gummer: My visits were mainly concerned with selling British products. Interestingly, private finance initiatives, copied from this country, are now beginning to drive industry and government in a number of countries. In addition, the newly privatised industries are winning billions of pounds in orders for Britain—industries which, had they remained nationalised, would not have been able to win a single cent.

Housing Finance

5. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in real terms in Government expenditure on housing between 1978-79 and 1994-95.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Over the past 15 years, Government expenditure on housing has

increased by £500 million in real terms. That takes into account social security spending on housing benefits and income support.

Mr. Corbett: Is 90 per cent. of the Minister's constituency casework, like mine, related to housing, particularly in the wake of the halving of Government investment in social housing, which his figures should have confirmed? What hope does that give to 17,000 people on the waiting list in the city of Birmingham, which has an excellent record of private sector partnerships, and to the tenants of 4,500 council homes that still have outside toilets? Will he confirm that the further cuts in investment in housing announced yesterday will mean 20,000 fewer new homes next year and 15,000 fewer building jobs?

Mr. Curry: The Government have created 180,000 new lettings in the past three years, and our policies will achieve the same in the next three years. As the hon. Gentleman is talking about Birmingham, he will no doubt wish to applaud Castle Vale housing action trust, a partnership with private sector developers and tenants that will receive £7 million worth of grant aid this year and £26 million of estate action schemes. He should not forget that housing is a question not only of new build but of new lettings. The regeneration of housing and the turning of some of the awful post-war estates into places where people want to live and have pride in living is a central part, and one of the most successful parts, of our policy.

Mr. Hendry: Will my hon. Friend confirm that there are 2 million more houses in this country than there were 15 years ago and that the Government are well ahead of their manifesto commitment on social housing and building programmes? Does he agree that a good deal more would be spent on housing if Labour authorities were rather better at collecting rents on their council estates?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, one has to take into consideration not only the resources that Government make available for those programmes, but how much money is levered in. Since 1988, we have levered £2.6 billion of private sector funding into the programme. That makes a very substantial programme and that is exactly the right way in which to do it. I am confident that we shall continue to lever in proportional amounts.

Mr. Raynsford: Will the Minister tell the House the truth about the cuts in housing investment over the lifetime of this Government? There has been a cut of more than 50 per cent. in real terms. Will he admit that that has been compounded by yesterday's disastrous Budget? Will he confirm that housing association starts will be reduced to fewer than 20,000 next year—the lowest level of rented housing since the second world war?

Will he confirm that council modernisation schemes will be scrapped because of cuts in local authority credit approvals? Does he accept that the improvement of privately owned properties will be stopped because of cuts in that area? Does he also accept that, contrary to the Secretary of State's weaselly words yesterday, council tenants will be clobbered by rent increases three times as high as the rate of inflation?

Mr. Curry: First, the answer to most of that is no. Secondly, perhaps the hon. Gentleman—[*Interruption.*] If the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully yesterday, he would have noticed that the pattern of rent increases in future will be 4 per cent., 3 per cent. and 2 per cent. in real terms over inflation. Of course, that means that the Government are doing what they said. Where there is a public expenditure gain to be made from increasing rents, we have pursued it. When that ceases to be of benefit, it makes sense to review the policy.

The hon. Gentleman should listen more carefully to what is happening and realise that housing policy, the creation of partnerships, the estate action programmes, action under the single regeneration budget, the schemes to improve lettings and new build, taken together, form a comprehensive housing policy that has been remarkably successful.

Small Shops

6. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to protect small shops in town and village centres from out-of-town super stores and car boot sales.

Mr. Gummer: I am determined to support and improve our town centres, and our planning guidance has been revised to encourage in-town developments.

Dr. Spink: I welcome unreservedly that answer from my right hon. Friend. Does he recall that it is now almost a year since he issued his minded-to-approve decision for a large out-of-town supermarket for Canvey island? The section 106 agreement has been delayed unacceptably by Aldersgate Development. Will he do what he can to bring that agreement forward so that my council and my constituents know what is happening about that development?

Mr. Gummer: It is very important that people should know where they stand, and I will do all I can to ensure that there is a solution to that problem. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend noticed that the Labour party clearly does not think that it is a good idea to improve in-town developments and make our town centres live again. We know who is on the reactionary side in the House.

Mr. Lewis: Does not the Secretary of State realise what a ridiculous figure he cuts at the moment—*[Interruption.]*—the Whale show—as he spends taxpayers' money trying to push through the Dumplington scheme in Greater Manchester, while at the same time he pretends to be in favour of in-town shopping?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must know that the issue at stake is whether decisions by previous Secretaries of State should stand or whether they can be continually second-guessed thereafter. Any Secretary of State in my position would stand up for the maintenance of certainty in these decisions. That is precisely why I answered my hon. Friend the Member

for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) in the way that I did. What is more, if there ever were a Labour Secretary of State for the Environment, he would do precisely the same.

Dr. Twinn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that out-of-town shopping centres are popular with the driving public because people can park their cars easily and for free? If we are going to make town centres competitive in respect of out-of-town shopping—and we should be doing that—does he agree that it is up to local authorities and shop owners in city centres to make city centres competitive, which means free parking?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that parking arrangements are crucial to delivering the in-town shopping centres that we want. Local authorities must make that possible and recognise that car parking is not a matter largely for them but that it can be much better run by those with an economic interest in the success of city centres, who run better car parks and ensure that there is closed circuit television to cover them.

Single Regeneration Budget

7. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce decisions on bids made to the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: As soon as we are in a position to do so.

Mr. Madden: As the Government shot themselves in both feet over the funding of English teaching to ethnic minority children, will the Minister ensure that the 50 single regeneration budget bids directly related to education, including that from Bradford, are given every sympathetic consideration? Will he do his best to ensure that the Cabinet sub-committee supervising the SRB quickly reaches new arrangements for the proper and secure funding of English teaching to ethnic minority children in schools?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed that we have doubled section 11 funding for teaching in schools where there are particular problems. Schools can bid for that funding, and no doubt Bradford will be one of the areas to do so. All bids under the SRB will be considered according to the criteria laid out. The partnerships must be very solid and deliverable and the schemes must be well-founded. They will all be judged on that basis. It is not the intention that any bid should have a head start over any other bid. The bids should be on an exactly level playing field.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind Nestlé's recent announcement of the closure, in two years, of the Rowntree Mackintosh factory in Norwich and its employment implications in my constituency, will my hon. Friend give appropriate consideration to the single regeneration budget bids that he receives from Norwich and the surrounding area?

Mr. Curry: I say to my hon. Friend, as I said to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), that we judge bids objectively. My hon. Friend will know that coverage was nationwide—we did not focus on certain areas—and that enabled us to address problems that arose from economic circumstances. We did not want any part of the country to feel that it was not entitled to take part in the process or that its concerns were not being met.

Mr. Vaz: How does the Minister intend to compensate local councils and other organisations that have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds and thousands of hours preparing for bids that, as the Minister knows, will not be successful because of the absurd funding regime of the SRB? When will the Government implement a regeneration policy that addresses the needs of urban Britain rather than the whims of Ministers and the Department of the Environment press office?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman should spend more time, as I do, going around the country and talking to council leaders. He will find what great support Labour leaders are giving the process. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) is a very good case in point. Since he ceased to be its leader, matters have improved considerably in Sheffield.

Authorities have often learnt much from the process of putting bids together. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman forgot to welcome the additional funding under the second round. Bids that were not successful the first time will have an opportunity to correct what might not have been right. As for compensation, I regard the money as very well spent and the experience very well learnt.

Mrs. Angela Knight: My hon. Friend will be aware of the concern that bids from areas that already have assisted or European regional status will receive preference in the SRB round. Can he assure me that that will not be so and that bids from areas such as Erewash, which will be put together by the business community and the local authority, will be judged on their merits only and will not be disadvantaged in the way that I have described?

Mr. Curry: I am sure that I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that she seeks. We judge bids on their intrinsic merits, the strength of the partnership, their deliverability and whether the schemes are working and are practicable. When the results are announced, my hon. Friend will see that we have been absolutely consistent in our treatment of the bids.

Mr. Betts: Does the Minister not understand that cities such as Sheffield are putting in bids for the single regeneration budget simply because there are no other sources of funds to deal with the major problems of city centres? The Government have not allocated new money for the budget. All that they have done is shut down the urban programme, cut the money available and put it into the single regeneration budget, and add to it money from housing investment programmes that have been top-sliced in the first place by central Government. There is no new money. There are real problems, and the Government are doing nothing to address them properly.

Mr. Curry: The problems are being addressed properly, and they are being addressed properly in Sheffield, because the city of Sheffield has shown considerable and welcome enterprise in this matter. I have considerable dealings with the leadership in Sheffield. The development corporation and estate

action and housing programmes are working well. We will see whether it will be successful with its single regeneration budget bid. The scheme has certainly been well supported by Sheffield.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend accept that my constituents, who were glad to welcome him on his recent visit, greatly look forward to the all-party delegation that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and I will bring to see him on 12 December in respect of our single regeneration budget bid? I hope that he will sympathetically consider our proposals, which are based on a real partnership of business and the local authority. I join my hon. Friend in welcoming what our right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said yesterday about extending single regeneration budget funding.

Mr. Curry: I look forward to meeting the delegation with my two hon. Friends from Blackpool. I know how hard they try to promote the interests of a borough that has its problems—we all realise that. No doubt, my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that resources have been increased and that there will be a second round on the same basis as the first round. Where bids have not succeeded the first time, there will be a chance to put them forward in the second round. Other bids will be invited as well.

I repeat what I have said to every questioner in the House: we are judging the bids on their merits according to very clear and open criteria. Everyone understands that, and the process has spawned a great deal of effective co-operation between the private sector, local authorities, education institutions and training and enterprise councils. It has been an extremely useful exercise and people are learning that local government and the private sector can work together creatively and sensibly, supported by central Government.

Water and Sewerage

8. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representation he has received from the water industry about future charging arrangements for water and sewerage.

Mr. Atkins: As the hon. Member knows, the water industry associations have recently presented to Ministers their views about future methods of charging for water and sewerage services which are being considered.

Mrs. Jackson: Does the Minister recognise that in an industry where there is not usually political consensus, there is consensus—apart from the Government Front Bench and the Director General of Ofwat—that, because water and sewerage are public services, it is both fair and sensible to allow water companies to continue to use the local taxation base as a reasonable core charging method? Will he respond positively to the document which was presented to him by the water industry associations and say that they can use council tax data for their charging systems? Will he do that as soon as possible?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Lady and other Opposition Members must realise that, if they believe as much as we do in sustainable development of a natural resource, it is logical that a cost must be levied on the basis of consumption. That is the case with gas and electricity, and I do not see how water is any different.

It is crucial that we make the right decision. The water industry associations and others, including the hon. Lady, have presented their views to us. I give the hon. Lady an undertaking that my right hon. Friend and I will make a decision as quickly as we can.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend think very carefully before moving to increase metering? I hate to agree with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), but there appears to be a great deal of evidence that water companies bear costs in the area of distribution of water as opposed to production of water. Therefore, the additional costs that may be added because of the introduction of metering might be out of all proportion to the benefit to consumers. If people were to reduce the amount of water they use, the price of water per gallon might rise dramatically. I hate to think what the political implications would be if we went ahead with metering.

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend recognises, as we all do, that there is no party political division in this area; there is no dogma on this matter. Opposition Members keep telling us about the need for sustainable development and an environmental approach, but they seem to fly in the face of the logic of that stance, which is that cost should be based on consumption. If that is the case, metering is the logical answer.

I recognise that there are other views, and we will make a decision on the basis of people's thoughts and concerns in due course.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Does the Minister accept that, if he decides to go ahead with compulsory water metering across the country, that cannot be brought into effect to meet the present time scale for ending charging on the old rating system? Therefore, would it not make sense to allow that system to be updated by using council tax to ensure a modern system with up-to-date values? That would open the possibility of providing help to people on low incomes and those who live alone, particularly those with high water charges, on the same basis as the council tax.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman and his party spend a lot of time preaching at us about the environment and about sustainable development. As I said to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) earlier, if we believe in the policy there has to be a consumption-related tax. Frankly, when it comes to water matters, I take less notice of what Liberal Members say than anyone else in the House.

Mr. Dobson: Why do the Government insist that it would be right for everyone in the country to be forced to have a water meter and to find the cost of installing that meter? The public have made it clear that they do not want meters. The water companies have now described it as an untenable option. Why do not the Government abandon the idea and allow the companies to charge instead on the basis of council tax bands or rateable values? Only the Government and the water regulator persist in believing that compulsory metering is right. We have to start asking whose side the water regulator is on: the Government or the public?

Mr. Atkins: When the hon. Gentleman has been doing the job a little longer, he will understand the complexities of the matter. Then he will realise that the logic of his

policy, as often declared, to support sustainable development of scarce and declining resources is to ensure that consumption is the factor, just as it is with gas and electricity. There is no compulsion as the matter stands. There are alternatives, and people have the opportunity to take them up. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the subject up and then talks to me. I will tell him what it is all about.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Bearing in mind the intense hardship to people whose water is cut off for non-payment or other reasons, will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that fewer people are cut off nowadays? Will he undertake to initiate research which will ensure that every possible step is taken before people are cut off, including finding other ways of paying their bills, perhaps through social security or in one way or another?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is right to say that disconnections are declining. The recent figures announced for this year showed a continuing decline. The process that has to be followed by a water company before it can obtain disconnection—a court order, several letters and various other requirements—means that disconnection does not take place unless it is the absolute ultimate sanction. All the evidence, certainly from research by the water companies among customers in my area in the north-west, suggests that the majority of customers, by which I mean a substantial percentage, wish to retain the option of disconnection as an ultimate sanction for non-payment.

Environmental Protection Agencies

9. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the plans to establish environmental protection agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have received a number of representations, which I have taken into account in the Environment Bill which we intend to present for First Reading in another place tomorrow.

Mrs. Ewing: I welcome the legislation which is to be presented, but I wish to express disappointment, particularly on Saint Andrew's day, that there is to be no separate legislation to establish a Scottish environmental protection agency. Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify how that decision was reached, given the different legislative systems? Despite that, will he give an assurance that he will consult Scottish-based organisations with reference to abandoned and contaminated land sites, which often contribute more to river pollution than the normal industrial activities of the modern day? Will he give us an assurance that a duty will be placed on the agencies to have a catchment management policy which will ensure that all aspects are examined closely together?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady is right to say that these things must be looked at together. That is why we are bringing the three agencies together and why there is a clear section in the legislation dealing with the Scottish environment agency, which will be a separate agency. It is perfectly proper that it should come in the same legislation because we all share in the environment and we all seek to ensure that environmental protection in Scotland and that in the rest of the United Kingdom should complement each other. There is no reason why we cannot deal with the matter in the same Bill. All that I can say is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has taken an extremely detailed personal interest in the matter as it relates not only to Scotland but to the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Barry Field: When my right hon. Friend considers protection agencies in general, will he consider one for chief executives of Liberal-controlled authorities, who appear to be becoming an endangered species? Has he read the report in the *Local Government Chronicle* and from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives that the Liberal Democrats seem to have a policy of sacking chief executives or not replacing them?

Madam Speaker: Order. The question hardly relates to that on the Order Paper. I called the hon. Gentleman because I realised that he was Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment and thought that he might have an interesting contribution to make. If the Minister can make some sort of reply, I would appreciate it if he could keep it to the subject on the Order Paper.

Mr. Gummer: The environment agency will have a number of duties, but I fear that they could not reach so far, even though an agency to do as my hon. Friend suggests will be increasingly important.

Ms Ruddock: On the cost benefit provisions of the proposed agency, does the Secretary of State care to reflect on the case of the Drax power station, where the need to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions on environmental grounds led to massive investment in flue gas desulphurisation? Is he aware that, due to the Government's bizarre criteria, the electricity companies are purchasing cheaper electricity from dirty power stations in preference to that produced cleanly at Drax?

Despite the Secretary of State's good intentions and the new environment agency, which we wish to support, is it not the case that the Government's commitment to market forces, deregulation and privatisation will undermine that agency before it is even born?

Mr. Gummer: No, precisely the opposite is true. That commitment makes it possible for us to protect the environment. The area of the world in which the environment has been least protected is eastern Europe, which ran a socialist society. We all know perfectly well how one destroys the environment—one has central planning, central control and no market forces and one does not introduce mechanisms whereby market forces support the environment.

That is why, for example, we announced the landfill levy yesterday and why Friends of the Earth called my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the Chancellor with the greenest credentials that our nation has ever seen. No Labour Chancellor was ever considered environmentally friendly and the reason is very clear from the ridiculous position that the Opposition have taken on the environment.

Local Government, Warwickshire

10. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about local government reforms in Warwickshire.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I have received

many representations on local government structure in Warwickshire. However, the review of Warwickshire is still in the hands of the Local Government Commission. I expect to receive its report next month.

Mr. Pawsey: Is my hon. Friend aware that the *Local Government Chronicle* recently published a report which stated that the Local Government Commission would recommend the status quo for Warwickshire? Is he able to confirm that? If he is, is he aware that the church bells will ring and wine—or at least beer—will flow in the streets of Warwickshire? It would be a marvellous Christmas present to hear something encouraging from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Jones: I have learnt not to rely on gossip, even when it is in the *Local Government Chronicle*. We will await the report and judge it on its merits when it is submitted.

Mr. Olner: Is the Minister aware that in Warwickshire and throughout the country people are sick and fed up with the Local Government Commission and with the fantastic amount of money that has been wasted on that futile exercise because it has not given local government the freedom that it needs to look after our constituents and communities? From start to finish, the whole thing is a sham and the Minister should admit it and abolish the Commission.

Mr. Jones: Considering that we have not received the final report for all the counties, the hon. Gentleman is prejudging the exercise. The decisions announced so far seem to have been well received, although from time to time we will obviously disagree with the Commission's suggestions. If the hon. Gentleman has reason to disagree with its original suggestions, the appropriate thing to do is to direct his representations to Sir John Banham.

Mr. Sykes: Is the Minister aware that, if beer will flow in the streets of historic Warwickshire, more beer will flow in historic Yorkshire if he allows the return of the historic county of north riding, as he did recently when he allowed the abolition of Humberside and its return to the east riding of Yorkshire?

Mr. Jones: I hear what my hon. Friend says. We have announced our proposals for North Yorkshire and for the former Humberside, which include the recreation of East Yorkshire, although not precisely along the historic boundaries.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Does not the Minister understand that, if the Government are prepared to announce the order for the abolition of Cleveland while at the same time they are not prepared to let the review finish, it is not my hon. Friends who should be accused of prejudging the review but the Minister and his colleagues? Would it not be more responsible at this stage to stop playing party politics with local government reorganisation, and to let the commission finish its review before bringing any orders before the House?

Mr. Jones: That would be disastrous, and it would leave a large number of people unclear about their future. The hon. Gentleman presupposes that we are looking at the reorganisation in terms of a universal blueprint. We are judging each county on its merits, and it seems reasonable to announce the proposals for each county and debate them as individual proposals.

Green Belt

11. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications for opencast mining affecting the green belt have been made in the last six months.

Sir Paul Beresford: We do not hold this information, but my hon. Friend may be interested to know that our planning guidelines make clear that opencast coal mining should be allowed only where the development can be carried out in an environmentally acceptable way or where there are overriding benefits.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend consider collecting such information? If he does, he will become aware that there has, during the past year, been a surge in applications for opencasting on green field sites within the green belt in Leeds and elsewhere in the country? If environmental acceptability is rightly to be the key test, will he or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State come to visit Garforth in my constituency to see exactly how unsuitable those applications are?

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has accepted an invitation to visit. As regards the information, I am willing to look into the possibility of providing it as soon as is reasonable.

Mr. Enright: Does the Minister further agree that in a constituency such as mine—which had huge numbers of deep-mined pits until very recently—it is an affront that, during the past six months, applications have been made for opencast mining in the very small pieces of genuine countryside which we have? Will he make a presumption against opencast mining in such cases, as we have suffered enough from mining waste?

Sir Paul Beresford: It is not an affront to apply. With the new regulations and the new attitude, there must be an environmentally-oriented balance. Nevertheless, we must accept that minerals can only be worked where they exist.

Urban Development (Ebbsfleet)

12. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the strategic planning factors within the responsibilities of local government and his Department which favour urban development at Ebbsfleet.

Mr. Curry: Planning guidance for the south-east aims to change the balance of development in the region from the west to the east. Thames Gateway is the main opportunity for growth in the region. Kent Thames-side, including Ebbsfleet, with its large and varied supply of development sites, has been identified as the main eastern focus for development in the Thames Gateway planning framework.

Mr. Spearing: Will not any urban development at Ebbsfleet detract from the development of east London, which was one of the strategic reasons for putting the fast channel tunnel link on its particular alignment? Is it not a fact that the proponents of stations at Ebbsfleet and Stratford respectively were not given equal access to Ministers? Do not both of those facts reflect upon the

integrity of Ministers, and of any hon. Member who did not have a constituency interest and who was involved in that controversial decision?

Mr. Curry: As far as access to Ministers and ministerial visits to sites is concerned, I repudiate absolutely what the hon. Gentleman has said because it is not true. Ebbsfleet was chosen because it stood up commercially from the very start. Ebbsfleet was never in competition with Stratford—it was in competition with Rainham, because those were two potential sites within the M25 catchment area.

The reasons for Stratford are different, and nobody has fought harder than my right hon. Friend and myself to make sure that Stratford is still in there with a chance. We hope that we will get the regeneration benefit from the development at Stratford, but Stratford already has city challenge, assisted area status, and objective 2 funding, and it is already served by rail, underground and the docklands light railway. It will also be served by the Jubilee line extension. We hope that further developments will be attracted to Stratford, because we want it to enjoy the benefits of regeneration.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: My hon. Friend will know from his visits to Ebbsfleet when he was considering all the potential sites that it is located on exhausted chalk pits, so it is not a green-field site of specific environmental interest. Will my hon. Friend also note that Ebbsfleet was chosen because it is right alongside a pool of talent offered by my constituents of Gravesend and Northfleet, alongside deep water wharfs on the Thames and transport access to and from the M25 and the A2? Ebbsfleet is the right location for the international station and as a focus for the redevelopment of Kent Thames-side.

Mr. Curry: I repeat to the House that Ebbsfleet was chosen because it stood up commercially when the potential sites for an international station were examined and for no other reason. We hope that Stratford, which is east inner London, will also attract developments if commercial logic suggests that. We have fought to keep that opportunity on the table.

European Directives

13. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for ensuring that outstanding European directives relating to environmental and ecological matters are enacted into law within the next six months.

Mr. Atkins: Our aim is to implement European directives as far as possible on time and in full. The House will be aware that we have just implemented the habitats and urban waste water treatment directives.

Mr. Mackinlay: Should local planning authorities, in support of the spirit of those directives, pursue planning policies that presume against development on sites of special scientific interest, will the Minister undertake that his ministerial inspectors and his ministerial colleagues will support such policies rather than demonstrate mere regard to the existence of SSSIs? Will he and his colleagues join those local authorities by implementing policy that presumes against development on SSSIs?

Mr. Atkins: No doubt my noble Friend the Minister for Construction and Planning will hear the hon. Gentleman's point. We must work from the supposition that we protect SSSIs, but there are occasions, albeit a few, when that policy does not fit. We try hard at national and local level to ensure that SSSIs and other sites of particular interest are maintained, usually in whole, but often in part.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

14. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of carbon dioxide emissions for the United Kingdom in 1994 and predicted for 2000.

Sir Paul Beresford: The latest estimate for carbon dioxide emissions in 1993 is 152 million tonnes of carbon, down from about 158 million tonnes in 1990. Figures are not yet available for 1994. We currently expect that in the year 2000 they will not exceed 1990 levels in line with our commitments under the United Nations climate change convention.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister ensure that the environmental and planning policies pursued by his Department are given some real teeth? For example, when considering planning applications for out-of-town shopping developments, the Department should take into account the fact that such developments lead to a vast increase in cars and, in turn, an increase in pollutants and obviously CO_2 emissions. When will the Government change the general trend of their policy to encourage the private car as opposed to the interests of public transport, because that would be a major way in which to reduce CO_2 emissions and thus the impact of global warming on the country?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman is obviously unaware that he has just stated many of the policies adopted by the Department on those issues, especially after inquiries have recommended such policies. I recognise his attempt at a pun and that should have been anticipated, but given the plastic teeth with which the hon. Gentleman is smiling at me, he better be careful.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend will know that the Opposition do not have a monopoly on concern about carbon emissions. Will my hon. Friend take decent steps to discuss with his Cabinet counterparts concrete proposals to reduce carbon emissions? In particular, will he consider reducing the motor mileage allowance to public servants, including Members of Parliament? Will he also consider reducing the number of cars made available to civil servants and possibly reduce the number of ministerial cars as well?

Sir Paul Beresford: Perhaps my hon. Friend will join me one evening, going home on public transport with five red boxes.

Nuclear Waste

15. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses his Department has received to the consultation paper he issued in August on the disposal of nuclear waste.

Mr. Atkins: We have received 251 responses to the consultation paper. A list of those has been placed in the Library of the House. In addition, we have received about 5,000 letters.

Mr. Gunnell: I am sure that many of those responses were from local authorities. Learning that the Secretary of State very much opposes central planning, when applications for the deposit of low-grade nuclear waste are received, will the Government's intention be that they should be determined by local authorities, so that they can respond to the opinions of local communities on the issue?

Mr. Atkins: I make two points in response to that. First, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution consults the local waste regulation authorities and the local authorities before any authorisations of any type are made, and that has been the case for some time. Secondly—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not party to this—there is a suspicion sometimes that the talking up of low-level nuclear waste, as though it were more dangerous than it is, gets the issue out of proportion. Low-level nuclear waste is the type of waste that comes from hospitals—rubber gloves, old exit signs and other similar bits and pieces, which, although they are obviously radioactive, are radioactive to such a small extent that they do not cause any damage or threat to the environment.

Mr. Michael Brown: Would it be helpful to remind my hon. Friend of the commitment that I gave to the electors of Brigg and Cleethorpes in the House in 1986? Would it be helpful for him to leave that constituency on one side when it comes to considering this matter? Would it also be helpful to him to be reminded of the constituency represented by my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary?

Mr. Atkins: I am, indeed, well aware of my hon. Friend's earlier pledge about those matters. I know him well enough to know that he would never have to implement it in so far as I am involved in any policy that is of concern to him, but I emphasise again that, as he well knows, if we have mentioned any specific sites—which we have not—we are talking about very low-level nuclear waste, which is the sort of stuff that has been going on for years and does not cause a problem.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm that bringing the waste regulation authorities into the new environmental agency will mean that, rather than their decisions reflecting the opinions and anxieties of local people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) suggested, in future they will have to respond to directives from the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State could intervene and direct them to accept low-level nuclear waste, whether they liked it or not?

Mr. Atkins: No.

Planning Law

16. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to alter planning law.

Mr. Gummer: I shall consider the need for amending legislation in the light of the report, "Shopping Centres and Their Future" by the Select Committee on the Environment, and of a symposium on quality in town and country that I have arranged for next month.

Mr. Campbell: Will the Minister consider planning permission as regards Crown land? He may be aware that, obviously, residents who live next to Crown land cannot object to anything that the agent of the Crown land wants to build. In my constituency, where a big hangar has been built, the residents had little or no say in the decision to grant planning permission for that monstrosity. It was just built.

In this age of the citizens charter, does the Minister agree that the residents who live around that Crown property should have at least a say in the decision whether to grant planning permission for whatever will be built on the Crown land?

Mr. Gummer: I shall be happy to consider the specific case. I believe that another case is presenting problems in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and I shall consider that as well.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the planning system can never be totally prescriptive in every case, but that the normal presumption should be that the local plan and structure plan should take priority? Will he ask the planning inspectorate to make that the normal presumption?

Mr. Gummer: Clearly, the structure plan is the one within which all such decisions should be made. Occasionally there are exceptions, but they need to be extremely well explained and there must be a real basis on which to make a change. We want a plan-led scheme, but I also want a great deal more flexibility within the plans. For example, I do not want local plans which designate in advance the use of every single site. We need to defend the green belt rigorously but get mixed development in our cities, towns and villages so that we can bring people back to the centres and enable them to live, work, take their leisure and worship in the same places instead of forcing them to use their motor cars to drive long distances.

English Nature and Countryside Commission

17. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet representatives of rural pressure groups to discuss the merger between English Nature and the Countryside Commission.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 7 October that we do not intend to proceed with a merger between

English Nature and the Countryside Commission at this time. Instead we have asked the chairmen of the two bodies to draw up a programme of closer working.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Minister aware that the announcement that the two bodies would not be merged has been widely welcomed in the rural parts of my constituency? Is he also aware that the practical and voluntary approach adopted by English Nature in past years has built up an enormous amount of good will among farmers? Does he agree that it is essential to keep that approach rather than adopt that of the Opposition, which is to regulate and control all aspects of country life?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend, who speaks with considerable authority on rural matters, is entirely right, and I shall convey his thanks to the chairmen of both organisations.

Social Security

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on social security following my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget statement.

Last year at this time I announced that social security spending would reach £88 billion next year and £92 billion the year after. Now I can announce that spending plans for those years have been reduced to £86.5 billion next year and £90 billion the year after. This is the first time since records have been kept that social security spending plans have been scaled down.

That reflects the impact not just of lower unemployment and lower inflation, but of my social security reforms. None the less, social security on average now costs every working person nearly £15 every working day. Therefore, I am now announcing further measures to curb the growth of expenditure and to help people get off benefit.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced yesterday, we shall implement in full the second stage of help with VAT, as we promised last year. From next April, pensions will incorporate up to £52 for single pensioners and £73 for pensioner couples specifically to help with VAT on fuel. We shall let people know about the extra help with VAT on fuel by means of a special notice in their order books. We shall also increase help with cold weather payments and insulation grants beyond that previously planned. From this month, payments for cold weather will rise from £6 to £7 a week. They were to go up to £7.50 next November, but I shall in fact raise them to £8.50.

We are also spending a further £45 million, £10 million more than I announced last year, to help insulate homes and improve fuel efficiency. That will provide grants for more than 60,000 extra households next year.

A key aim of my fundamental review of social security is to improve work incentives. To help people out of dependency, it is vital to do four things: to make work more rewarding than benefit; to help people with the transition from benefit back into work; to persuade employers to take on the long-term unemployed; and to help companies create more jobs for the less-skilled. I can announce a £600 million package, which addresses all four tasks.

The first of those is to make work more rewarding. Family credit helps nearly 600,000 families in work. In October I introduced a child care allowance which, over time, should help 150,000 parents with their child care costs. But the more people earn, the less family credit they receive. Consequently, the incentive to move from part-time to full-time work is limited. So I am introducing a £10 a week supplement to family credit for those working 30 hours or more a week. The least well-off receiving housing benefit and council tax benefit will get the full value of the increase. That will cost £200 million and should help about 345,000 families.

Family credit has proved its worth in helping families back into work. But most unemployed people do not have children, so they are not entitled to family credit. However, an in-work benefit might help them into jobs, too. I therefore propose to test-run such a benefit through pilot schemes covering 20,000 claimants. If the pilots are successful, we shall consider introducing a national scheme.

Many people who want to work are hesitant about accepting a job because of uncertainties about the size and timing of family credit payments, so I intend to speed up payment of family credit so that all new claims are dealt with in five days. Other people fear loss of help with their rent or council tax, so I shall let people who take a job after six months out of work keep their housing benefits at their existing rate for four weeks, regardless of their earnings. We shall consult the local authority associations to ensure that entitlements to housing benefit and council tax benefit are revised speedily so that payments follow on seamlessly after the fourth week.

The new back-to-work bonus, which I announced in October, will be of particular help for people who want to work full time. It will enable people working part time on job seeker's allowance or income support to accumulate a bonus of up to £1,000 payable on return to full-time work. That bonus will be tax free.

I am also giving employers an incentive to take on unemployed people. Any employer who takes on someone previously unemployed for two years will receive a one-year holiday from the employer's national insurance contribution. That change requires legislation, so it will come in from April 1996. Assuming that employers take on 120,000 people a year, they will benefit by £45 million.

The greater the costs companies incur when they employ people, the less they can afford to pay or the fewer people they will take on. I particularly want to help less-skilled people to get jobs, so I shall be reducing employers' national insurance contributions by a further 0.6 per cent. for lower-paid employees from next April. I shall raise all the earnings bands used to calculate employers' national insurance contributions by £5. To help companies concerned about high levels of sickness, I can announce that we shall reimburse statutory sick pay for costs exceeding 13 per cent. of a company's monthly national insurance bill.

Housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest together now amount to £11 billion. They have doubled since they were introduced in 1988. The UK is almost alone in paying 100 per cent. of rents to those on benefit. As a result, tenants have no incentive to choose the less expensive of two dwellings or to negotiate over their rent level, and landlords may be tempted to push up rents for those on benefit. Rent officers determine whether rents are within reasonable market levels and help is not usually available above that. But in many areas, the market level is largely determined by those on housing benefit. The average private rent in the deregulated sector is about £70 per week. But housing benefit meets rents of more than £350 per week. Taxpayers on modest incomes, meeting their own housing costs, resent subsidising rents higher than they can afford themselves. People on housing benefit should have similar incentives to those paying their own rents when deciding what they can afford.

I will introduce a new scheme next October. New claimants and those moving home will be entitled to housing benefit for the full rent up to the average rent for similar properties in the area. Housing benefit will cover only 50 per cent. of the portion of rent above that. Existing claimants in their current tenancy will continue to receive full housing benefit as at present. Local

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

authorities will be given funds to be able to reimburse more than 50 per cent. of the rent above the average in cases where they think that there is special need.

Prospective tenants will want to know how much housing benefit will be payable before they agree a tenancy. So we shall consult the local authority associations and the Institute of Rent Officers about how to produce that information. At present people who are away can claim housing benefit for up to a year, even if their home is empty. In future we shall limit that period to 13 weeks, except for people with exceptional reasons, such as those in hospital.

Taxpayers pay the mortgage interest of people on income support. Over the past 15 years, that expenditure has risen from £31 million to more than £1 billion, and the scheme has major drawbacks. Until I imposed a cap, it covered any size of mortgage—from cottages to castles. Next April, I intend to reduce that cap to £100,000. The generosity of the scheme for those out of work can create huge disincentives to move back into work—but to extend help with mortgages to people in work would be immensely costly.

Since income support cover is paid direct to lenders, the scheme is simply bailing them out for their bad lending practices. The present system also discourages individuals from taking out private insurance and dissuades lenders from insuring all their loans. None the less, private insurance has spread significantly. I believe that insurance of mortgages should become the norm.

For anyone taking out a loan after 1 October next year, we shall pay income support for mortgage interest only after the first nine months on benefit. I believe that insurance for that nine-month period will be readily available. I expect that many lenders will incorporate it in their loans at modest cost.

Existing mortgage holders qualify at present for 50 per cent. of their interest payments for the first 16 weeks—but that money is paid to borrowers, and they do not always pass it on to the mortgage lender. In practice, most people who lose their job and who are unable to meet their mortgage payments return to work within a few months. Most private policies make no payments in respect of the first few weeks. Lenders rarely repossess in such circumstances, even when the borrower is not covered by income support. I propose that no payments will be made for the first two months for existing mortgage holders who start an income support claim. For the next four months, the payment of 50 per cent. of mortgage interest currently made to the borrower will be made direct to the lender. Thereafter, mortgage interest will be paid in full, as at present.

We shall consult the Social Security Advisory Committee, mortgage lenders and insurers about circumstances that cannot be covered by insurance. I am confident that the insurance market will respond, that lenders will behave responsibly, and that sound lending will ultimately contribute to a healthier market.

The fight against benefit fraud remains a top priority. Last year, our crackdown saved a record £654 million and caught a record 300,000 people cheating—but prevention is better than detection. We want to stop fraud happening in the first place. That requires a secure system of payment. We are working with the Post Office to create an automated system of payment, probably involving a payment card, dramatically to reduce fraud involving pension books and giro cheques. We are seeking private sector finance for that major initiative, which will strengthen the whole Post Office network. Nine companies and consortiums submitted proposals to be prime contractors for a system that could be in use in 1996.

Most fraud involves people giving false information about their earnings or circumstances, so we shall be making more checks on people's circumstances and more home visits, and we are piloting a scheme in London so that local authorities can cross-check information about their housing benefit claimants. That programme will cost £100 million a year, but it should save more than £2.5 billion over three years. I am also tightening some benefit rules.

I have already acted against avoidance of national insurance contributions by employers who pay earnings in various non-cash forms, which undermines the whole basis of the NI scheme. Such practices are devious. I have already put a stop to fine wine wage packets, precious stone salaries and a number of other ruses. I give warning that I shall take further action as and when required.

Separately, I shall be limiting the grant paid through the social fund for funeral payments. Levels of payments for funerals through the social fund have grown by 6 per cent. a year above inflation. Costs rose from £18 million in 1988-89 to £61 million this year, a more than threefold increase. Funeral payments cover the whole cost, so funeral directors can force up costs to customers on social fund, knowing that they are unlikely to obtain better quotes. I have taken action to stop families claiming via remote relatives who happen to be on income support. I propose next April to limit the maximum payment to £875, which was the average payment for funerals last year.

The measures that I have announced today mark a further radical step in my reforms of social security. My aim is to improve incentives, to focus help on those most in need and to stop social security outstripping the nation's ability to pay. I have set out a £600 million programme to help people out of dependency and into work. I have fulfilled our promise to help pensioners and others cope with VAT on fuel at a far more generous level than anything suggested by the Opposition. I have also set out sensible plans to tackle the rapid growth in housing benefits. Any party that shrinks from those problems is unworthy of government; this Government have the courage to tackle them.

I commend the measures to the House.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The first basic point is that the uprating is the bare minimum to which the Secretary of State was committed; anything less would have been a breach of faith.

Does the Secretary of State accept that even the new figures represent modest subsistence levels? Is it not true that a family with two children under 11, living on income support, will be expected to exist on a bare third of average earnings and that, under this Government, the value of benefits as a percentage of earnings has steadily declined? Does not the settlement further underline and widen the gap between those trapped on benefit and those in work?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that anger over the hike in value added tax on fuel will be compounded by the Chancellor's presentation yesterday, which bordered on the dishonest? Will he confirm—it is important to make this clear—that, for people on benefits and pensions, yesterday's announcement added not a penny piece to the direct compensation that had been promised in last year's Budget? Is he really proud of offering a single pensioner an inadequate 25p over and above the statutory uprating and a pensioner couple an insulting 30p?

Has the Secretary of State seen the research carried out by the Disablement Income Group, which suggests that, with VAT at 17.5 per cent., people with disabilities—just one of the vulnerable groups—will face additional fuel bills after compensation varying from about £1 to more than £3 a week? I realise that the Secretary of State is bound to back the Chancellor, but does not his conscience prick? Is he happy that, for example, those on disability living allowance—another special and vulnerable group—will get no help from this package other than from the impact on the annual uprating for increased fuel bills?

The Secretary of State has made much of cold weather payment increases. How much will that cost the Treasury, given that the total payment last year amounted to only £12.4 million? Is there not a touch of humbug in pretending that it is a significant concession when the gross Treasury take on VAT on fuel amounts to £2.85 billion?

The Secretary of State will perhaps recognise that pensioners and others will resent the inadequate VAT package, but does he accept that they will be frightened by the announcement on funeral costs? I am anxious not to increase fears unnecessarily and I certainly do not want to make too much of the issue, but it is very serious.

Can the Secretary of State give me an assurance that he has had assurances from the undertaking trade that it can offer a decent, adequate and dignified service at or below the new cap of £875 on funeral payments under the social fund? Can the Secretary of State promise to avoid a situation, which I and he, I am sure, do not want, in which families who qualify, who are in great poverty at a time of distress, have to scramble around to try to bridge a gap between that ceiling and what they are being charged? If that happened, it would be widely seen as a disgrace. I very much hope that the Secretary of State can give an assurance that that will not happen, and an assurance that the cap is now adequate and will be uprated, as necessary, to ensure genuine and proper protection in deserving cases.

In the small print of today's announcement, there is, I fear, much misery. Yet again, the higher rate of statutory sick pay has been frozen. Can the Secretary of State confirm that there has been no increase since 1990, which is a real cut of £9.23 a week from April 1995? Is it not the case that someone who is incapacitated for more than six months will get from the new incapacity benefit £18.75 less a week than the invalidity benefit rate he would have got?

Why should the non-dependant deduction for housing benefit purposes, to take one other example, be increased well above the rate of inflation? What is the point of that? What will that do to encourage a family to stay together—a cause, we always understood, dear to the heart of the Secretary of State?

The Secretary of State has made much, as he always does, of the fight against fraud. The claims made for the introduction of electronic methods of payment are startling. Will the right hon. Gentleman note that effective moves to eliminate fraud will have our strong support, although we shall look closely at his claim that £2.5 billion can be saved over the next three years? When looking at fraud, will he not forget that last month, the Comptroller and Auditor General, yet again, found errors in income support payments amounting, on this occasion, to £672 million, and qualified the Department's accounts for the sixth year running? Is that not an eloquent comment on 15 years of Conservative stewardship?

I welcome the national insurance holiday for employers taking on the long-term unemployed. It is, however, a timid start and is unlikely to make any great impact. Why does the right hon. Gentleman's scheme ignore those who have been out of work for more than 12 months? Why is its start postponed to April 1996? I do not find the reference to the need for legislation convincing in any way. It means that someone who at present has been unemployed for more than two years may well find that he has spent four years in the dole queue before the scheme, which is meant to help such people, becomes operational.

Would it not have been better to adopt the Opposition's proposal for a tax allowance, which would have delivered a genuine incentive for the employer to take people off the unemployed list? Does the Secretary of State accept that if he wants to move on to Labour's ground, he must show a great deal more courage—[*Laughter.*] That is, apparently, what he is trying to do. Does he accept that he must show a great deal more courage and commitment than we have seen in the Budget?

We shall look carefully at the rather jumbled collection of schemes which the Chancellor paraded and to which the Secretary of State referred. Will he note that we shall welcome the sensible, although we believe minor, changes to speed up the availability of family credit to ease the transition from income support to work? I underline our fear, which will be widely shared, that, without minimum wage legislation, the pilot schemes on family credit will become an ineffective subsidy for low wages paid by bad employers.

Does the Secretary of State accept—I think that he must—that the clear implication of the announcement on housing benefit is that the escalating costs are a direct reflection of the Government's ruthless policy of forcing up rents? Is not the simple message of what the Chancellor and the Secretary of State have told us that the Government were wrong and that the Opposition were right throughout the argument? Is not the root cause of the Government's policy that they have forced up council rents in the past five years by 79 per cent. while the retail prices index has increased by only 27 per cent.? The effect on housing benefit has, of course, been devastating.

The Secretary of State appears to be proposing, in effect, an area cap on private sector rents for housing benefit purposes. Does he anticipate any problems with variations in rent levels within an area, as yet undefined? Is not there a legitimate fear that some landlords will set rents above the cap, leaving tenants facing a cruel raid on their limited incomes to keep a roof over their heads or, even worse, homelessness? Is not the Government's answer again to force local government into the firing

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

line, leaving it to take the unpopular decisions and to take the flak? That does not say much for the Government's courage.

On the basis, however, that one should never fail to praise where praise is due, may I congratulate the Secretary of State wholeheartedly on repulsing the extraordinary theories of under-occupation, which the Chief Secretary has been peddling so enthusiastically in recent weeks? It will be a great relief to Labour Members that they have appeared to die a death.

Does the Minister recognise our deeply rooted concern about his announcement on assistance with mortgage interest payments? Is it not naive to think that private insurance cover can provide all the answers? Will it not impose on every new home owner a very considerable cost? I wonder whether the Minister can say anything about this: in the industry, they are talking of £25 or £30 a month for cover during that nine-month period. Will not the burden be especially severe for those who are seen to be most at risk?

How, for example, can the possibility of marriage breakdown, which one can never, perhaps, discount with total confidence, be covered at a reasonable and affordable premium? Will he confirm—this is important—that the Council of Mortgage Lenders' figures suggest that, of the 548,000 claimants currently receiving help, only 43 per cent. are unemployed and that the clear majority, the remainder, are made up of the disabled, lone parents and the elderly? Does the Minister think that it will be easy or convenient for them to find such cover?

The Minister's right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said:

"support will not normally be available in the first nine months".—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1088.]

Can the Minister explain the circumstances in which the nine-month rule will be waived? Has he consulted the insurance industry? I return to the point about cost: will he make available in the Library examples of the type of policy and premium that he believes will be involved? What does he estimate the nine-month moratorium will save from the £1 billion plus at present being spent?

Does the Secretary of State expect—this is important—building societies to make that insurance cover a condition of lending, and has he consulted the building societies about the danger that the changes will depress a housing market still looking for recovery, and inhibit labour mobility? Will the building societies be happy to know that the Secretary of State considers the very large number of defaults on mortgages to be a problem of bailing out bad loans and not a by-product of a recession brought about by the mismanagement of this country's economy?

Does the Minister accept that many people will be genuinely frightened by the tough penalties that he is imposing on any existing mortgage holder who has the misfortune to be forced by circumstance on to income support? Is it not tantamount to a sentence to homelessness to leave that person in that circumstance, suddenly facing life on income support, with no help for two months and only 50 per cent. of the mortgage payments for another four months?

This morning—I do not know whether you, Madam Speaker, were included in the mailshot—almost every hon. Member got a letter from the right hon. Gentleman stressing:

"we want to ensure that people starting work are not worried about paying their rent."

Do not the changes for existing mortgage holders bring to many people the threat that, if they lose their jobs, they will also lose their homes? That seems to be a very unpleasant prospect.

Social security spending makes up 31 per cent. of Government expenditure. Does the Minister accept that the record of recent years proves to us at least, and I am sure to him, that a high social security budget is no guarantee at all of improving standards and social justice? There can be no satisfaction in funding economic failure and the high unemployment that it brings.

Today's statement is part of what I would see as a bric-a-brac Budget, with little shape or sense of direction. What logic is there, in social security policy, in forcing hundreds of thousands of people on to means-tested benefits, with the introduction of incapacity benefit and job seeker's allowance, while at the same time proclaiming determination to cut the numbers on such benefits and tempt those concerned back to work? Is not it clear that the insensitivities and false economies of the incapacity benefit and job seeker's allowance are the dominant note in this so-called review of social security policy? The British people will see little there to undo the damage that has been done in recent years.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman has shown himself to be unwilling to face up to any difficult decisions and resistant to change, and he refused to make any savings, but he was still willing to spend more on any conceivable programme than it is reasonable to expect the nation to afford.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) began by saying that the increase in uprating to allow for VAT was the bare minimum. At least it was not as low as the 50p which, according to the hon. Member for Garscadden, would just do the trick and from which he constantly tries to dissociate himself. He would be more convincing if he could show us on the record that, before we announced these measures, he had ever proposed a higher sum than 50p, let alone a provision that will amount to £1.40 a week for a pensioner couple in the coming year and up to around £2 a week by the next year.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether it was true that the extra money is only 25p. In the coming year, single pensioners will receive £1 a week—£52 a year—and couples will receive £1.40 a week—£73 a year—of which they would not receive a penny were it not for the fact that VAT had been introduced and compensation was therefore necessary. That is substantially more than the Opposition have offered, proposed or suggested that they would be able to afford.

The hon. Member for Garscadden said that the total yield of the tax is about £3 billion. He did not mention the total value of the compensation package which, when it has all fed through, will be £1.25 billion a year.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to funeral costs. I can give him the assurance he sought. Of course funerals are available, within the pretty extensive sum of £875 that we are talking about, which are dignified and respectable. We want people to be able to have that. However, there must

be a limit. It is absurd for the social fund to meet funeral costs of more than £2,000 for a funeral. A cap seemed reasonable in such circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman claims to have doubts about whether the electronic payment of benefits, probably through a payment card, would achieve the savings that I have suggested. We believe that such a system would largely eliminate the fraud and abuse of the payment system which, at present, is one of the easiest systems to abuse. It is important that we move in that direction. I believe that it is sensible to involve private capital and initiative in that regard to enable us—we hope—to introduce the new system in 1996.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned errors and overpayments in the benefit system. We hope that the various measures that I have taken to improve the accuracy of payments will help to eliminate those errors.

The hon. Gentleman rather grudgingly welcomed the change to national insurance contributions and the holiday for a year for employers taking on people who have been unemployed for two years. He asked why the proposal could not be extended to those who have been unemployed for just a year. Fortunately, more than two thirds of those who have been unemployed for a year find work in the ensuing year. The best way to achieve the maximum impact is to concentrate help on those who have been unemployed for two years, who find it most difficult to get back to work. That will be recognised as a sensible use of that incentive and of targeting the benefit.

The hon. Gentleman proposed a tax incentive. I believe that tax incentives are likely to be rather more complex and therefore less effective with regard to the motivation of employers. He also rather laughingly claimed that we were moving on to Labour's ground. We have heard precious little ever from the Labour party about incentives. As soon as we introduce yet another measure to improve incentives, Labour treats it at best with grudging support and most of the time attacks the very things that it rather belatedly now claims are its ground.

All Labour is really keen on is the minimum wage. The minimum wage amounts to a prohibition on the creation of jobs paying less than that. Family credit ensures that people's incomes are topped up so that they will have a decent income in work rather than be paid to stay out of work, because jobs would not exist if there was a minimum wage.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked how much income support for mortgage interest would cost. At present, insurance policies, which cover more than will be required to meet the arrangements that we shall introduce in October, are available for a sum equal to roughly 0.5 per cent. or less of the mortgage interest rate. The Association of British Insurers has said today that it expects that cover to be widely available and that there will be no difficulty in meeting the wider demand that will ensue from the changes.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we are introducing tough penalties and that we are making life difficult for people who find themselves homeless. That is not our intention. We have made it clear that we shall discuss the matter with lenders, insurers and the Social Security Advisory Committee, to make sure that the vulnerable groups whom we have mentioned are properly handled in the changes.

It is right that, in the first instance, people who are buying a home should expect to meet any problems that emerge, at least over a limited period, out of insurance or other cover. Some lenders might increase pressure on people to have such insurance or might even cover their whole mortgage book themselves by insuring the mortgage book, and thereby reduce the cost of insurance to those to whom they are lending.

The housing benefit and mortgage interest changes and our reforms to increase incentives to encourage people back to work will be widely welcomed throughout the country and seen as a coherent whole. They will be contrasted with the Opposition's unwillingness to take any difficult decisions or to acknowledge the need for any change.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. After that initial lengthy exchange, I remind the House that we shall return to these issues. Therefore, I seek brisk questions and answers from now on.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement? I hope that he keeps on his ground and does not move on to the ground of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcements on family credit are particularly welcome and that they will help to create many jobs? Is it not clear that, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, it is better to tackle job creation and low pay by family credit rather than by minimum wages legislation?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful for that endorsement from a distinguished holder of my present office. I welcome his support for our measures to enhance family credit and to get people back to work, rather than to consign and condemn them to the dole in the way that a minimum wage undoubtedly would, as in many countries on the continent.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Why will disabled people not be compensated for the increase in VAT on fuel in disability living allowance? Why did not the Secretary of State bring about a transfer scheme to encourage more employers to take on the long-term unemployed? Why is he not considering merging income support and family credit into a new low-income benefit, which would help the transition from unemployment into work?

Mr. Lilley: As I explained last year, we are uprating pensions for people on invalidity benefit and, of course, people on disability premium and income support, and those on severe disability allowance. That covers the vast majority of disabled people. That is the sensible way to try to ensure that there is help for people in those circumstances, and it has been widely welcomed during the current year.

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): Arising out of my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) regarding VAT compensation for pensioners, will the increase in compensation next April be composed of part of the cost of living, of the 2.2 per cent. increase—that is, 25p—and a further 25p as a special increase? Is my right hon. Friend

[Sir Andrew Bowden]

aware that if he does it that way, the average pensioner will be 56p per week worse off than before VAT was imposed on fuel?

Mr. Lilley: I assure my hon. Friend that we are doing exactly what we promised to do last year and the proposal met with his support then, as it was meant to.

If we had not applied VAT to fuel, a single pensioner would receive £52 less in his pension next year and a pensioner couple would receive £73 less. The precise method by which it is calculated is not terribly important. The fact is that single pensioners have £52 and pensioner couples have £73 coming to them in their pensions next year to help them with their fuel bills. That is far more than the Labour party even dreamed of promising.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Does the Secretary of State recall that last year he announced a record increase in the social security budget and called it a stunning success? This year, he comes before the House to say that, for the first time ever, the projected increase in the social security budget has been cut and he calls that a stunning success. Which statement should the House believe?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the back-to-work benefit programme is totally inadequate? Will he confirm that for each £100 paid in benefit only £1 goes in back-to-work benefits? When will he announce a radical programme that matches need?

Mr. Lilley: We accept that we have made commitments to increase social security spending, and we shall abide by them. Last year I was proud to say that, despite the speculation and scaremongering by the Labour Front Bench, we had met our obligations to the vulnerable and that we would help people with VAT on fuel, for example.

We are continuing to provide that help, but we are doing so while scaling down the prospective increases in the social security budget through our success in reducing unemployment and inflation and through the social security reforms that I have introduced. I think that it is a success when one is able to meet one's obligations within a curbed amount of money, and I intend to go on achieving that aim.

The hon. Gentleman believes that the back-to-work programme is inadequate. A £600 million programme—half of it in revenue forgone and half in money paid out—is substantially more than anyone anticipated before the Budget, and it is substantially more than was urged upon us by the Opposition.

Of course, that alone will not solve the existing problems which the hon. Gentleman and I recognise are endemic in the western world. They will be solved by improving skills and training, by improving the vibrancy of our economy through deregulation, by low taxation and by increasing the number of jobs, which we are doing better than any other country in Europe.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I particularly welcome the measures announced by my right hon. Friend that will concentrate help on the long-term jobless. As I wrote a Conservative pamphlet entitled "Operation Longstop" in 1987, which urged those very measures, will my right hon. Friend consider introducing the in-work benefit pilot schemes first in Bolton?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to for my hon. Friend for his support and for his suggestions, which undoubtedly subliminally entered my consciousness and influenced the formulation of the measures. We shall certainly consider introducing the pilot schemes in Bolton and there will be consultation about them in due course.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Does not the Secretary of State understand that his proposals for housing benefit are likely to create a two-tier market in the private sector, with the most vulnerable people driven into the worst housing? Will he put pressure on his colleagues to deal with the real problem of private landlords ripping off an unregulated market and vulnerable people at enormous cost to the taxpayer and to council tax payers?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady does not realise that we have a two-tier market at present, with those on housing benefit sheltered from the impact of their rent and the factors that influence everyone else. It is sensible to give everyone in the market—particularly those who are considering occupying a property above average rent—an incentive to choose the less expensive of two properties and to negotiate with their landlords to reduce their rent rather than accept whatever is asked.

The hon. Lady suggested that the market was unregulated. She is wrong. There is a system of rent officers. They have to assess whether the rent is at a reasonable market level. It is inevitable that in some areas where tenants are predominantly on housing benefit there will be little for rent officers to use as a comparator to assess what the reasonable market level should be. The measures will improve the working of the market and reduce any scope for landlords to rip off the taxpayer in the way the hon. Lady rightly disapproves of.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Bearing in mind the statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the healthy state of our economy, cannot the Secretary of State understand that there seems little reason why we should have the increase from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. in VAT on domestic fuel? Is it not about time that he and his Cabinet colleagues listened to the country on this serious matter, which is causing grave concern despite the packages that Ministers have announced? Does he not realise that people are worried about the increase in VAT on fuel?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made it clear that money had to be obtained to help us reduce the deficit. If the revenue from VAT on domestic fuel was not available, it would have to come from somewhere else. Those who criticise the tax are remarkably silent about where they would find the money to replace it. They are also rather silent about the substantial support that we are giving to pensioners and others to shield them from the full impact of VAT in a way that goes beyond anything that the Opposition sought before the measures were introduced.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): What steps will be taken to reimburse local authorities for the additional spending that they will incur on housing benefit, which will not now be reimbursed to them? Why has the Secretary of State chosen to increase the

non-dependant deductions by such a large extent, and considerably more than the Rossi index would suggest? Does he not recognise that that will increase the pressure on families to split up?

Mr. Lilley: On the latter point, it seemed reasonable that where there were non-dependants in a household who had an income, they should make a contribution to the rent rather than expect so much of it to be met by housing benefit. I am sorry: I missed the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Timms: I asked about the extra expenditure incurred by local authorities.

Mr. Lilley: There is no question of us assuming that the local authorities will continue reimbursing 100 per cent. of rents. The entitlement to rent for new claimants and those moving property will be up to the average, and 50 per cent. above the average up to a reasonable market level. However, we shall give local authorities a significant sum from which they will be able to pay over and above that in cases in which they believe that that would be helpful to avoid hardship or difficulties for the individuals involved. That money will come from central Government funds.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the £73 available to pensioner couples in their pensions next year will reimburse them for the VAT on the average annual energy cost of £417 and that that amount is close to the average fuel bill that a pensioner incurs? Can he further confirm that one way in which pensioners can reduce their fuel bills to the average amount is by taking advantage of the enormously generous home energy efficiency scheme, which allows pensioners to insulate their homes and gives them £305 of free household insulation courtesy of the Government?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right: £73 is 17.5 per cent. of £417 and thus is the VAT that people will incur if their bill was £417 before the introduction of VAT. That is substantially more than anyone expected us to make available for people in those circumstances. My hon. Friend is also right that we are increasing the amount available to help pensioners who need insulation in their homes to reduce their heating bills. That must be in their interests and in the interests of conserving energy nationally.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): How will the areas that will be used to decide the average housing benefit be selected? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that in Northern Ireland our local authorities do not look after housing. Also, in the past, even though the social security system applies to the whole of the United Kingdom, on occasions decisions taken in Northern Ireland have been different from those taken in the rest of the UK. Will he ensure that that does not happen in future?

Mr. Lilley: We have discussed with rent officers how best the areas within which averages will be calculated should be assessed. It seems likely that they will be sub-areas of the rent officers' areas, which they are in the best position to help to define. That will be decided more finally as a result of our discussions.

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): If a man is unemployed and his wife has a small part-time job and manages to get a full-time job, while her husband remains unemployed, will she be able to claim the tax-free back-to-work bonus?

Mr. Lilley: We have certainly increased the number of hours that she can work without any loss of benefit from 16 to 24. If she is on benefit and working part time, she will be able to claim the back-to-work bonus when she returns to work full time.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The Minister is obviously aware that some local authorities rarely pay housing benefit at a level higher than the rent officer's assessment. Does he understand that there is not a shred of evidence that that has led to landlords cutting rents in those areas? Does he seriously believe that the average, low-paid, private sector tenant is in any position to negotiate a rent reduction with a landlord? If he does, he is living in a dream world. If he believes that some landlords are charging extortionate rents, why does he not do something to tackle that problem, instead of the ludicrous pretence that tenants can do something?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman cannot simultaneously maintain that landlords are charging excessive rents and that there is no scope for negotiating those rents down when people are given an incentive to do so. Rent officers already cut benefit entitlement to rent in one third of rent assessments. They are able to do so only when there are comparators for them to use. That will make the market more genuine, and therefore better able to reflect reasonable market rents.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's determination to reduce the growth in housing benefit. Can he confirm that the measures that he outlined will help to reduce fraud in relation to housing benefit?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome and can confirm that the measures that we are introducing on the fraud front will, I hope, reduce fraud in housing benefit. We have set up a pilot scheme, initially in 20 London boroughs, to enable them to cross-check that people are not entering multiple claims for housing benefit across borough boundaries, which is an important source of fraud that we hope to reduce and eliminate.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): Will the Secretary of State tell us more about the new in-work benefits for single people and childless couples? If the scheme were up and running nationally, what would be the net cost to the Exchequer in a full year and how many people would be eligible? While that is a significant step, it does not seem sensible. What does it say about our low-wage economy after 15 years of a Conservative Government's stewardship that one can earn a weekly wage and yet not earn enough even to support a single person? Is it not the case that the Government's inability to regulate the market means that the taxpayer is increasingly subsidising exploitative employment practices in that market, at great expense to the Exchequer?

Mr. Lilley: I do not think that low earnings are determined primarily by Government decisions. They are a reflection of people's earning power in the marketplace. In a pamphlet published last week, I tried to spell out the reasons why, throughout the western world, the earnings

[Mr. Lilley]

of unskilled people have lagged behind and sometimes fallen below average earnings, which are rising healthily throughout the western world. We must try to tackle the problems that ensue from that phenomenon, and the measures that I announced in the statement will help us to do so. I would hope that they would be welcomed.

I am sure that it is not the case with the hon. Gentleman, but some Opposition Members are more antagonistic about paying moneys that might be seen to be subsidising employers who happen to offer low levels of pay than they are grateful for the help that those on low pay will receive as a result of the measures.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): The housing benefit measures are extremely good news for Scarborough and for Whitby. Is my right hon. Friend aware that hon. Members with coastal resorts in their constituencies have had dreadful trouble in the recent past with badly run DSS hostels? Artificially high rents have made hotel conversions far too attractive, and the measures will help curb the scandal of "Dole-on-sea".

Mr. Lilley: I am conscious of the problems that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members representing coastal areas have found in their areas. I hope that the measures that we have announced on housing benefit will discourage the sort of abuse to which my hon. Friend referred and which may well be more prevalent in those areas. It is only right and proper that people who are occupying properties with above-average rent should have some incentive to reduce that rent where possible, or to choose a less expensive property to live in.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Is not the requirement of insurance on mortgages a hidden Tory tax on owner-occupiers, which the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not have the courage to announce in the Budget yesterday? Does not that insurance amount to about £25 to £30 a month on a £50,000 mortgage, a figure that will almost certainly soar at higher levels?

Mr. Lilley: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is no. A statement from the Abbey National says that about 40 to 50 per cent. of new mortgages that it gives are covered by insurance already. It seems quite reasonable to encourage a higher proportion still to be covered by insurance, and that is the effect of the measures that I have announced.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that introducing compensation in advance of VAT going up is an unusual measure for the Government, and that when RPI goes up eventually—the RPI figure will be inflated by VAT going through—additional money will come in the uprating statement when pensions go up again? Is there any suggestion yet that people are modifying their use of electricity by ensuring that they are not wasting energy which, after all, is the policy urged by all hon. Members?

Mr. Lilley: I can certainly confirm the point that my hon. Friend makes. In addition to the extra help that we shall give from April next year, there will be a further benefit to people as a direct result of VAT on fuel in the subsequent year through the natural uprating that will follow through. That reflects again the impact which has been, to some extent, already compensated for by earlier changes.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): The Secretary of State said that employers who take on people who have been unemployed for two years will receive a one-year holiday from employers' national insurance contributions. Will the Government be seeking any assurance from those employers that they will keep on those workers at the end of that year?

Mr. Lilley: I do not think that that would be feasible, as it would increase the bureaucratic add-ons to the scheme and make it less attractive. In general, I do not think that employers would seek to apply the scheme in the way in which the hon. Lady suggests. I think that employers will find that, when they take on people—about whom they may have a degree of suspicion, as those people will have been unemployed for a long time—they will be delighted by the response that they will receive from those people, who will be glad to be back in work, as most people want to be. The employers will be only too delighted to keep them on at the end of the year.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, historically, as unemployment has come down people have been caught in the poverty trap? Will he accept it from me that the measures that he announced today, alongside those announced by the Chancellor yesterday, represent important means of overcoming that problem? Does he accept, however, that those changes are only the start of the new thinking, to which it is absolutely essential that both sides of the House devote time, which is designed to try to get people back into work? Does he recognise, as a member of the No Turning Back group, that some written work has been done on that subject, which he might like to re-read as he continues his programme of radical reform?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite correct that, since the war, there has been a tendency for unemployment to rise in a recession and then for that rate not to come down by an equal amount during a subsequent recovery. As a result of the changes that we have made to the labour market and our trade union reforms, one of the encouraging things has been that unemployment started to come down earlier in this recession than in previous ones. We are determined to build on that improvement and to encourage unemployment to fall further so that more people can go back into work. That is what the back-to-work package in the measures that I announced today is about. I shall certainly reacquaint myself with the writings of the No Turning Back group, which are invariably stimulating and good for us all.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer described the changes that the Secretary of State announced today to the payments of housing benefit as a new system to prevent the current system from being prey to unscrupulous landlords. What estimate has the Secretary of State made of the amount that those unscrupulous landlords have taken out of the housing benefit system

since it was deregulated in 1988? How much does he expect to save for the social security budget as a result of the changes that he announced today?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady is quite right—we expect to make significant savings at a steady rate. The direct effect is likely to be about £200 million, but the indirect effect is likely to be substantially greater than that because many people will negotiate down rents and move to more economical properties. As a result of the changes that we have made, the entire rent level may be affected, so that the long-term effect could be substantially greater than that anticipated. We do not know how much has been ripped off by unscrupulous landlords, but I am glad to note the hon. Lady's implicit support for a system that will reduce such losses in the future.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Does the Secretary of State understand that the £72 market rent is disguised in the areas of greatest housing demand, where the average rent is well above that sum and where the market rent is set by rent tribunals? Will he therefore refund those local authorities on the basis of the average rent in the area, because he has based his philosophy on that? Please may we not assume that people who are looking for housing can choose, because often their only alternative choice is a cardboard box?

Mr. Lilley: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the plan is to base the entitlement to housing benefit on the average rents for each type of property in each area and not to take a national average. It applies to those in the deregulated market where alternative accommodation is usually available, but in the event of hardship or any specific difficulties, local authorities will be funded to give additional support over and above the 50 per cent. above the average.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: We now move on.

Points of Order

4.32 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am grateful to you for allowing me to put to you in the House a point that I put in a letter this morning in respect of the Committee of Privileges.

You will recall, Madam Speaker, that in the debate on 31 October, I said that I intended to publish a report. I did that and I gave it to you. You made a statement on 2 November in which you drew attention to the issue raised by my action. You asked the Committee of Privileges to meet and to

"report so that the House can have an early opportunity to consider this matter in an orderly manner and to take any action that it may think fit."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1994; Vol. 248, c. 1564.]

Normally a report of the Committee of Privileges is presented to the House by the Leader of the House, and on this occasion that would have allowed the House to consider not only the report but the alternative draft that I submitted. However, to my surprise—I make no complaint, because I was notified—the Government decided to table a motion tonight to remove me from that Committee and not to present its report. Although the motion is debatable, it cannot be debated because no time has been made available.

I am not making any complaint of sharp practice, but that decision has made it impossible for the House to have an orderly debate on the matter: it has not received the report—although it has been published—and hon. Members are not to have their attention drawn to the report for which you, Madam Speaker, asked. No time will be available tonight to debate a matter of considerable importance.

I should be grateful if you could amplify the statement that you made on 2 November, to make it clear that what you expect is that the House will have the Privileges Committee report put before it and be invited either to accept or reject it, which it is perfectly free to do. I am grateful to you for allowing me to raise this point of order because, whatever the merits of the matter, it is a very important question.

Madam Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his very important point of order.

The House will have noted that the report of the Committee of Privileges is a special report recommending a certain course of action. It is not a substantive report on the actual complaint that has been referred to the Committee. It is in order and, indeed, it is normal practice, for the House to deal with such a special report by way of a motion inviting the House to take the action that the Committee has recommended.

As the right hon. Gentleman has himself already indicated, any Member of the House can seek to force a debate on a motion of the kind that has been tabled today by the expedient of objecting to it after 10 o'clock.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on a letter that several of my hon. Friends and I received today from an Opposition Whip, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), asking whether I would give him advance indication of my voting intentions in Government votes next week. I understand why that information will be of more than passing interest to the Government Whip, but

[Mr. Charles Hendry]

it comes as a bit of a surprise to find that the Opposition Whips believe that I should be accountable to them as well.

I was wondering whether you, Madam Speaker, as a former Whip yourself, would be willing to organise a training workshop for the new Labour Whips so that they understand their responsibilities more clearly, and also perhaps to tell them which Members of the House sit on which side.

Madam Speaker: As a former Whip, I think I never fell into that trap. I was always very keen to see that my correspondence went to the right recipient.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I raise a succinct point of order, of which I have given you notice, relating to the new rules recently agreed by the House for sittings of the Scottish Grand Committee?

The impression was given that the Lord Advocate and the Scottish Law Officers could both make statements to the Committee and answer Adjournment debates. Indeed, that was the initial clear understanding of the Government Chief Whip's Office, the usual channels, the political correspondents and editors of *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* and parliamentary colleagues of all parties. I think that the Secretary of State would not mind if I said that he himself was very vague about it, and under the impression that the Lord Advocate could answer Adjournment debates.

However, your advisers—as usual, I do not doubt that they are right; they have a habit of being right—contend that, under the arrangements as drafted, the Lord Advocate cannot answer Adjournment debates. As it appears that it was the Government's original intention to allow such an innovation, could I ask whether you have had any approach to rectify the matter?

This is more than an academic, parliamentary, pedantic point, because it raises the subject of Lockerbie, in relation to which the view expressed by the Prime Minister in answer to questions is that the lead Department is the Crown Office and the Lord Advocate's Department. As Lockerbie was the biggest mass murder perpetrated against western civilians since 1945, and as some of us have the gravest doubts about on-going policy as to whether Libya was responsible at all, surely the matter should be ironed out.

Madam Speaker: I appreciate the fact that the hon. Gentleman gave me notice of his point of order.

The Standing Orders relating to Scottish business permit the participation of Scottish Office Ministers or Law Officers who are not members of the Committee in the business of the Committee only in the context of ministerial statements. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's direct questions, I have had no approach to change the Standing Orders. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make changes to the existing rules, he will need to find a way to amend the Standing Orders, which, as he knows, have only recently been approved by the House.

I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman say that the Secretary of State or those in his office were not too clear about the matter. Perhaps the Secretary of State is grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue so that the situation has now been made clear.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On Tuesday, immediately after the Government lost their majority, I went to the Table Office, for which ultimately you have some responsibility, and asked the Clerks about the membership of Select and Standing Committees and the number of Opposition Members as opposed to Government Members on those Committees. They said that consultations were taking place at a much higher level.

Conflicting stories and advice have come from different quarters about what happened at various times in 1974-79 when Labour was in power. It appears that, certainly at that time, Labour had no more than parity on certain Committees while on others it had a majority of one.

There is another problem to which we should turn our attention, and it relates not only to the number of Members on Committees and the fact that, on some Committees, the Opposition should be in the majority. I refer to the question of what happens in relation to the nine Tory Members who no longer have the Tory Whip. If any of those hon. Members is serving on Select or Standing Committees there is an argument about which side they are serving on. Therefore it is time that we had a statement. I have no doubt that discussions will take place.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): The hon. Gentleman should sit on a Committee.

Mr. Skinner: I have, many times. Check the record.

This is an important issue, and I want to know exactly what will happen. The Government have deprived themselves of their majority and should now be in a minority on those Committees. The Select Committees are in chaos because some of the nine Members who have lost the Whip serve on them. Appropriate action should be taken in all those cases and it is high time that we were all given the exact picture—and not just through the usual channels—of what is to take place on these various Committees.

Madam Speaker: I have not had a request from a Minister or from the Leader of the House to make a statement on this matter. I have made my own inquiries and I understand that it is a matter for the Committee of Selection. I am sure that matters will be resolved, perhaps not satisfactorily for everybody concerned, but for the majority of hon. Members.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming debate on Question [29 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

4.42 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Yesterday, in what has become known as the VAT-on-fuel Budget, the Chancellor confirmed his plan to double VAT on fuel in April. That plan will mean an average 10 per cent. rise in fuel bills and it will hit the housebound, the old and the disabled. In total, the plan will mean £2 a week on pensioners' fuel bills.

The VAT rise is unfair, unacceptable and totally wrong. Hon. Members' first response to the Budget is that the Chancellor should think again. If he will not think again, the House should force him to do so. I believe that a majority of hon. Members wish to stop the increase to 17.5 per cent and that that majority should be allowed to express itself. The Government should be ashamed of the fact that they told the electorate that they would not impose VAT on fuel and are now determined to impose it at 17.5 per cent. from April.

Why are Ministers so out of touch with public opinion that they think that they can get away with breaking election promises on VAT? Why are they so out of touch that they think that they can fob off millions of pensioners with a grossly inadequate compensation scheme? The Conservative party is so much the party of privilege that the Government are prepared to tax pensioners in poverty for their fuel while refusing to tax millionaire directors of privatised utilities on their executive share options—even when Conservative Members advise them that the system is indefensible.

Why is the Conservative party so much the party of the boardroom rather than the party of the people? The Government charge pensioners £2 a week more by way of VAT even as they refuse to criticise a £200,000-a-year rise for the chairman of British Gas. How do the Government think that they can ever soften the blow with the Chancellor's announcement of £1 a week more under the cold weather compensation scheme? Do they think that that is in any way adequate compensation for the anger and sense of betrayal felt by British people?

The scheme excludes 8.75 million pensioners from even the ability to claim. It is available only to pensioners who are on income support, and normally for only two or three weeks in the year. It is available only if temperatures fall below zero for seven days a week. Six days of freezing weather are not enough: a pensioner ends up with no help at all. The scheme demands that, in addition to being old, one must also be penniless and freezing before a penny can be claimed. Kafka would have been proud to invent that scheme. For British pensioners it is cold comfort indeed. Pensioners cannot heat their homes with false Government promises.

Why did the Chancellor not tackle the taxation of private medical insurance, executive share options, inheritance tax abuses and offshore trusts before contemplating his tax offensive on pensioners? He is so out of touch with public opinion that he is not a reluctant convert to VAT on fuel: he is, unfortunately, an enthusiastic advocate of it. Far from wanting to leave VAT at 8 per cent. next year, he wanted it to be 17.5 per cent. this year.

The Chancellor is so out of touch that he favours in principle putting VAT on books and newspapers as well. He has voted in the House for VAT on children's clothes and has already told us that not putting it on food and transport is an anomaly. A few months ago he was unable to deny the letter that he wrote to a constituent in which he said that he had always thought that in this country we exempt too many goods and services from VAT.

The Chancellor has a dependency on VAT and he moves from one VAT high to another. He cannot explain his craving for it and under pressure he seeks to deny it, particularly at election times. But like any addict he keeps coming back to it. There is no hope for this man other than to be completely removed from the temptation by an enforced period of abstinence—by a period of years in opposition.

The Government are out of touch in what they say about VAT, and they are out of touch in talking about tax cuts when everybody knows that they are imposing tax rises. They are out of touch with the effects that their economic policies have had on millions of British people. But I do not need to explain the impact on people. John Maples, who is a vice-chairman of the Conservative party, stated last week in his memorandum to the Prime Minister that living standards would fall again in 1995 and 1996. He went on:

"We have to see this rise in living standards soon or we will have had four or even five years of recovery with no rise in living standards."

Mr. Maples is fearful that under this Government we could move from recession to recession without an intervening period of prosperity for millions of people. In offering his advice to the Government, he says that there will be no prosperity this year or next.

Many companies are going out of business, and that has been the experience under Conservative Governments not just since 1979 but since 1970. The effect on British industry can be summed up by saying that there have been four recessions and that thousands of companies have been buried. The damage to manufacturing is great because of the third of manufacturing jobs that have been lost.

What about the effect on living standards of the Budgets that the Chancellor and his predecessors have introduced? There have been seven tax rises in six

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

months. Mortgage tax relief has been cut even as mortgages are rising, costing the average family £122 a year. The married couple's allowance has been cut, costing the typical family £96 a year. There is a new tax on household insurance of £7 and on car insurance of £10, VAT on fuel and an airport tax which will amount to another £10 for the typical family.

Take the case of the widow already hit by VAT on fuel, hit by the insurance tax for her home, then hit by cuts in mortgage tax relief if she owns her own home. In April, she will be hit yet again by cuts in the widow's tax allowances. Before this year she started to pay tax at £99 a week. From April, shamefully, she will start paying tax at only £93 a week. The Government have taken the widow's mite yet they ask us to believe that the Conservatives are the party of low taxation.

We have had the biggest tax rise in history—20 tax rises in two years. We have had tax rises amounting to £500 last year and £350 in the year to come. I tell Conservative Members that the total cumulative tax increase under Conservative Government since the election, as recorded in the Red Book yesterday, amounts to extra taxes not of £1 billion, £2 billion or £3 billion but of £50 billion by 1997.

At the last election, Conservative Members said that to pay for public spending plans, Labour would take more than £30 billion in taxes. The Conservatives have taken £50 billion in taxes because of their economic failure. What do they say now, after the biggest tax rise in history? Unable to say that they are cutting tax; with no record of achieving cuts in tax; with tax higher now than it was in 1979; with no specific Budget proposals to cut tax for millions of people who are hard hit because, for most of them, taxes are to rise; with the Chancellor unable even to repeat in his Budget the promise that the Conservatives are the low-tax party—as he used to say—in the medium term, because the Budget statement shows taxes continuing to rise, what do they say now? Yesterday the Chancellor said:

"Conservative Members are tax cutters by instinct."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1102.]

Having been betrayed on action over promises, we are now asked to believe that we should trust the Government's instincts on tax. When we cannot believe what they do or what they say, we are asked somehow to believe in their instinct.

The Chancellor had chances in the Budget. He had a reduced public sector borrowing requirement. He had the option of taxing executive share options. He had the option of cutting public spending on private medical insurance. He had the option of cutting into waste. But his instinct was clear. His instinct was not to cut tax for millions of pensioners, but to raise it from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. That was his instinct—not to cut taxes but to raise them for millions of people.

The Prime Minister says, in his own inimitable language, that more must be done to get back to our instinct of cutting taxes. We will treat such statements with the contempt that they deserve. So were they all men of sound instincts. After 15 years, we have a Cabinet in long retreat, from deed to intention to instinct, which cannot now talk about its achievements, only about intermittent and occasional instincts.

What would the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister have said about the repeated offender asking for one more chance, on the strength of his instinct, to do better? Would the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister say, "Let us trust the instincts of these men"? Or would they not say, as they have, "We should condemn a little more and understand a little less"? The Home Secretary said, "The critics say give them chance after chance. I say, what about the victims?" In this sorry tale of repeated multiple tax offences, there are 50 million victims and 300-plus Tory Members of Parliament responsible. Again in the words of the Home Secretary, "We should have no truck with trendy theories on this. Those who are responsible should be held to account for their actions and punished accordingly." It would take a cut of 7p on the basic rate of income tax today just to undo the damage of the tax rises that the Chancellor and his predecessor have introduced.

The Government are so out of touch with the British people that while they talk of tax cuts they are bringing in tax rises. Not only that—they try to persuade us that they have a strategy for attacking unemployment when their proposals do not even begin to measure up to the problem.

Consider what the Secretary of State for Employment called "the Budget for jobs". The community action programme was not increased, but cut from 55,000 places to 40,000 places—not doing more for the unemployed next year but doing less. The training budget was not increased but cut—not doing more but doing less. Far from investing more in helping the unemployed, the Government propose cuts in the employment budget which will mean that £500 million less—not more—is paid out next year. The claim of the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Employment that this was a Budget for jobs is a travesty of the truth.

The main measure for the unemployed announced yesterday—the national insurance holiday for people unemployed for more than two years—is not on offer until April 1996. If a man or woman has been unemployed for two years or more, why should he or she have to wait three and a half years before the Government begin to act? If it is right to take action, why did not the Chancellor take action yesterday rather than postponing it for 16 months? But is that not typical of the Government? They have been forced by events to admit that for 16 years they have not done enough to help the long-term unemployed. They have now had to accept the principle that action must be taken to avoid the threat to social cohesion. They have adopted one, but only one, of Labour's measures in a desperate attempt to give the impression of acting. But they cannot measure up to the problem and they take another 16 months to act.

Who will benefit from the scheme? Why has the date of April 1996 been chosen? Which redundant people are likely to be calling on the services of the scheme? Conservative Members should be interested. Will Kleinwort Benson apply for a national insurance holiday if it chooses to employ the ex-Chancellor? Does the Secretary of State for Employment merit a work trial of three weeks free of charge to let, as his statement says, a future potential employer draw conclusions about his propensity to work? If the Chief Secretary were to seek employment, no doubt abroad, would the job finder's

grant be enough to keep him in the style to which he would like to be accustomed? What of the great scheme called workstart?

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's jokey line, but does he think that, if we pursued the socialist policies that he would advocate in dealing with the unemployed, we would be any better off than the French or the Spanish, who have much higher rates of unemployment and rates which are rising while ours is falling? Does he not think that we have it right here and that his remedies would not work?

Mr. Brown: The workstart scheme is specifically designed for the hon. Gentleman. I will come to the measures that we would adopt to deal with unemployment. The workstart scheme is designed specifically to cover employer prejudice against any group of people. When the time comes, perhaps all Conservative Back Benchers will be eligible for the scheme.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) what we would do about unemployment. We would release the capital receipts to local authorities in a phased way and let local authorities build. The hon. Gentleman, with his expertise in these areas, should be supporting us. We would expand the small business grant scheme and let small businesses employ. We would create an environmental task force and let young people have hope again. We would give employers not £6 a week under the scheme that the Chancellor proposed but a realistic figure of £75 a week to get the long-term unemployed back to work.

Mr. Butterfill *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again.

If the Chancellor wants to know how he can pay for the first year costs of measures that would eventually save the Exchequer money, let him look at the privatised utilities. Let him look at the £1.5 billion windfall tax allowances given to the water companies, at the allowances that he is to give to the privatised British Rail, at the £3 billion windfall from the demerger of the national grid and at the excess profits among the £45 billion that the privatised utilities have made during the recession. At a time when 1 million people under 25 are out of work and more than 1 million people have been unemployed for more than one year, it is our duty to be more ambitious in our policies to help the unemployed.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that his proposal to tax privatised utilities would mean taxing the savings, pension funds and life assurance companies of the 16 million savers in this country who own 50 per cent. of the shares of privatised utilities? Is not the hon. Gentleman proposing the biggest theft of pension fund money since Robert Maxwell—another socialist?

Mr. Brown: If privatised utilities can afford to pay their chief executives salary increases of up to 75 per cent., they can afford to pay a windfall tax to the Treasury on their excessive profits. I would think more of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) if he sought to explain to his constituents why he has reneged on his manifesto for the last general election, which told them that there were two vital messages to remember:

"David lives locally . . . David Shaw supports lower income tax."

I gather that the hon. Gentleman has kept one of his promises, but he will pay dearly for breaking the other promise when he faces his electorate again.

What of the long term for industry, skills and training, and investment? Public investment will be cut 9 per cent. next year and more the year after. The Government cannot help industry, improve skills or aid investment through the Department of Trade and Industry because they are divided from top to bottom. The industry budget was cut because the President of the Board of Trade and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury went to war over the cuts that were necessary, resulting in the budget being halved. We will soon find out whether regional incentives, support for small businesses, or research and development funding have been placed at risk as a result.

The employment budget was cut because, although the Chancellor may want to act, the Secretary of State for Employment doubts whether there should be a Department of Employment at all.

As to the review of dividends and savings, we know from press cuttings that Lord Hanson blocked the Chancellor. There is no long-term policy because the people who fund the Tory party are no longer interested in Britain's long-term prospects. The Government can do nothing for industry, employment or skills because the Conservative party is divided from top to bottom and cannot begin to agree the action to be taken—as with the Post Office. The Government have no strategy, policy, direction or leadership, and few followers.

A letter to Conservative supporters sent by Conservative Central Office states:

"Dear expatriate,

It is now 15 years since the general election victory in 1979."

The recipient is asked to consider registering to vote at the next general election. But a problem arises in the penultimate paragraph, with which I will acquaint the House. It states:

"If you want to vote Conservative and do not have a relative or friend on whom you can completely rely to follow your wishes, tear off part 2 of the form and discard it, and fill in a 'Find me a proxy' request form, sending it to us. The Conservative Party will then suggest to you a reliable Conservative who will agree to be your proxy."

To whom was that letter sent? Mr. Nadir in northern Cyprus and Mr. Bottna in Switzerland? Mr. Thatcher in Dallas—can he no longer trust his mother to exercise his proxy?—or Mr. Patten in Hong Kong? Is there no one on whom he can rely? The letter ends:

"Please be as generous as you can. It will be an investment with a real return."

The Tory party is so divided that its mind is not on the Budget, the state of the economy or even solving the VAT problem but on the war raging within it.

The Chancellor broke a number of other promises in yesterday's Budget. In the run-up to the general election, the Prime Minister said:

"If we were going to cut public expenditure, we would have done it before, and I don't believe it is economically right . . . I see no reason why we should not meet our promises . . . We have seen these concerns in the past and it has not been necessary to change plans."

[Mr. Brown]

What has happened since the general election, and what happened yesterday?

Mr. Butterfill: There was a recession.

Mr. Brown: The one thing that we did know about was the recession, which was raging before the general election. That is hardly an excuse for not keeping public spending promises. On transport, the Conservatives said:

"Over the next three years, we are committed to the biggest investment in Britain's infrastructure."

The Government will slash the transport budget 30 per cent. next year and 23 per cent. in 1997-98, and will slash London Transport's spend by £40 million next year and £165 million the year after. That is what promises mean to the Conservatives. They said also:

"We believe that the railways can play a bigger part in responding to Britain's growing transport needs."

The Budget cuts spending on the railways by £521 million.

The Conservatives promised:

"We will continue to give the police the support and resources they need to carry out their duties effectively on behalf of the public."

The Budget will cut Home Office spending by £200 million over the next two years. All that from a Government who said that they stood by their public expenditure figures, that there would be no cuts and that such cuts were not economically necessary.

After hearing today's statement by the Secretary of State for Social Security, we are clearly seeing the dismantling of vital parts of the welfare state that have been accepted by both political parties for 40 years, since the second world war. Sickness pay has been transferred to employers, there have been cuts in invalidity benefit, there will be cuts in mortgage help to the unemployed, and there will be a ceiling on help for the bereaved with funeral expenses—even when the Government are in a position to reclaim those expenses from the estate of the deceased.

Why do not the Government deal with problems of bed-and-breakfast accommodation and find a far better way of investing in this country's housing? They cut, cut and cut again. They have failed to act against offshore trusts, abuse of non-domicile and non-resident taxation facilities, privatised utilities and their tax arrangements, and abuse of corporation and capital gains tax. The Government are prepared to make the unemployed, sick, disabled and pensioners suffer instead of imposing the changes necessary for fairness in our society.

Eighteen months ago, the Chancellor made an analysis of the problems facing the Government and the country. He said:

"We are in a hole. We are in a dreadful hole."

He identified the problem precisely. His difficulty now is that, 18 months later, we are even further from a solution. The Chancellor identified urgent action. He said that there had to be agreement in the Conservative party, yet it is even more split than it was. The Chancellor said that a medium-term view had to be taken, and there is none. He said that there must be a sense of purpose, but where is that now? The Chancellor said that the Government must have an agenda for the next two years. They had Post Office privatisation for a day or two, but then dropped it.

What does the Chancellor tell us now? In an interview a few days ago he talked about what he called a "slightly hysterical political atmosphere", which is no doubt a reference to Cabinet meetings under the present Prime Minister. He said:

"The key thing for the party is not to panic".

There we have it—the Tory strategy is "Don't panic, don't panic," with the Chancellor as the Corporal Jones of the embattled rerun of "Dad's Army" but without any of the resolve, organisation, leadership or popularity of the original.

Let us describe the Government's problem in terms that Conservative Members will understand. The Government now have all the hallmarks of a business on its last legs. As we saw in the Budget yesterday, they have no new ideas and there is no innovation from the Cabinet. Decisions are made not for the future but just to get through the day. They have lost credibility, exploited all the assets and wasted them for no long-term benefit. They have run out of credit; they are now divided and paralysed by a board that is split. They ignore all the problems and challenges facing us in the future and have ceased to operate as a viable entity—they are bankrupt in all but name. They are wasteful, divisive and incompetent; they are in need of liquidation and being wound up.

There is one final point of which the House should be aware. The Dudley by-election takes place in a few days. The Conservative manifesto in Dudley at the previous election was very clear. It rejected what the Conservatives called

"the disastrous pathway of higher taxation and national insurance contributions taking money out of your earnings",

but the Conservatives went on to do precisely what they had promised the electorate they would not do. The Chancellor said that promises made in Dudley do not matter. Let us remember the election manifesto—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes, the Chancellor not only said it in the Press Gallery but repeated it in the House. The manifesto issued at the last election contained words that will haunt the Conservative party throughout this campaign. It stated:

"You can depend on John Major".

But the voters of Dudley will never trust the Conservative party on taxation again.

The Budget is unfair. It cannot unite Britain and does nothing for Britain's long-term economic future. What people will remember above all about this Budget is that, when the Government had the opportunity to think again, they still decided to impose VAT on fuel. That is why Conservative Members should use the next few days to wrestle with their conscience. They should look again at the election manifestos that they signed and which the Conservative party issued; they should reconsider what they said immediately on the imposition of VAT some months ago and then vote with us to defeat the Government next Tuesday.

5.11 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): This is supposed to be a debate about this year's Budget, but instead the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) treated us to a vintage Uncle Grumpy performance, during which he complained bitterly, mainly about measures that were not in this year's Budget but in last year's.

The hon. Gentleman's speech was an absolutely characteristic mixture. He could not bear to say a single good word about the excellent health and success of the British economy but indulged in ludicrous exaggeration and made uncosted public expenditure pledges, such as that in his throwaway line about the £6 billion capital receipts, which would add massively to the public sector borrowing requirement. We witnessed his over-reliance on pantomime humour and his over-confidence in his personal infallibility as a prophet of doom on the British economy.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chief Secretary begin by apologising for breaking promises on VAT on fuel?

Mr. Aitken: If it comes to breaking promises, I have a rather more up-to-date example of the hon. Gentleman's own activities in that department. I was very amused when, as a rehearsal for his pantomime performance today, he became so over-confident at the weekend that he made a rather embarrassing appearance in the *News of the World*. There he was, on page three in a full-frontal photograph, holding up Mr. Gladstone's famous Budget Dispatch Box outside No. 11 Downing street. Someone might have warned him of the danger of such a Prince Hal-like performance, trying on a crown before he is entitled to it—it can sometimes bring bad luck because pride comes before a fall.

Even worse than the presumptuous photograph was the preposterous prediction in the opening words of the article—

Mr. Brown: I was not there.

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman says that he was not there so I am sure he will have great sympathy with me over forgeries by newspapers. If he was in a compromising position for the *News of the World*, he should have used the famous exit line of that newspaper and made his excuses and then left.

The hon. Gentleman is trying to get out of the embarrassing situation to which I was referring, which was the preposterous prediction in the first words of the article. They were:

"Nobody should look to Kenneth Clarke for new hope for the unemployed when he presents Tuesday's Budget."

As we now know, the hon. Gentleman yet again got it hopelessly wrong, because one of the most important and much-praised features of the Budget—even *The Guardian* praised it—was the £680 million package of measures to help the unemployed back into work. I shall say quite a bit more about that later.

No one should be surprised that the hon. Gentleman got everything so wrong in the *News of the World* last Sunday. Whenever Uncle Grumpy talks about unemployment, he defies the law of averages and always gets it wrong. It is worth reminding the House of what he said in the debate on the spring 1993 Budget resolutions. He said:

"I make one Budget forecast—that, after the Budget, unemployment will rise this month, next month and for months afterwards."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 289.]

No sooner had the hon. Gentleman opened his mouth than unemployment fell steadily month after month. It has dropped by more than 450,000 from its peak and continues to fall at a rate of more than 1,000 a day.

As we have now firmly established the hon. Gentleman's credentials as an economic forecaster—he is in a rather less reliable category than the astrologer in the *News of the World*—we can perhaps deal with more serious matters.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I know that the Chief Secretary's memory does not stretch back 15 years but I remind him that, when the Conservative party came to power, there were 340,000 long-term unemployed people; there are now more than 1 million, or three times as many. Why?

Mr. Aitken: As that statistic comes from a member of a party that, whenever it has been in power, has left unemployment much higher than when it took office, I do not regard it as reliable.

Instead of my following the Uncle Grumpy pantomime line, I thought that the House would expect the Chief Secretary to make a serious speech about what the Budget means to the fundamentals of our economy—*[Interruption.]* I know that Labour Members do not like to be told home truths or the good news about the economy, but the country at least will wish to hear the facts, seriously presented.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): If the action to help unemployed people is so important, and if the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor are so proud of it, why do we have to wait 16 months before it is implemented?

Mr. Aitken: Some of the measures are in trial schemes that are already in place. Let us not lose sight of the fact that unemployment is coming down—by 28,000 in September, by 46,000 in October and by more than 1,000 a day. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has introduced a package of measures that will accelerate that downward trend, and all credit to him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why wait?"] Those who were listening to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will know that some DSS schemes take a little time to introduce, which is fair enough.

Let me now return to the serious speech about what the Budget means to the fundamentals of the economy, about how our policies will be seen after the Budget by international markets and about the public spending programme of priorities and reductions for the next three years.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Chief Secretary please, before he leaves the subject, explain in words that even I can understand why it takes so long to put the measures in place?

Mr. Aitken: There are not always instant solutions to long-term problems. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's measures complement measures that are already in place. Some of the schemes, which have been piloted for some time, are now being built on and extended at considerable cost, quite rightly, to the taxpayer. This criticism of the timing is not well merited. What really matters is whether unemployment will come down, as it is coming down now, and whether it will continue to come down, which is what will happen.

I was trying to tell the House how the Budget relates to a number of important areas and, above all, how it relates to the ordinary and understandably anxious people who are having to learn to live with the consequences

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of a global economic environment that is in a period of astonishing change. It is not surprising that new measures on unemployment or on anything else have to be tailored to cope with a fast-changing world.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The Chief Secretary has drawn international comparisons. Does he accept that on every comparison—the growth of the economy, manufacturing capacity, manufacturing investment or the loss of manufacturing jobs—this country has done worse since 1979 than has every other one of the G7 countries? If he disputes that, will he give us one indicator on which we have done better than any of the other G7 countries?

Mr. Aitken: This is the old game of selective statistics. Let us get back to the hard facts of what is going on today. We have had two and a half years of steady growth and falling unemployment. Our economy is now growing at more than 4 per cent., easily the fastest rate of growth for any of the major economies in Europe. Underlying inflation is at 2 per cent. and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has kept inflation below 3 per cent. for more than a year. The last time we saw a performance as good as that, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was 13 years old. In those days, good news for Britain may have made him a great deal more cheerful than he was this afternoon.

Mr. Tim Sainsbury (Hove): My right hon. Friend could go further. Far from the situation being as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) described it, in the 1960s and the 1970s, this country finished bottom of the league of the G7 countries in productivity, exports and output growth. In the 1980s, we did not just move right up the league, but went right to the top of the G7 countries. That performance is quite contrary to the one described by the hon. Member for Attercliffe.

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for reminding the House of the old terrors of a Labour Government, which were much more extensive even than those he has mentioned. The average rate of inflation, for example, during Labour's years of power was 15 per cent.; today, we have inflation at 2 per cent. The Chancellor has kept it below 3 per cent. for more than a year, as I have just said.

Let us give credit today to the remarkable performance of Britain's companies, which are creating a great turn-around in our national trading performance. Today, our visible exports are at record levels, with a growing contribution of invisible exports. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor forecasts that our balance of payments on the current account will improve by about £7 billion this year overall. In fact, some independent forecasters are going further and saying that next year we shall actually be in trade surplus. After all those locust years of Labour, in which we had huge trade deficits, this turn-around in our economic performance deserves some congratulation.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose—*

Mr. Aitken: I will take one more intervention and then I must get on.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Are the growth assumptions on which the public sector borrowing requirement for 1997-98 calculations are made the same as the growth assumptions on which our contributions to the European Community are made?

Mr. Aitken: I am sure that the Treasury is consistent in these forecasts and I have no reason to think otherwise.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli) *rose—*

Mr. Aitken: I shall take one last intervention and then I shall say something about interruptions.

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the current account and the balance of payments. I do not have the Red Book in front of me, but I seem to remember that for the non-oil visible account, the forecasts show deficits of about £12 billion for the next three years. How does that accord with the great manufacturing upsurge about which the Chancellor spoke yesterday?

Mr. Aitken: I will send the right hon. Member a copy of the lecture I gave only two nights ago on Britain's trade performance. It shows how well we are doing in both the invisible sectors and the non-oil sectors. We are having a success in exports which we have not seen in the country's recent history.

I have now been interrupted about seven times in 10 minutes. In the speech made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor yesterday, the shadow Chancellor, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, interrupted seven times and was like a jack-in-the-box on pep pills. I draw the attention of the House to a thought from the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). We should reflect on what he said if we are to be a serious debating Chamber. He said:

"We sit in the Chamber, and we jump up constantly. Nobody on the Front Bench can any longer deliver a speech, as there are an enormous number of interventions. Hon. Members who intervene are not trying to find a solution, but are trying to find some way of knocking the other chap down . . . I hope, therefore, that we can perhaps give some thought to the way in which we behave in the Chamber. People want to hear what ideas we have".—[*Official Report*, 23 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 637.]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chief Secretary now take this opportunity to condemn Mr. John Maples and his memorandum, which suggested that Conservative Members should shout down the Labour leader?

Mr. Aitken: I do not agree with everything that every private memorandum says. If I were the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, I would be a little quieter than he has been. The Maples memorandum, warts and all, was at least written in English whereas the Balls memorandum, on which the hon. Gentleman based a major speech, was incomprehensible and was written in jargon, such as endogenous growth zones, which needed a translator. The hon. Gentleman's intervention shows only that he does not want to listen to serious debate and serious argument. He was not in the endogenous zone, but in the dodgy zone. This afternoon, he dodged all mention of the public sector borrowing requirement and certain key features.

There are two important things about the Budget. First, it enhanced our international competitiveness. We are determined to stick to our supply-side reforms. No social chapter, no minimum wage legislation and no interfering socialist quangos of the kind that spew out from the Labour party with great regularity will destroy jobs or

scare away the great inward investment surge which is coming into this country as long as this Government are in power.

Secondly, the key element in our approach is the commitment to sound public finances. I sometimes think that the Labour party does not even understand what the term means; it thinks only in terms of soundbite public finances. We want none of the pantomime sideshows in which more public expenditure can be promised without any payment from the taxpayer and in which it is assumed that full employment can be produced by the wave of a wand—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The House knows my views on seated interventions. My view is even stronger on what I call a seated running commentary.

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I appealed to the wise words of the Father of the House because the country sometimes wants to listen to serious arguments and serious speeches.

I was making the point that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor lives in the real economic world. He has set out a sensible Budget to reduce our debt. Some of the things that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East advocated this afternoon would simply increase our debts automatically. He needs, of course, to ensure that our standing in the international markets of the world is maintained because that is important in terms of judgments on our interest rates and our currency rates.

Last year, the Government borrowed more than £45 billion, or 7 per cent. of gross domestic product. This year, on the revised forecasts in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget, we are set to borrow £34.5 billion, which is more than £25 a week of borrowing for every household, or 5 per cent. of GDP. We forecast for next year a PSBR of £21.5 billion, or 3 per cent. of GDP. That means that in two years of steadfast policies, we shall have more than halved our borrowing, and that is real progress.

Even at those levels of borrowing, no prudent domestic or international observer of the British economy should have expected to see tax cuts in this Budget. My right hon. and learned Friend was absolutely right to signal that clearly some months ago because in the real world, where sound public finances are the litmus test by which a nation's economic status is judged, it is far more important for the British Chancellor of the Exchequer to be right than to be popular. That is why he has not played to the gallery or taken any fast and loose risks with the British economy and premature tax cutting.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did his best to reopen last year's Budget by concentrating on VAT on fuel. While we are on the subject, I should refer to tax cuts because I know that the Labour party has tabled a procedural amendment to seek to reopen the debate on the second tranche. Indeed, it is getting so desperate in its quest for support that its finance Whip, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), is sending unsolicited mail to Conservative Members asking whether they will join the Labour party in the Lobby. I think that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, who likes to make noises about the Maples memorandum, should be a little careful about the Hoon memorandum and the Balls memorandum. He seems to have more skeletons in the cupboard than we have.

The amendment tabled by the Opposition is entitled "Amendment of the law"—an appropriate title, since Parliament has now approved this tax in both its stages and four votes by clear majorities. The procedural amendment is an opportunistic wheeze, but the Opposition spokesman who appeared on "Newsnight" last night did not seem to know whether he wanted to repeal one stage of VAT on fuel or not—a sort of half-pregnant position.

The one thing that the Labour party does know is that to proceed with its procedural machinations, it has to ensnare the support of at least a dozen or so of my hon. Friends—hence the Ashfield or Hoon letter, which tries to wheedle my hon. Friends into the Lobby on Labour's side.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will my right hon. Friend note that not only the hon. Member for Ashfield but the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), seems to be sending letters? It seems to be a developing habit in the Labour party, and I wonder why.

Mr. Aitken: It is getting like St Valentine's day cards at school. One sends out messages from Cupid to people who do not know, in the hope that an arrow will strike here or there.

I should like to say a friendly word to my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) and to one or two others who I know have sincere reservations about the second stage of the imposition of VAT on fuel. Perhaps they may listen to me with some sympathy because, although my official title in the Government these days is Chief Secretary, for a good many of my 18 years on the Back Benches I am told that my unofficial title in the Government Whips' Office was "chief rebel".

From the vantage point of that somewhat unusual parliamentary qualification, the first point that I would like to make to some of my hon. Friends is that serious rebellions should be kept for big votes on great issues of confidence and principle. Voting with the Labour party to support opportunistic and disruptive procedural motions is a cop-out, not just from party discipline but from the Queensberry rules of rebellion. True Conservatives do not, I believe, and will not, I believe, cast their votes in this House to support Labour's procedural dirty tricks letters and department.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose—*

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose—*

Mr. Aitken: I said that I would not give way for a little while and that I would make progress.

Secondly, and perhaps more important, anyone thinking of following the siren voices of the Labour party on this matter has to come up with the answer to one vital question. If they are to support a Labour game plan to blow a £1.5 billion hole in the Budget arithmetic and damage the strategy of sound public finances that my right hon. and learned Friend Chancellor has created—at the admitted cost of doing what is right rather than what is popular—the question that they must answer is, where will Labour find the extra £1.5 billion in revenue that

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would be lost by not going ahead with stage two of the imposition of VAT on fuel? Will it find it by supporting increases in taxation, in which case, which taxation?

Mr. Winnick *rose—*

Mr. Aitken: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but it will be the last intervention that I shall take for some time.

Mr. Winnick: With regard to conscience and great issues, presumably the Chief Secretary himself was party to the Cabinet decision to exert much pressure on and, indeed, intimidate Conservative Members of Parliament to vote as the Cabinet wanted them to on Monday. Does he agree that, if there were a free vote on a motion that VAT should be applied at the full rate on domestic fuel, it would be overwhelmingly defeated? That would reflect the feeling in the country. Hardly any other issue at the moment is more unpopular than the Government's intention to impose the full rate of VAT on domestic fuel. That is why the House should be given an opportunity to reflect the opinion of the people.

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman made a speech rather than an intervention, but I shall briefly try to respond. I utterly reject his charges of intimidation by the Cabinet. We thought that it was absolutely right for last Monday's vote to be a confidence issue because it was an international obligation into which we had entered freely and because we should stick to our word, as Britain always should in international matters.

The hon. Gentleman's second point about free votes is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. If we had had a free vote on Monday night, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, who have supported the financing of the European Community and the Edinburgh agreement, would have been in the Lobby with the Government—so much for free voting. We do not want too much hypocrisy and humbug on that matter.

I shall return to the serious question of thinking, as some of my hon. Friends are, of blowing a hole in the Budget arithmetic with a reversal of stage two on fuel. Where would the £1.5 billion be found—by increasing taxation, and, if so, which taxes? Or would it be found by cutting spending, in which case, which public spending? Those questions will have to be answered.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South) *rose—*

Mr. Aitken: I said that I was not giving way any more.

Mr. Stevenson: Give us the answer.

Mr. Aitken: I am going to give the answer. They are serious questions, but one of the reasons why I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman is that his party has already answered them, but in the most frivolous and lightweight of ways.

In his so-called shadow Budget last week, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East proposed one of his many pantomime solutions: that all Labour's extra spending plans, as well as the plan to drop VAT on fuel, could be paid for by new taxes on what he calls loopholes and windfalls. If the legendary Canon Spooner were still alive and were to describe those two new Labour taxes as loopfalls and windholes, he would be no more credible or incredible than the shadow Chancellor. Whatever terminology is used, those two proposals are simply not serious or workable measures for raising that taxation.

Mr. Stevenson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Aitken: No, I said that I would not give way.

Labour's proposed new windfall tax would be a tax not on windfalls, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) has pointed out several times, but on the earnings of certain utility companies, which are already paying £2 billion a year in corporation tax. They pay those earnings out as dividends to shareholders such as pension funds, which are in turn paying them out as taxed income to occupational pensioners. It would also be a tax on the investment programmes that those companies undertake, such as new telephone lines for BT, or new gasfields and gas pipelines for British Gas. In effect, the windfall tax would be an extra tax on investment, an increase in corporation tax and some form of double taxation on pensioners and shareholders. It would hit all customers by undermining quality of service, raising prices, or both. So much for the windfall tax.

The loopholes that the hon. Gentleman talks about, at least on the scale that he is thinking of, simply do not exist. Of course there are loopholes in the tax system. The Inland Revenue tries to find them every year and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has closed some down in this Budget, as Chancellors of all parties do every year. However, the bonanza of which the hon. Gentleman is dreaming is simply a fantasy. Some of these loopholes are, in fact, tax reliefs designed to encourage businesses to invest and create wealth. Labour would not be closing loopholes, but closing business. Do not take my word for that. Howard Davies of the CBI said that Labour is proposing

"a massive increase in business taxation."

So, whether we are in the world of Canon Brown or Gordon Spooner, those phoney taxes do not add up or make sense as a fiscal panacea to pay for VAT on fuel. My advice to the hon. Gentleman, if he has loop-fallen into a windhole, is to stop digging and, instead, come clean with the British electorate about how he will really pay for Labour's expensive and ever-expanding high public spending programme, including the cancellation of the second stage of VAT on fuel.

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman said that if we were not to increase VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent., it would blow a hole in the Government's public finances, yet his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has accepted that, at some stage, he would like to cut taxation. At that stage, would it be a priority to reduce VAT on domestic fuel or to seek cuts in direct taxation?

Mr. Aitken: I cannot anticipate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's next or future Budgets. He will cut taxes, in whatever direction, only when it is prudent to do so. It is certainly not prudent to do that with public finances recovering as they are and with the present high level of borrowing. All the Labour party wants to do is to add to borrowing, which is about the most irresponsible of policies that anyone can think of.

I want now to consider the important subject of the Government's public spending programme. In parenthesis, may I say, in this age of leaks and leaked

memoranda, that this year's public spending round and the public spending totals that it produced were, on the whole, remarkably leak-free? Virtually no commentator envisaged that what we would achieve were reductions in public spending that would total £28 billion over the next three years, with £24 billion off the control total. The ratio of public spending to GDP is projected to fall from 43.5 per cent. this year to 41 per cent. by 1997-98.

There have been no quick fixes or conjuring tricks. There are genuine reductions in our previous spending plans across virtually all Departments. They show the strength of the new arrangements for determining public spending created by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), to whom I pay tribute for that innovation.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): May I take this opportunity to compliment my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on the same skill and achievement in handling this year's public spending round that he showed when he was at the Ministry of Defence in handling the successful "Front Line First" exercise? In particular, may I thank him and the Chancellor for listening to the representations that a number of my hon. Friends and I made, and in particular my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for not cutting the hill livestock compensatory allowance this year?

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's very kind remarks. I can confirm that HLCA spending will remain constant at, from memory, £105 million.

I want now to consider the way in which we have been guided in the public spending round. We have been helped by lower inflation and the private finance initiative. Many of the sweeping criticisms made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East completely missed the fact that billions of pounds—the latest estimate is £5 billion—are coming into spending on public projects through co-operation with private sources. That was a most important part of the speech by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor.

I want to concentrate on the priorities in public spending and improving efficiency. One of the great divides in British politics is about priorities in public spending. That great icon of the Labour party, Nye Bevan, once said:

"The language of priorities is the religion of Socialism."

If Nye Bevan were around today, he would be amazed that his modern heirs and successors have become Trappist monks on the fundamental questions.

On the fundamental question—is public spending too high or too low?—the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East resolutely refuses to give an answer. When my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) asked the hon. Gentleman that question in the economic debate during the debate on the Queen's Speech, Garrulous Gordon, the great gusher of soundbites, suddenly fell silent and became Dumbstruck of Dunfermline.

However, at least one member of the shadow Treasury team was allowed briefly to escape from the Trappist nunnery to say something about priorities on public spending when she gave a long press conference. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) introduced a bizarre new dimension to the argument by saying that the new modern Labour party would separate public spending into new categories, the first of which was rescue spending. In the language of "1066 and All That", that was a "Bad Thing". The second category was renewal spending, which was a "Good Thing".

I said that those categories were bizarre. For example, rescue spending—a "Bad Thing"—included spending on the unemployed, the poor and the police. That last line should change the slogan of the Leader of the Opposition to "tough on crime, soft on paying the bills for the crime fighters".

The row about renewal and rescue spending was quite enough to set the brothers and sisters of old Labour at the throats of the new yuppie Islington economists, because old Labour finds it very hard to see how lower rescue spending on the poor and the unemployed can possibly be reconciled with the Labour party's long-standing commitment to high welfare state spending.

I do not want to intrude too much on private grief in that respect, because I candidly admit that we Conservatives, ever since the time of Disraeli, have also been trying to identify and deliver the right priorities in public spending. From time to time, we have not been entirely averse to borrowing good ideas from Opposition parties. I offer a quotation from Disraeli to illustrate my point. He said that we

"caught the Whigs bathing, and walked away with their clothes. We left them in the full enjoyment of their Liberal position while we are the strict Conservatives of their garments."

There is an echo of that in the spending round today. It would perhaps be a little unchivalrous of me to use Dizzy's quotation while the hon. Member for Peckham was still up to her neck in the muddied waters of Labour's confused thinking on public expenditure priorities, but now she has moved on to higher ground I can certainly tell the remaining members of the shadow Treasury team that public expenditure is now running in a sound and Conservative direction.

While we have reduced the public spending totals by £28 billion over the next three years, we have also given priority to several key areas, of which I want to highlight two or three, and some of which Labour likes to treat as its own private fiefdoms. For example, with regard to health, we now plan to spend £1.3 billion more in 1995-96 than this year on the national health service. That is an increase of 1 per cent. in real terms over and above this year's 3.75 per cent. growth in real terms. That demonstrates once more this Government's commitment to improving the NHS. By next year, spending will be 70 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979—an extra £12.5 billion at today's prices.

When asked, the Labour party is quite unable to say whether it would spend more or less public money on health. Perhaps Dumbstruck of Dunfermline needs a course of speech therapy at his local NHS hospital and I am sure that he would receive very good treatment there.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor also introduced an imaginative and far-reaching package of new spending to help the unemployed. The national insurance contribution changes will make a significant difference to those who benefit from them. It was interesting that the Leader of the Opposition could find nothing to criticise yesterday among our plans to help the unemployed.

I recognise that if we are to have priority areas of public spending, some programmes must be trimmed. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the public spending round

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that we have just been through is the quiet revolution that we have initiated in that unglamorous area of public spending—administrative efficiency, cost reductions and improving the output of public services without a commensurate increase in the input of taxpayers' money.

Soon after I arrived at the Treasury, I was rather startled to discover that the running costs of Whitehall were £15 billion a year. That is approximately £13 a week in taxation for every household in the land. We have been tough on those plans. The new plans announced in yesterday's Budget represent a 10 per cent. reduction in real terms over three years in the cost of running central Government. Despite increasing work loads, for example in social security, that is quite an achievement. The public sector is increasing its efficiency while continuing to deliver high-quality services to the taxpayer.

The size of the civil service is falling. There are 10,000 fewer civil servants now than in April, and the numbers have fallen by 40,000 since the last election. The civil service is now at its smallest since Neville Chamberlain was in power in 1939, and the plans introduced in the Budget will ensure that that trend continues.

Service to the public is our priority, but we can still serve the public's needs without having to squeeze their pockets. In each area of government, that involves asking questions to ensure that we are doing the right things and doing them as efficiently as we can. That is why we started the programme of fundamental expenditure reviews in each Department. They are improving the cost-effective delivery of front-line services on all fronts. The Ministry of Defence defence cost study, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) was kind enough to refer, produced annual savings of £750 million and enhanced operational capability.

That trend continues. The NHS will reduce central bureaucracy by 21 per cent. The Department of Transport is increasing efficiency by a fifth and the Treasury is consulting on the recommendations of its fundamental review, which could lead to savings in senior posts of more than a quarter while improving its performance as an Economics Ministry.

A new round of reviews is now starting that will include reviews into spending on agriculture, the environmental programmes of the Department of the Environment, on the Department of National Heritage and on the Office of Public Service and Science. All those rather unglamorous reforms are, nevertheless, fundamental to our target of keeping the costs of Government under control and reducing the public sector borrowing requirement.

Of course I recognise that a Budget, the centrepiece of which is its success in reducing public spending totals by £28 billion, is hardly likely to be greeted with immediate celebrations or dancing in the streets, but let me say a word about the so-called feel-good factor—a phrase much beloved of journalists, but which does not exactly resonate around the hearths and homes of Britain at the present time. Indeed, I have some doubt whether it is within the power of politicians to make people suddenly feel good. Certainly, in the pubs of Ramsgate in my constituency, nobody raises his glass and says, "Oh, I see that GDP growth has now reached 4.2 per cent.—cheers!" or, "I see that manufacturing production is now up by 6 per cent. this year. I feel good; I'll have another half." Human nature simply does not work like that. People feel good because of much deeper and more personal factors in their lives.

I was rather struck by speeches in the economic debate on Wednesday and by the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, whose thoughts were also echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—I hope that I can still call him my hon. Friend, despite his newly independent status. In their different ways, my right hon. and hon. Friends made a point that the Government have not missed—that we are living through a revolution of changing expectations, in which many of the old economic certainties of life are vanishing.

People are having to adjust to uncomfortable changes such as the loss of expectation of lifelong employment in any one job. Quite naturally, they are worried about their employment prospects, their debts and their pensions, even when national economic statistics are cheerful. We should sympathise with such feelings and respond wisely to them, because man certainly cannot live by economic data alone.

There are difficulties, too, in adjusting to what might be called the problems of success—the new world of low inflation that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has created, for that, too, means a shift in expectations, particularly for those who lived through the fool's paradises of artificial booms followed by all too real busts. My right hon. and learned Friend has shown consistently in the Budget and in his many speeches that he is absolutely determined to avoid the phenomenon by his steady steering for a low-inflation and real-growth course.

I believe that, sooner or later, the electorate will see what many commentators have already seen—that my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget responds to the anxiety and insecurity factors that I have mentioned, because it is a courageous, cautious and correct Budget. People who do not relate now to a good economic statistic such as the current 10 per cent. annual growth in exports might start to feel rather less anxious when the firm or factory in which they work starts to increase its production because it wins a big export order.

That is happening throughout the country because of Britain's spectacular success in the export sector. The people who are not rejoicing now about 2 per cent. inflation might start to recognise their better fortune when their pension or weekly wage holds its value and buys the same amount of goods in the shops month after month because prices are not rising, as a result of my right hon. and learned Friend's determination to keep inflation down.

Let us consider another category of people for whom the Budget might start to ease anxiety and insecurity factors—the unemployed. Let me again repeat the good news, which the Opposition Treasury team cannot bear to hear. Unemployment has been falling for nearly two years. The level is 450,000 lower than its peak. During the past few months, more than 1,000 people per day have been coming off the unemployment register.Incidentally, that is good news for public spending, too. Every 100,000 people who come off the unemployment count save the public purse £365 million a year.

We want to see more and more unemployed people going back into work, so we have been listening carefully to what unemployed people tell us are the main things that make them hesitate in deciding whether to take work if a job is on offer. Unemployed people tell us that the three things that make them hesitate are insecurity about how to manage between leaving benefit and receiving the first wage, uncertainty about being able to meet the rent and uncertainty about whether they really are better off in work or on benefit.

My right hon. and learned Friend's package has tackled all three issues in an imaginative way. It builds substantially on all the work that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment have been doing to encourage unemployed people effectively to search for jobs and to keep in touch with the marketplace. My right hon. and learned Friend's work incentives package includes substantial measures targeted at precisely the very obstacles and barriers that I have mentioned, which hinder unemployed people in taking up jobs, and the lack of incentives or reward for working harder or for working longer hours.

The package provides especially powerful incentives for employers to take on unemployed people, particularly those who have been out of work for long spells and who might have lost confidence in their ability to hold down a job. Those people need extra assistance and encouragement, and that is what we have provided them with.

My right hon. and learned Friend's package proves that, above all, the Government listen carefully to what the unemployed tell us are their real problems. Those problems have been addressed positively and imaginatively, with a large package of small, tightly targeted, relevant work-incentive reforms.

When we consider the great sweep of the Budget, with its emphasis on sound public finance and on maintaining credibility in international markets, the public spending totals and the effect on the lives of ordinary people, it is greatly to the credit of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor that he has introduced an austere, prudent, responsible and, already, well-respected Budget. He has certainly not taken the soft and easy pathways of personal and political popularity. Perhaps in footwear terms he is thinking of exchanging his famous Hush Puppies for some long-distance walking boots, for he has embarked on a long, steady, strategic march, the results of which will take time to achieve. If the results could be achieved by an overnight miracle, we would be back in boom and bust territory.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Aitken: No, I will not give way.

Good management of the economy requires not only resolution from the Chancellor but some patience and resolution from our own supporters, particularly when we are only just past the halfway mark in the life of this Parliament. Sometimes, I think that the patience of politics is better understood by the electorate than by journalists and politicians who work in the fevered hothouse atmosphere of Westminster. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a good point recently, when he highlighted the yawning gulf between the 1,000 or so active politicians and their media camp followers and the rest of the 50 million or so who are our fellow countrymen.

Britain gives its judgments slowly and thoughtfully, and certainly on a different time scale from that of the shadow Chancellor, a man whose vision is limited to tomorrow's headlines or to tomorrow morning's "Today" programme soundbite. By contrast—it is well recognised by today's media—my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, who is variously described as cool Clarke, cautious Clarke, calm Clarke and canny Clarke, has a much longer, more profound and more substantial agenda.

The Guardian, which is not always my favourite newspaper, got it right when it headlined yesterday's statement as a

"slow burner of a Budget".

The Budget will gradually thaw out the chill winds of personal economic anxiety in the country. Its warm measures on work incentives will encourage a fall in unemployment. Above all, the Budget will stoke the fire of our already successful national economic recovery. I commend it to the House.

5.56 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Slow burners can sometimes have the heat turned up on them later. Many of us suspect that that is what is proposed in the longer-term strategy to which the Chief Secretary to the Treasury referred. We have a Budget for the short term. The right hon. Gentleman said that the shadow Chancellor's horizons are tomorrow's newspapers, but, for the Chancellor and his team, the short term appears to be the interests of the Conservative party and the next general election.

The country needed a Budget for the longer term, to secure the long-term well-being of the economy and the growth that can last well beyond the next general election. We needed a Budget for investment in jobs and industry and for investment in our infrastructure, and in particular in the talents and skills of our people. Instead, we have a missed opportunity.

Twenty-four hours on, we have an opportunity to consider some of the fine print of the Budget and some of the accompanying departmental press statements. What dismal reading they make. Perhaps the House will recall that, yesterday, the Chancellor highlighted education as one of the priority spending sectors for the Government, with a budgeted increase of 1 per cent. in real terms next year. One then reads the press statement from the Department for Education, and, when one looks beyond next year, one finds a control total budget which, in real terms, is 1 per cent. less in 1997-98 than it is this year.

The Chancellor highlighted the Home Office budget—it has been earmarked for growth—but the true nature of the Government's approach to unacceptable crime levels can be found in the Home Office press release. The budgeted sum, we are told by the Secretary of State for the Home Department,

"is fully sufficient to enable the present numbers of officers to be maintained across the country if chief officers . . . choose to do so."

The significant word is "maintained". When chief constables have requested additional police officers, they have been told that, by squeezing other parts of their budget, they might just have enough to keep the numbers that they already have.

[Mr. James Wallace]

While the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) seemed to think that it was a matter for congratulations that hill livestock compensatory allowances would not be cut in the agriculture budget, he must know that maintaining them at present levels will mean a real cut in allowances. The Government, who used rising farm incomes as an excuse to cut HLCAs in previous years, now refuse to follow the logic of their argument and increase HLCAs when farm incomes are falling. Our rural communities will have to tighten their belts even more and sustain farming and related service enterprises with reduced support in real terms.

This will impact particularly hard on the more remote communities where essential car use and haulage costs will be penalised by the imposition of higher duty on petrol and diesel, without any relief from the compensatory measures which were proposed by my right hon. and hon. Friends. In my constituency a difficult position is exacerbated by the Government's withdrawal of freight subsidies and the reduction of subsidies in the export of livestock.

The Chancellor said that more would be done in the area of health, and made the somewhat platitudinous statement that the Government would deliver even better standards of patient care. I doubt whether that will bring much comfort to the long-term frail elderly or young people with acute disabilities who are told that there is no longer any room for them in the health service and that they must place themselves in the hands of local authorities whose cash runs out halfway through the year.

With the number of health service administration staff in Scotland rising by 45 per cent. in the five years from 1988 to 1993, what guarantee do we have that additional funding will not be taken up by administrative costs?

Mr. Butterfill: On the point about cash running out, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Isle of Wight council, which is run by the Liberal Democrats, had a substantial increase in resources and still ran out of money?

Mr. Wallace: It ran out of money while trying to deliver a service. It was given that responsibility and it may have had an increase in resources, but quite clearly the increase was not sufficient. It has always been acknowledged that the provision of proper packages of care for individuals who are now the responsibility of local authorities is expensive. If an authority runs out of money halfway through the year, it has clearly received insufficient funding.

The press release from the Overseas Development Administration proudly proclaims that Britain's aid programme is to be increased. But when one analyses the small print, one finds that there will be a £116 million reduction in real terms between this year's estimated figure and the planned expenditure for 1997-98. At a time when the Chancellor boasts that we have easily the fastest growth rate of any of the major European economies, as a country we seem incapable of sharing any of the fruits of that increase with those who struggle to survive in the developing world.

Closer to home, the Scottish Office budget is set to fall by £590 million in real terms over the next three years. The Secretary of State for Scotland has made it clear that local authorities will bear the large burden of those cuts. Local authorities have been obliged to cut back more and more over the past 18 years. In addition to trying to contain tight budgets even more, they are being asked in the next year or two to deal with a reorganisation of local government which no one wants. They will have to undertake even more community care, and they face ever-increasing repair and maintenance bills for schools.

There is no fat left to cut away and our councils are now being asked to hack away at the backbone of local public services. That is hardly an auspicious start to the promised era of democracy, with new councils coming into being in 1996. The elections of these unitary authorities will take place next year. They may well serve a useful purpose, because the timing will not be lost on the people of Scotland, coming five days after the 17.5 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel is to take effect.

The House, through the amendments on the Order Paper, will have the opportunity next week to make the Chancellor rethink the increase in VAT on domestic fuel. My right hon. and hon. Friends will certainly take the opportunity to make him think again.

Mr. Gallie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. How can he ask the Chancellor to step back from the increase in VAT when he has demanded increases in public expenditure in many areas? It does not add up.

Mr. Wallace: I thought tha' the hon. Member for Ayr wanted the Chancellor to back away from the VAT increase. The Budget measure which extended the band of the 20 per cent. income tax rate goes a long way to achieving the same result as increasing VAT to 17.5 per cent. The Chancellor should rethink his decision, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the courage of his convictions and vote for the Chancellor to think again when he has the opportunity to do so next week. If the House does not vote that way, the people of Scotland have an opportunity to give their verdict on the VAT increase on 6 April next year.

Mr. David Nicholson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, as he mentioned me early in his speech. His long list of points amounts to the Liberal party trying to have it both ways as usual, but I want to probe him about petrol taxation. Is the Liberal party opposed to an increase in petrol taxation? I know that it is in favour of the expansion of public transport infrastructure, and that may be desirable, but in most rural and semi-rural areas people depend on cars to get around.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to comment on that. The Government have increased petrol duty without any compensation to people in rural areas who, as the hon. Gentleman says quite rightly, need to use cars and to whom cars are not a luxury.

I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the proposals in our alternative budget. We said that any increase in petrol duty should be accompanied by a decrease—not the increase that we have seen—in vehicle excise duty, with the biggest decreases going to those vehicles which are the most fuel efficient. A number of examples have shown that that would benefit motorists in rural areas. We acknowledge that it is a problem. We have faced up to it and we are trying to deal with it.

The Conservative party used scare tactics in most rural constituencies in the run-up to the last general election by speculating as to the amount that the Liberal Democrats would increase tax on fuel. The Government have put up the tax on fuel even more than they suggested in their propaganda against us, and they have not introduced any of the compensatory measures which we have always said would be part and parcel of any increase.

The measures that the Government have introduced to compensate for the VAT on fuel are inadequate because they are calculated to help those who will have an average increase in their fuel bills. However, because it is an average, inevitably for some the burden will be above average.

That will be the case not just in Scotland—although the 1993 family expenditure survey showed that, while average weekly household expenditure on fuel, light and power was 4.8 per cent. of a family's total budget, in Scotland the figure was 5.1 per cent—but in areas such as the north-east and west midlands, Wales and Northern Ireland where the percentage was higher still. People in these areas with above-average fuel bills will continue to suffer.

The Government have asked us to accept that the most vulnerable members of our community will have to suffer because of the Government's past economic mismanagement which has led them to impose such measures. The Chief Secretary could not say what will happen in the future. If there is an opportunity to cut taxation, he would not say whether he would reduce this particularly punitive tax or whether he would take the opportunity to give a handout to those who are better off already.

The Government's short-termism is demonstrated by its cutting expenditure and obtaining revenue from measures such as the VAT on domestic fuel. They want to tax today and hand back tomorrow in the run-up to the general election. It is short-termism which makes the Budget such a wasted opportunity.

It is time that we encouraged industry to invest in the future. I accept that the Budget contains a range of measures that will particularly benefit small businesses. That is very welcome. I welcome in particular the increase in the VAT threshold. A significant measure which will be of most immediate help is the transitional rating relief which will ease the pain of revaluation for many small businesses.

When I wrote to the Secretary of State for Scotland in the summer warning him of the potential damage that the revaluation could do to small businesses, he suggested that the concerns had been overstated. However, I am pleased to see that in Scotland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, proper attention has been given to the issue and that significant funds have been made available to cushion the impact of revaluation.

In the longer term, investment in our country's future will require both public and private investment. At a time when rail and urban networks are ill equipped to deal with a modern industrial economy, the Government are cutting their capital expenditure even further. We have heard talk in successive Budgets about public and private partnerships, which in general my right hon. and hon. Friends support. The lack of a high-speed link to the channel tunnel is not exactly a glowing testimony to the success of those projects to date.

I often think that the contrast between the link between Calais and Paris and the link between Folkestone and London is a fitting example of the Government's much-vaunted policy of a two-speed Europe. Liberal Democrats believe that there is an important place for joint public-private ventures, but the Government should recognise the importance of the public sector priming the pumps.

Considering what the Chancellor said yesterday, perhaps my most doom-laden comment must be about the obvious cuts in the training budget. We are not exactly in the position that there is so much training in Britain or that we have so few people unemployed that we can afford to cut our training budget. That is particularly so when we compare what we have achieved, or not achieved, in training with what our main competitors have achieved.

The inadequacy of our training provision and achievement was well documented in the report of the Confederation of British Industry Scottish manufacturing group entitled, "Manufacturing Matters", which was published earlier this year. It pointed up the absence of any training strategy for Scotland and drew attention to the report of the Policy Studies Institute, which showed that almost half of all employees had not received any training in the previous three years.

The CBI report highlighted the low rate by employers of the promotion of vocational qualifications. Too often, employers see training as a cost rather than an investment. Yet if we are to be a competitive economy and if employees are to remain employable throughout their working life in an ever-changing global economy, training and retraining will have to become part and parcel of tomorrow's work patterns. That will require a change in attitude and culture. It is one that the Government should promote rather than stifle.

It will cost money to increase the training budget and provide incentives for training, but what is the cost today of failure in the past to invest in training? Already, at this stage of the recovery, 2.5 million people are unemployed yet industry is hitting skills shortages. The managing director of an electronics firm which I visited earlier this month in central Scotland, which has relatively high unemployment, explained to me his difficulties in finding employees who had the necessary skills for his company's work. He pointed out that the company's sister company in France received support to allow nine weeks full-time training of new employees. That is the contrast between the attitudes on different sides of the channel. That is the measure of an approach to training which is qualitatively different to ours.

Investment in training and investment in research and development are long-term projects which have a long-term payback so we find that they are off the Government's agenda. The Government have their horizon at the ballot box. Tax levels with cuts in expenditure are to be used to provide fuel for the all-too-familiar pre-election tax bribes. We should be using the opportunities and revenues created by our recovery to invest now for the future. We are paying today for yesterday's failure to invest. We shall pay tomorrow for today's failure to invest.

6.13 pm

Mr. Tim Sainsbury (Hove): It is perhaps appropriate that I resume my contributions to our affairs from the

[Mr. Tim Sainsbury]

Back Benches, after a short interval of 11½ years, in an economics debate, after spending some time at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Following the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) takes us from the northern extremities of our country to the south coast. The challenges that our economy faces are the same whether we are in Orkney and Shetland or Hove. Those challenges are not met by vague suggestions of more expenditure here or there or less tax here or there, which are characteristic of the speeches of not only the hon. Gentleman but of Liberal Democrat Members in general. If I may say so, my speech will move from the woolly world to the real world.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave us perhaps too short a taste of his ability for knockabout stuff, but I particularly welcomed his reference to the need to enhance our competitiveness and to the long-term approach to the problems and challenges in our economy that the Budget represents, and which he reflected fully in his speech.

I should be overlooking an opportunity if I did not make some reference to the speech by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). When he was shadow spokesman on trade and industry, I spent some time sitting opposite him on the Front Bench. I listened carefully, as I did today, to many of his speeches. That was when I developed my admiration for his fluent style and his skill in using—and, not infrequently, abusing—statistics. Most of all, I constantly developed an amazement at the inaccuracy of his predictions. Every time that he spoke from the Opposition Dispatch Box he predicted doom, gloom and disaster for our economy.

As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has already pointed out, every time—or, to be fair to the hon. Gentleman, almost every time—he was entirely wrong. He became a master at finding a cloud for every silver lining. It appears that a change of portfolio has not changed that part of his skill. His speech today, rather like the speech by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) yesterday, put me in mind of an article in yesterday's *Financial Times*. The article referred to the skills of French diplomats from the Quai d'Orsay. The article said that they were particularly good

"at striking rhetorical poses that bear little relation to reality".

That is an admirable summary of the speeches of both the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East went a little further. The article also attributed to French diplomats the skill of

"holding two almost irreconcilable positions at once."

We heard the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East—it is a characteristic not only of his party but of the Liberal Democrats—at the same time demand more spending practically anywhere one cared to ask and demand lower taxes.

I sometimes wonder whether Opposition Members recognise any connection between taxes and spending. I have to tell them that the Government do. I welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was able to announce about the public sector borrowing requirement. The importance of maintaining and building on improvements in the public finance is paramount if we are to have a successful economy.

That reminds me that this is not only my first speech from the Back Benches after a short gap but almost exactly the 21st anniversary of my maiden speech, which was also in a debate on the economy. It was in fact what one could call a Budget or mini-Budget debate—the sort of debate to which we had become too accustomed under Governments of both parties, but never more often than during Lord Healey's period as Chancellor. If he did not introduce two or three Budgets a year, he was slipping. We had many of those extra debates. We unhappily became familiar with them in the 1970s.

It is generally accepted everywhere except among Opposition Members that our economy did badly compared with our main industrial competitors in the G7 during the 1960s and 1970s. We did much better in the 1980s.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Sainsbury: In view of the hon. Lady's sedentary comment, it will perhaps be instructive if I remind the House of some of the background facts and figures for 1973.

In the three years preceding the economic debate in which I first participated, the increase in the retail prices index had been 7.6 per cent. When we came to 1979, after a period of unhappy Labour government in the three years before 1979, the average increase in the RPI had been 18.8 per cent. In the three years preceding this year, the average increase was 3.7 per cent. My hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench think, as I do, that that is too high, but today it is 2.2 per cent.

Economic growth was very strong in 1973, but negative—the output of the economy declined—in four of the following nine years. The growth rate recovered to something approaching our present rate only in 1983.

I hope that the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) accepts that productivity is a very important factor if we are going to generate wealth and jobs. In 1973, productivity in manufacturing, to which the Opposition rightly attach great importance, was only 54 per cent. of the level that we have achieved. Five years later—after five years of Labour misgovernment—it had hardly improved and had crept up to only 56 per cent. of the present level. During the 1970s, it hardly grew, but it grew strongly throughout the 1980s and I am happy to be able to say that it is still growing strongly now.

The growth in productivity contributed to unemployment. As we all know, unemployment is a problem that is common throughout the developed world, and it is much worse in most European countries. I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer sensibly tackled it in his Budget in two ways: first, through his detailed proposals to encourage investment in business, especially the small and medium-sized enterprises that are so important in our economy. They make an particularly vital contribution these days as so many of the larger firms assemble components and sub-assemblies produced by smaller companies. If the latter are not efficient and productive, the efficiency and productivity of the larger companies are bound to be damaged. They also contribute as

innovators and companies that can respond flexibly and fast to changes in their market. Most of all, they contribute as job creators.

Another comparison with 21 years ago shows that small and medium-sized enterprises employed only 27 per cent. of the work force in manufacturing at that time. Five years later, under Labour, it had crept up to only 30 per cent., whereas it is now about 40 per cent. Those small businesses will greatly welcome the further help given to them in the Budget.

Mr. Wallace: Is not one explanation for that increase the fact that many big businesses have been destroyed and, therefore, from sheer mathematical analysis we may deduce that more people are employed in small and medium-sized enterprises? As the right hon. Gentleman is so fond of comparisons, is he proud of the comparison that the World Economic Forum made with other countries? It found that in Britain fewer young people between the ages of 17 and 22 were in full-time education and training than in almost every other industrialised country and we came 37th out of 41 for total gross domestic investment. Is he proud of that comparison?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am very proud of the fact that, when a Conservative Government came to power in 1979, one in eight of our young people went on to higher and further education—a lower proportion than had done so in 1973—and that that it is now one in three. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well aware of the major steps that we have taken to improve vocational training, and I am also proud of those.

The second important way in which the Budget contributes to solving unemployment is by maintaining macro-economic stability, low inflation and low interest rates. Unless we maintain that stability, we cannot hope to achieve the investment that we all want and that is necessary to maintain and enhance the competitiveness of our economy and to create jobs. I know from my business experience that investment decisions, especially those involving a long time scale to fruition, are difficult to make and require difficult judgments. Invariably, they are taken in the absence of all the information that the investor would like. If they have to be taken against a background of macro-economic instability—with high and varying rates of inflation and interest rates jumping all over the place from 6 per cent. to 20 per cent. or whatever—it will make those decisions much more difficult and be much more damaging to the most important investment decisions.

We must maintain that macro-economic stability and I think that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary would agree that that was one of the ingredients that was missing from the otherwise successful record of the 1980s. It was the one area in which we did not achieve the necessary improvement on the dismal record of the 1970s. We now have that stability.

Ms Armstrong: I did not want to intervene before as I hope to have my opportunity to speak later, but the hon. Gentleman should at least try to be consistent when quoting the statistics. Is he proud of the fact that investment as a proportion of our gross domestic product is nearly 3 per cent. lower than it was in 1979? Should he not move on from some of the other statistics that he quoted and recognise that, far from everything being as good as he is trying to paint it, investment is lower than it was in that awful year of 1979 that he keeps talking about?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Lady is worried not so much about my consistency as about what she might consider to be my selectiveness when quoting the statistics, but the one to which she referred must be considered in the light of two factors. One factor that the Opposition have consistently ignored is that what matters about investment is its quality and not merely the quantity. When the private sector and private enterprises choose investment, we can be sure that it is of better quality.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East) *rose—*

Mr. Sainsbury: I shall not give way. I have not finished responding to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West.

The second factor of statistical importance is that investment must be considered in relation to the proportion of manufacturing industry in the economy and, as in all advanced economies, that has been declining. I refer the hon. Lady to an answer that I received earlier this week, however, which pointed out that, merely by transferring certain functions of industry to sub-contracted firms—whether in transport, catering, cleaning, laundry or anything else—the activities are now carried out by companies that are classified among the service industries, which has made a difference of about 750,000 in the number of people employed in manufacturing.

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Mr. Sainsbury: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has already reminded us that we should try to develop our arguments instead of constantly giving way to interventions, especially when other hon. Members are waiting to speak.

We now have the stability that I said was so important to investment in our economy and I congratulate all my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench on that achievement. I congratulate them even more on their determination to maintain that stability. Added to the other reforms, gains and changes that we have made since 1979—industrial relations laws, personal and corporate taxation, the advantages of privatisation, progress with deregulation, market opening and especially the single market and our success in attracting into this country the lion's share of inward investment from Japan and America—they have given us a better opportunity of achieving steady and sustainable growth than we have had for decades.

I strongly support my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in his determination to avoid the illusory boom that leads inevitably to a painful bust. I support his commitment to the virtuous circle of improved competitiveness, rising productivity, economic growth, low inflation and more jobs. This Budget will help us to stick to that virtuous path.

6.29 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): The speech of the Chief Secretary, who opened the debate for the Government, gave us a clear example of how out of touch are the Government. His rather weak appeals to us not to talk about VAT on fuel because it was in last year's

[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]

Budget suggested that he is not aware of what people up and down the country are talking about. They are not talking about the changes that have been made to certain aspects of public finances in this year's Budget. They are talking about the cruel and unnecessary imposition of the second half of VAT on fuel, which the Chancellor decided to go ahead with. That is what I want to speak about, as it is what my constituents are speaking, and worrying, about.

When talking about a potential rebellion by Government Members, the Chief Secretary said that he did not consider the imposition of VAT on fuel to be an issue of great consequence. I must tell him that for many people it is an issue of great consequence. The figures for 1993 show that 141 people died directly from hypothermia, and that 13,457 people died of pneumonia. Help the Aged estimates that 30,000 deaths a year are related to heating and fuel poverty.

It is a serious issue, but it does not have to be so. Such figures are not repeated in other countries. A 1991 survey shows that the average number of deaths in January rises by 16 per cent. above the annual average in Scotland and by 19 per cent. in England and Wales. The comparative figures for Sweden and Germany are 7 and 4 per cent. respectively. Despite the crueller winter climates in those countries, their increase in winter deaths due to fuel-related poverty is smaller.

There is very little doubt about that, and yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer decided to go ahead and impose the second increase of VAT on fuel. Help the Aged estimates that, as a direct result, the increase will rob people of 19 days of heating. That will still apply after the compensation package, which has not improved at all on what was suggested last year.

The only fig leaf of cover which the Government have for the imposition is the £10 million increase in the allocation for the home energy efficiency scheme. I have to say that that is a drop in the ocean. We started off with a home energy insulation scheme costing about £35 million in the Budget. That was increased to £70 million, and now to £80 million. It is estimated that it will take more than 25 years to get around to all the homes where energy efficiency work is needed. Despite the numbers of people who are suffering the consequences of the astronomical rises in their fuel bills, it will be 25 years before the Government's scheme will give them any relief.

I resent the hype and the deliberate misinformation that is put about by the Government about the consequence of the package of compensation. Those who will receive it—those who are suffering from the imposition of the first half of VAT on fuel—know that the package is totally and utterly inadequate. There are poor families and people who will not receive any compensation and who will face the consequences of the imposition of VAT who think that, in some way, pensioners are being protected. However, pensioners are being given totally inadequate protection, and families none at all.

So when the Chief Secretary quotes the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), he ought to remember that the most telling thing that the right hon. Member said last week was that there was far too much fear in the country and it was about time that the Government started to tackle that fear. He was talking about employment issues, but I suggest to Government Members that there is a lot of fear about the appalling imposition of VAT on fuel, and they ought to be prepared to do something about that. We can have all of the cliches for the Chancellor, such as "Cool" Clarke, but I suggest that we ought to be talking about "Cruel" Clarke.

The Budget raises transport and environment issues. I heard the Secretary of State for the Environment, supposedly quoting Friends of the Earth, saying that the Chancellor was the greenest Chancellor we have ever had. I do not know whether Friends of the Earth said that—if it did, it, not we, must live with that.

The imposition of a landfill tax instead of a landfill levy—where the money raised from its imposition on landfill sites would be used to treat contaminants and enhance the environment—is a sign that the Government are interested only in taking revenue from those situations, and that they are not really interested in that aspect of the environment.

I shall speak now on what are probably the more important issues of the transport-related decisions that have been taken. I have been brought to a position where I now agree that there is no justification, as I understand it, for a differential in taxation on diesel and on unleaded fuel. I accept that that difference should be levelled in the way in which the Chancellor proposes, but I must ask why he has done nothing about super unleaded fuel. There is absolutely no justification for giving a tax advantage to a type of fuel that has been proven to contain higher levels of volatile organic compounds—particularly benzine—does nothing for the environment and is by and large used in cars without catalytic converters. Yet we continue to give tax incentives for people to use super-unleaded fuel. There is no justification for that, and the Chancellor should have taken the opportunity do something about it in the Budget.

Overall, the Chancellor's transport decisions cannot be considered to be green in any way. Increases in petrol taxes have been combined with huge cuts in the road programme, but with even bigger cuts in railway expenditure, which has been slashed by £521 million. We all know that we shall see the attacks on local government expenditure which, combined with deregulation, will make absolutely sure that we cannot develop and maintain a public transport system that provides people with alternatives to their cars.

Clearly, it is not an environmentally friendly strategy to have motorways jammed with cars and lorries which do not necessarily have to be on them. That is not good for the environment or for jobs. We need a decent infrastructure, we need investment in our transport infrastructure and, yes, we need to be concerned about the environment when making those investments. The Chancellor's proposals have done nothing about that at all.

The Chancellor called it a Budget for jobs. As an hon. Member representing a constituency that contains areas of some deprivation, I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attempts to get the long-term unemployed off the register, but they are hardly adequate when we are talking about people who have been unemployed for two years. By then, it is already considerably more difficult to get those people back into work than it needs to be. Why have the Government not done something about those

who have been unemployed for one year? Why have they not done something about the long-term unemployed now, instead of in April 1996?

The Government may talk about getting the long-term unemployed back into the labour market, but why have they slashed the training programme? They set up the training and enterprise councils, the TECs, but even before they started to operate properly the Government cut their programmes and their budgets to a shadow of what they had been promised. The Government are now taking another £115 million off the budgets of the TECs and £500 million from the Department of Employment's budget in total.

Hardly anything in what the Government propose is designed to do anything serious to overcome the problems of unemployment. However, the Government's attempt to ensure that the long-term unemployed are as fairly treated by employers as those who are unemployed for a short time is welcome as far as it goes. I am slightly concerned, however, because a few years ago, before the flexibility and deregulation in the employment market that the Government have introduced, employees were in a better position to ensure that they could not be deliberately put out of work just to enable employers to pick up the incentives, such as those now offered to get the long-term unemployed into jobs. I fear that the employment practices that the Government have encouraged may result in the worst employers trying to do exactly that to their existing workers.

The Government have identified the increasing concern about unemployment and they want to pretend to do something about that. We have not heard much about the long-term problems in the economy. We are, supposedly, at that point in the recovery when things should start to get better. However, as recently as 17 November, the Engineering Employers Federation issued a document which analysed the employment prospects in the engineering sector. It concluded:

"Employment in the sector . . . After falling 20 per cent. over the last four years . . . will fall by 18,000"—

a further 18,000 jobs—

"in the next 12 months to reach 1.66 million by the second half of 1995."

Even though we are in a recovery, the engineering industry has lost 20 per cent. of its existing jobs and employment in that industry is continuing to fall. I suggest that any reasonable person would accept that, by the middle of 1995, when we reach the end of the recovery, such as it is, we shall then have to face whatever downturn may hit the economy with an engineering industry offering far fewer jobs than it does even now.

Mr. Gallie: What levels of investment has the engineering industry received during that time? Can the hon. Gentleman estimate the proportion of the labour force that has been lost as a direct result of investment in new technology?

Mr. Ainsworth: Some investment has been made in the engineering industry but jobs have not been created. I do not know how Conservative Members think that the country can be run on the basis of a policy, pursued for such a long time, that has deliberately created and maintained a pool of unemployed people.

Different types of employers operate within the engineering industry. Some employers still believe that they should run their companies using exploitation and divisive employment practices, but the most successful companies are run by those employers who have come to recognise that the only way to be successful is by getting everyone working together in the same direction. They recognise that everyone should be rewarded appropriately. That is what makes those companies successful. Why do the Government not recognise that our country would be successful if they brought everyone on board and ensured that we all work in the same direction? Instead, the Government have deliberately pursued an utterly unfair taxation policy and other divisive policies that have created and maintained unemployment.

The basic issue is that our manufacturing base is too small, because such a massive proportion of it was lost in the early 1980s. The recovery will be choked off because of that fundamental lack unless and until the Government invest in our future. Small businesses should be given capital allowances so that they can offer new jobs, but the Chancellor has deliberately refused to do that.

I should like some answers about what has happened to the single regeneration budget, but I would not be surprised if I did not get any, because, despite all my studies, the bundle of information that we received on the Budget is absolutely beyond me. Tucked in that bundle was a press release from the Department of the Environment claiming a £800 million increase in the single regeneration budget. It claimed that that was a huge increase in that fund, but the figures contained in the Budget tables reveal a cut in the figures that were supplied to me in answer to a parliamentary written question in April. I do not know how the £800 million has been created. In some way, every penny of new spending on the single regeneration budget, not just for one year but for each year in a given four years, plus a little bit more, has been lumped together to round the figure up to £800 million.

The Government are pretending that there has been a big increase in regeneration money, but they have cut the budget. The Government originally created that budget from a number of budget heads of a number of Departments and, in doing so, they managed to inflict a massive cut in the available funds. Now the Budget figures reveal yet another cut in the money available for that single regeneration budget.

It is clear from the Budget that the Government are continuing to implement the huge tax increases announced last year. They are treading water while the British people continue to pay higher than necessary taxes just so that those taxes can be cut, cynically, before the next election. They have failed to address the appalling unfairness of the tax system. They have failed to address the long-term need to invest in our future. The Government have divided our country and they are divided themselves. As we know, a house divided always falls, so let us hope that the Government fall before they do irreparable damage to our economy and our society.

6.47 pm

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) made great play of fuel costs in relation to deaths. Perhaps he has forgotten, or was lucky enough to be too young to remember, the days of the previous Labour Government when electricity prices went up by 2 per cent. a month, month after month. The hon. Gentleman is therefore on dangerous ground.

[Sir Andrew Bowden]

I welcome the great bulk of the proposals in the Chancellor's Budget. I am particularly glad about the active steps that have been taken to help the long-term unemployed and I know that they are also welcomed by people throughout the country. Before I discuss pensioners and some of the problems that they face, I must mention tax on alcohol.

I feel that my right hon. Friend has not been quite as imaginative as he might have been. Unfair competition is being created as a result of the competition in Europe, and the ease with which many thousands of people can travel to Europe and obtain large quantities of cheap drink. Jobs are being lost in my constituency in Brighton, and throughout the country, as a result of the massive quantities of alcoholic refreshment that enter Britain month after month.

I know that the Chancellor will not increase the duty on beer and wine. I would have preferred a positive cut, because there continues to be a massive gap between the prices of those drinks in Britain and the prices a few miles across the water, or under the channel tunnel. That does not provide fair competition for the industry.

On pensioner issues, the Budget contains good news and some not so good news. I welcome the approach by the Chancellor to clamp down on the misuse of housing benefit, which happens in far too many places, but I urge that that be done carefully. We must not create a position whereby older people who are new claimants of housing benefit may be penalised for living in high-cost housing when they have nowhere else to go, or for living in districts where they may have spent most of their lives, with their families and friends nearby, when it would be difficult and unwise for them to move far from the district where they have their roots. We need to be flexible and careful in framing those regulations.

I warmly welcome the Chancellor's announcement of an increase in tax allowances for pensioners. Indeed, I wrote to him, with my fellow officers of the all-party parliamentary group for pensioners, on 7 October, when we used the following words:

"we feel strongly that tax allowances should not be frozen for a third year. Some pensioners have actually been brought into taxation by the freezing of allowances even when their income has only kept pace with inflation. A continued freeze on allowances will affect the least well off taxpayers, many of whom are pensioners."

Therefore, that increase is very much welcomed by retired people.

To give two examples, a pensioner aged between 65 and 74, with an income of only £5,000 a year, will, in the next 12 months, be better off to the extent of £86 less tax. If that pensioner has an income of £8,000, he or she will be better off to the tune of £118. That was a splendid move by the Chancellor, which I am sure that the whole House will welcome.

The cold weather payments are the most generous and the best that we have ever had. The increase to £8.50 per week brings those payments near to meeting the average fuel bill of the average single pensioner. It will mean that, if that pensioner is in the financial category of entitlement to cold weather payments, he will be able to spend, in a very cold week, nearly double the amount that he would otherwise.

Another of the important reforms that the Government have already implemented is that no longer will pensioners who are entitled to a cold weather payment have to apply for it—it will be paid automatically. In the past, many pensioners who were entitled to the payment did not, for one reason or another, apply for it, and did not receive it.

Mr. Connarty: I know of the hon. Gentleman's work on behalf of pensioners, but does it not strike him as odd that the payment is made only after the event, and that the Government have rejected the concept of a cold weather credit so that people can have the money in advance? The problem is that often they cannot afford to heat their homes when the cold snap comes.

Sir Andrew Bowden: If the hon. Gentleman thinks through what he said, he will realise that it would be difficult to pay cold weather payments in advance because one would not know when the cold weather was coming. For example, we have had a very mild November this year. The object of cold weather payments is to give additional help in exceptionally low temperatures.

As the payment will be paid automatically, it will quickly come through the social security system. In the past, it did not, because the person concerned had to fill in forms to apply for the payment and the application had to be considered and checked. Now all that has gone, and the arrangement works much more smoothly than it has ever done before.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am sure that my hon. Friend shares my welcome for the generous improvement to the home energy efficiency scheme, which I know has helped many older people in his constituency, as in mine—they are close together. We need to do all that we can to give more publicity to that excellent scheme, which reduces costs to pensioners at all times of the year and in all weather conditions.

Sir Andrew Bowden: I endorse what my right hon. Friend has said. That help must be concentrated on people who do not have the financial resources to protect and insulate their homes properly. The great bulk of the nation's householders must invest in ensuring that their homes are heat-efficient and have double glazing and proper insulation in the roofs or elsewhere.

Let me return to cold weather payments. I continue to be worried about the group of pensioners who have a small income that slightly exceeds the income support level. That group is not eligible for cold weather payments. I urge the Government and my Front Bench colleagues to consider carefully whether they can find a way to help that group next year, because many of our pensioners whose incomes marginally exceed the income support level are worse off than pensioners who are in receipt of income support. That is not just.

I must now discuss a subject that leads me, I fear, to criticise Government action somewhat—value added tax on fuel. When the tax was proposed and announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), I did not oppose VAT on fuel in principle, although no one likes new taxes. However, I believed that, if we were to introduce that tax, it was essential that significant help was given to pensioners and people on low incomes.

I am pleased to have played what I believe was a significant part in the campaign to persuade the Government to help, not simply pensioners in receipt of income support or other state benefits, but all pensioners. That is not because I believe, broadly speaking, in universal benefits—I do not. About 3 million pensioners pay tax, some even paying tax at the rate of 40 per cent., but I could envisage no way in which it would be possible to help the 3 million pensioners who have only a comparatively small amount—£5, £10 or £15 a week—more than income support levels, without giving that help on VAT on fuel bills to all pensioners.

I am delighted that the Government accepted that suggestion, and took action to implement it. That is the first time ever that a Government have increased the basic pension to help towards the costs of a specific tax that they have brought into operation.

The House will recall that, this April, the specific increase was 50p a week for single pensioners and 70p a week for married couples, on top of the basic pension and in addition to the increase for inflation in that basic pension in the previous year. That was clearly a separate increase for all pensioners. It was widely believed, certainly by me and I think by many hon. Members, that next April that would happen again, and there would be an additional 50p and 70p for single and married pensioners, plus the increase for inflation.

In last year's social security uprating statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security said:

"I was also determined to help those who have worked, saved and earned modest pensions, and who normally get no extra help. So, from next April, on top of uprating for inflation, all pensions will be increased by 50p a week for single pensioners and 70p a week for couples. The following year, extra help for VAT on fuel will be £1 a week for single pensioners and £1.40 for couples."—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1993; Vol. 233, c. 1039.]

From that statement I concluded that that increase would be implemented in the same way as the additional 50p and 70p for this April. In his broadcast last night, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said:

"By next April, a single pensioner will have an extra £52 a year, and a couple an extra £73 a year, put into everybody's pension, on top of the normal pension increase."

I am extremely disappointed at the way in which the increase will be applied. It will be applied on the basis that in the year September to September, inflation went up by 2.2 per cent. As the House knows, that automatically means that the following April the basic pension will increase by 2.2 per cent. But within that 2.2 per cent., 0.4 per cent. was inflation caused by VAT on fuel. The Government now say that that means that for the single pensioner, that is worth approximately 25p a week, and that they will reduce the 50p increase on the overall basic pension to only 25p and that there will be a proportionate decrease for married couples. I deeply regret that decision, which will be extremely difficult to explain to our 10.5 million pensioners.

Because of the way that the Government intend to apply this increase, I am afraid that it is true that the average fuel bill for a pensioner will leave that person with a net loss from April on of 56p a week. That is not a fair deal for millions of pensioners, and especially for those who have only a small amount above the level of income support. I ask the Chancellor and the Government to think again about that.

I am not asking for a massive sum. I want to support the Government on the second wave of VAT on fuel, not because I like it, but because we have to deal with the PSBR, and the money has to come from somewhere. The vast majority of our people can pay VAT on fuel without hardship, but many pensioners cannot. The Government should implement what they proposed last April—a separate 50p for the single pensioner and 70p for the married couple. That would cost a maximum of £130 million, but there would be a considerable tax clawback from the 3 million pensioners who pay tax.

The House must never forget that today's pensioners are from the second world war generation. They made enormous sacrifices and suffered great hardship during that war. Some pensioners are still with us from the first world war. The great majority of those people had little chance to save, and by today's standards had relatively low incomes. They deserve, and should receive, a more generous slice of the national cake.

7.5 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): The Government owe a great debt to their former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). The press have described the Budget as boring, and most press comment has been about jam tomorrow and about how the Chancellor has not taken any risks. But if the former Chancellor had not announced in advance two years' worth of tax increases, and those increases, which people will begin to pay at the start of this financial year, had been announced yesterday, the country would be in uproar.

The reduction of mortgage interest relief alone would have dominated our debate and Conservative Members, as much as Opposition Members, would have been expressing doubts about that and worrying about its impact on middle-class household incomes. If out of the blue yesterday the Chancellor had announced that he was more than doubling VAT on fuel, there would also have been uproar. It might have been like the time when Nigel Lawson announced the reduction of the top rate of tax to 40 per cent. On that occasion the uproar in the House was so bad that the sitting had to be adjourned until order was restored.

However, because measures have been trailed and debated for months, most people think that this was rather a dull Budget. I nodded off because the beginning of the Chancellor's statement was so mind-numbingly dull. At least Nigel Lawson gave a view of what was happening in the world economy and said what he thought would happen. Yesterday's Budget statement was largely a party political speech that was geared to domestic politics and looked no further than the next general election.

I was surprised at the absolute unanimity, even among newspapers that give blanket support to the Conservative party, that everything has been put off until next year's Budget. In that Budget the basic rate of tax will be reduced to 20 per cent. so that some time in the summer of 1996, at about the time of the intergovernmental conference on Europe, money will be feeding its way into the pockets of ordinary families and voters. That is when the Government will make their dash to try to get re-elected and will run a Europhobic campaign about how we do not want to be dominated by the Germans. It is clear that that is the strategy, and it is completely out of keeping with Britain's needs.

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

Because of the way in which the Budget has been managed in public relations terms, its reception has been favourable, but the Budget is disastrous for the reconstruction of the economy. It is deeply flawed. I am used to people on the left delivering fairly savage critiques of the Government's economic policies, but I am surprised that there has not been more comment about the recent analysis by *The Economist.*

It is not news when members of the Labour party, *Tribune* or *The New Statesman* slag off the Government for economic incompetence, or warn that disaster is coming. But when *The Economist*—which, year by year, has supported the Government and their economic policies totally, giving the most widespread and consistent support for all their economic measures, such as financial deregulation and privatisation, being almost a generator of many of the ideas that have been taken up by the Conservative party in government—published its predictions for the British economy for next year in a book that is now on sale on the bookstands, I assumed that it would back the Government and say that they were broadly right, but I was amazed because I thought that I had picked up a copy of one of my articles in the Socialist Economic Bulletin.

I shall read what *The Economist* says in order to put it on the record. It is a damning indictment of the Government. I put it down as an early-day motion and the usual suspects all signed it. However, I want it to have a wider circulation. This is the expectation of *The Economist* about what will happen to the British economy and it is in complete and stark contrast to much of the misinformed waffle in the media yesterday.

The Economist says:

"Believe it or not, the best is over for Britain. The economy will decelerate in 1995, living standards will slip and 1994's sharp falls in unemployment will slow to a crawl. There will be no return to recession nor will there be any kind of inflationary explosion. But humiliatingly for John Major, who has become accustomed to bragging about Britain's place at the head of the European league of economic performance, the country will slide back to its traditional place near the bottom of the international pile."

Coming from *The Economist*, that has much more force than any complaints from Labour Members, particularly when one remembers that this book of predictions is edited by a Conservative Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn). If that is what the hon. Gentleman believes, he should be joining those who are now sitting unwhipped on the Conservative Benches, withdrawing his support from the Government who are presiding over this economic mess.

The Economist does not take the view that this is all some international problem; it nails the blame exactly where it lies—with Government incompetence. Referring to the time since we were evicted from the exchange rate mechanism, leading to the boost to the British economy that we have seen in the past year, it states:

"What has gone wrong since those happy days? The answer is simple—government policy. Kenneth Clarke, the chancellor of the exchequer, quite rightly undertook a drastic tightening of fiscal policy, announcing the biggest round of tax increases in post-war history for 1994 and 1995. But he failed to counterbalance this with a corresponding monetary relaxation. The result was bound to be a slowdown in the economic recovery. This was just becoming apparent in the late summer with the weakening of consumer spending, car sales and housing, when the Bank of England bizarrely piled on the monetary pressure with a half-point increase in rates"—

that is, interest rates.

"This masochistic mix of monetary and fiscal tightening, combined with the sharp increase in long-term interest rates caused by the worldwide collapse of bond markets and the Bank of England's misguided warnings about inflation, is sufficient to explain Britain's deteriorating prospects. With macroeconomic incompetence like this, there will be no need to look for sob stories in the alleged deficiencies of the economy's supply-side—deficiencies like low skills, inadequate training or unwillingness by industrialists to invest for the long term."

The Economist, which has supported the Government more loyally than any other economic organ during the past 15 years, is not saying that the problem is an international one, but that it is the incompetence of the Chancellor and the Bank of England that will lead to the deterioration in living standards next year.

It would be easy for Opposition parties to say that that is good news, because, just as the Government are trying to sneak their way into the 1996 election, people might see that the economy is turning down again. But I know what that means in my constituency where, effectively, one person in four is out of work. *The Economist* article sums it all up perfectly with its heading, "A lost last chance". Already, the Government's incompetence in handling the period since our eviction from the exchange rate mechanism and the way in which they have lost the opportunities presented to them will lock us into the next recession.

Hon. Members should consider where we are in the economic cycle. We know that we have a business cycle. This is the high point. This is the boom between the recession of 1990 and the recession of the late 1990s. That is what is so depressing. If one compares where we are on the economic upswing today, since the end of the recession in mid-1992, with the last time that we came out of recession in the early 1980s after the Government's first real severe recession, we are in an equivalent position to the end of 1983. In 1983 people thought that there was a feel-good factor. They were confident. They were taking on bigger mortgages. They were expanding their personal consumption because they thought that they could see real growth.

When one compares the situation then and now one realises how much more weak and fragile has been the recovery from this recession and how much shorter and insubstantial it will be. When one considers the past 25 years of economic history in Britain and removes the distortion of the great bonus of North sea oil, one sees a consistent pattern of decline, with each recession biting deeper and longer than the one before and each subsequent boom shallower and less substantial, leaving a weaker economy than before. That is why I find this depressing.

Had we had policies that encouraged investment, we should now see the increase in exports being built much more strongly into our economy. But how many businesses will go for a sustained expansion of investment when they have already seen a 0.5 per cent. increase in interest rates and when the overwhelming assumption is that that will be followed by another 0.5 per cent. and another 0.5 per cent? The markets are telling us that they expect inflation to rise in the long term. That is why

long-term borrowing is so expensive. The Government have not convinced the markets that we have broken free of the cycle.

There is much talk of us being in a uniquely good position and that we can see the prospect of export-led growth and low inflation stretching ahead, but that view is not shared by the markets or the economists. But people are talking themselves into that belief and I find that worrying because we are missing an opportunity.

The Economist accuses the Chancellor of macro-economic incompetence. We have been bubbling along with inflation at 2 per cent., but inflation is still the overwhelming obsession of Conservative Members. But the most frightening prospect for the British economy is the fact that our investment has collapsed.

For the past 20 years I have been used to seeing those interesting analyses of what proportion of GDP in each of the G7 countries goes on investment. We all know the pattern. Japan has 30 per cent. or 35 per cent. year by year, most of continental Europe has between 20 per cent. and 25 per cent., and Britain has 15 per cent. or, if we are lucky, up to 18 per cent. The only country investing less than us has been America, with about 14 per cent. For the first time, we have sunk below America's pattern of investment. We are now at the bottom of the G7 pile for investment.

That means that, in the Government's failure to create a climate in which business feels that it can plan its own investment, and when the Government have savaged their own investment programme year by year so that our infrastructure is a disaster in comparison with that of modern European nations such as Germany, Holland or Sweden, we have lost an opportunity and our competitors will pull further ahead of the British economy. In Japan, Germany and France, industries with their higher investment will be a greater threat in terms of competition in the export markets. Their people will see a higher degree of skilled labour building up as it matches the investment pattern. We are already locked into a further qualitative decline between ourselves and our major competitors. Conservative Members are slapping themselves on the back for a cunning strategy, but the Government are preparing a grim and depressing inheritance for the next Administration.

Whether the next Government are the lot opposite, having conned their way back to power with a little chicanery, or whether my poor right hon. and hon. Friends will be left to clear up the mess, they will find, immediately they assume office, declining productivity and export markets relative to our competitors. International investment will be looking elsewhere, and the new Government will be confronted with all the usual economic crises that flow from that situation.

I am not interested just in slagging off the Government—I have been critical of my own party on more than one occasion. I want to examine what should be done. *The Economist* is not a magazine that I usually invoke in my arguments, but the final paragraph of its article on developments at the time of the next general election is equally revealing:

"Britain will become more prone to inflation in the long run. This malady will again be more threatening from 1996 onwards, when the government suddenly takes its foot off the monetary brakes and steps on the fiscal accelerator ahead of the general election. That would have been the right time for the authorities to put on the brakes against a traditional boom-bust cycle. But when did the Bank of England or the Treasury ever do the right thing at the right time?"

The next Government will not find it easy to take that inheritance on board. My party should be thinking now what should be done to break out of the trap. Although inflation has been a problem in the past, it is not the immediate problem. The overwhelming difficulty facing the British economy is lack of investment and of a skilled work force who can fully utilise high investment.

The Labour party has published a series of proposals, which I completely support, to increase work force skills, improve education spending and increase training. I should be more than happy to see a fairer system of taxation, to restore many of the inequalities of the past 15 years. If it were up to me, the Budget would include a top rate of tax of 55 per cent. for anybody earning more than £50,000 per annum, and of 48 per cent. for anybody earning more than £40,000. That group, which accounts for 4 per cent. or 5 per cent. of society, has done well out of the Government, and in attempts to rebuild the economy, it must make the greatest contribution.

Low-income and middle-class families are already taxed more severely than in any period outside wartime, and no one could seriously propose major increases in the burden of taxation on them. The people who should make the greatest contribution are those who have done best over the past 15 years. I much regret that my party is not saying that loudly, and persuading the public that we shall increase tax rates for that group. Once one has spelt out the point in the wealth structure at which taxes will be increased, one can make a firm commitment to taxpayers below that point that they will not pay a penny more under Labour. I want a firm commitment to taxing people who have done best, but to protecting those already squeezed by the Conservatives.

If possible, some of the increased taxation on those earning more than £40,000 a year could be used to relieve the tax burden on ordinary working-class and middle-class families. That would redress the redistribution of wealth, which has been going the wrong way in recent years.

The two tax increases that I propose would produce another £3 billion. It would be for the Government of the day to decide whether to redistribute that revenue to people on pensions or benefits, or to remove part of the tax burden on lower-income groups. It might have to be used further to reduce the PSBR or to fund an investment programme.

Nevertheless, no one believes that £3 billion from the richest in society could solve the problems facing the British economy. A much more vast sum is needed. If Britain is to match German investment levels, it must look elsewhere than the taxation of private income—to the City of London. The operation of Britain's financial sector is like something from "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland".

Not everybody knows this, but I grew up as a working-class Tory in a working-class Tory household. I was the first person from either side of my family not to vote for the crooks opposite. It was traumatic. I was not allowed to tell my ailing grandmother that I had become a Labour supporter in case the shock killed her. My information came from the *Daily Express*, so I do not know how I ended up on the Labour Benches. Nothing in my early childhood led me to question the usual assumptions.

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

I grew up believing in capitalism. I understood that, when there was a boom, companies made a profit, shareholders received dividends and workers enjoyed wage increases. I understood also that in a slump, companies did not make a profit, shareholders did not receive dividends and the poor old workers were kicked on to the dole. The simple, raw logic of capitalism has been replaced by a system whereby when there is a boom, profits are made, dividends are paid and workers enjoy a pay increase—but when the boom ends and there is recession, companies do not make a profit but dividends are increased, often while workers are laid off.

The year 1986 is generally thought to have been one of Mrs. Thatcher's best years. I remember Nigel Lawson saying that Britain was on track to replace Germany as the strong economy of Europe. That is a bit of a laugh now, but in those days people thought that we were living a boom and had broken out of the cycle of boom and bust. People began to believe Tory party propaganda. At that time, good dividends were paid but today, after all the pain of the past few years, dividend values have doubled in real terms. On what basis can one justify paying today twice the dividends that were available during the Thatcher boom of the 1980s?

The effect of doing so is to squeeze out investment, because the first call on company profits will be increased dividends. There is nothing in this squalid little Budget to challenge that. Where is there any encouragement, in terms of tax concessions, for companies to increase their investment? That should have been the centrepiece of the Budget and would have had the support of Labour Members. Instead, the Budget contains piddling little measures against a crisis of under-investment.

The Labour party will be failing in its duty if, when it takes office, it does not pass legislation or use the tax system to reduce dividends to a reasonable level. I am not proposing anything revolutionary—I just want the Budget to return to the situation that existed in Mrs. Thatcher's heyday. Why not cream off the extra money that is paid in dividends and return it to what it was in 1986 in real terms? If there were a tax mechanism to do that, £11.96 billion would be released this year and every other year for investment—the sort of sum needed to match German investment levels and research and development. At present, that money is siphoned off and taken out of the City and paid as dividends.

Company law is so structured that virtually everybody running a major company in Britain has as his first concern not investment or capturing new markets, but that a shark such as Hanson will make a vast bid, shareholders will sell out, and Hanson will immediately make a quick profit and destroy the industry by asset stripping and dumping its workers on the dole, so that another productive part of our economy is lost. That is how the British economy is functioning, and nothing in the Budget will shift those priorities. Unless we shift them, we shall continue to fail in comparison with Germany, Japan and the more successful industrial nations.

A couple of years ago, I was invited to open an extension to a factory in my constituency. There are not many factories left in my constituency because, like most of the core of outer London which used to be a manufacturing heartland, it has been destroyed by the first and second Thatcher and Major recessions. The factory is small but competent. It was the last in Britain to produce the wall sockets into which one plugs electrical appliances; every wall socket not produced by that company is imported.

The factory had bought the most modern high-tech machinery and plant, which Germany and Japan have. Its work force was drawn from the locality and comprised many who had failed in or been failed by the education system. They may not have had great skills, but the firm ensured that they were offered day release and training to improve their skills so that they could fully utilise new equipment.

I said that I was surprised to have been invited to open the extension because I had expected the factory to ask El Presidente—the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—or one of his juniors. I was told that Ministers were not welcome there because they had never lifted a damned finger to help such companies.

It soon became obvious to me that the company was successful because it had no shareholders. It was owned by two brothers, which meant that, at the end of the year, they could make their own calculations. They could work out their profits and decide how much to invest. The investment decision was the first to be taken.

Until we change our company law and, therefore, the pattern of investment, we shall continue to fall behind other nations. That means that the next Labour Government will have to tackle the City with a major programme of taxation and general reform to shift the balance. If the next Labour Government do not do that, they will fail just as the previous two Labour Governments failed. I desperately want my party's Front-Bench spokesmen to start to spell out in detail, as I have tried to do in my small contribution to the debate, precisely what it is going to do to reverse the decline in the economy.

We can all slag off the Tories; it is wonderful stuff. Having listened to their speeches, one cannot fail to slag them off. However, I am in the Labour party because I know that the Tories are useless. I want to be told what we are going to do and I want us to tell the British people so that there is no doubt or illusion.

Whichever party wins the next election will face a long period of pain. No one can turn the economy around without a major adjustment, without many people having to change their employment and be retrained and without a great change in the way in which the City of London operates. Unless we are prepared to stand up and tell the people that in advance, I greatly fear that we shall be vulnerable to some of the distortions that we have witnessed in previous election campaigns.

I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that I condemn the Budget and the Chancellor to the oblivion which they so richly deserve and to which they are condemning the British economy and the British people. However, it is not enough to oppose the Conservative party; we have to spell out what we will do, how it will be better than what the Conservatives have done, who will pay the price and who will benefit. Until we do that, people will continue to doubt us, and the Conservative party, with its skilled electoral machine and its supporters in the media, will seize on every doubt, just as it did during the previous election, to distort reality.

It is in the Labour party's interests to spell out the truth and tell people that there is pain to come, whoever governs Britain, but that we would ensure that it was fairly spread and that, at the end of that period of pain, we would emerge as a modern European economy.

7.33 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): While I was listening to yesterday's debate, I looked across to the Opposition Front Bench and saw the grinning features of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and the mournful features of the shadow Chancellor, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). I was reminded inexorably of "Hancock's Half Hour" with Sidney James and Tony Hancock. However, the big difference was that Tony Hancock was a good deal less gloomy than the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. I am sorry that he is not in his place at the moment. His speech today reminded me rather of "Four Weddings and a Funeral" because he is the only man who, by his very presence, can make a wedding seem like a funeral.

The gloomy way in which the shadow Chancellor approached our economy was matched only by the incompetence of his suggested remedies for reducing, for example, unemployment. His big idea was to release local authorities' capital receipts to be spent in the economy. He thought that that was the secret to reduce unemployment. Of course, he does not realise that most of the councils that he was talking about, especially those run by Labour, have no cash but enormous debts. Indeed, some of the fiefdoms controlled by Labour have debts so large that the majority of the taxes paid by their residents are going to pay for the servicing of that debt rather than the provision of services.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that housing debts are being paid from council tax receipts. As he will be aware, the housing revenue account is ring-fenced and it is the tenants and their rents who pay those debts. If councils were allowed to raise capital and then invest in their housing stock, they could generate more rents, invest further and give tenants what they really want and, at the same time, put people back to work.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Lady should know that if some Labour councils collected their rents they might be considerably better off. However, the fact is that some, although not all, are enormously indebted. There are a few, exclusively Conservative councils, I believe, that have some money in the bank and do not have enormous debts. If the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) would care to name a Labour council that does not have enormous debts, I should be happy to give way to her. I see that she is not anxious to respond.

Dorset county council was controlled by the Conservatives and had £20 million in the bank. Unfortunately, the Liberals took over at the previous local election and, in a very few months, they have spent nearly all of it. Some councils are debt-free, but not the vast majority. The shadow Chancellor's proposition would merely add to the public sector borrowing requirement. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary suggested that it would add about £6 billion when we are radically trying to reduce it.

Mr. Connarty: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting a model for industry—it should not invest and take on indebtedness and, therefore, not grow? Is that the model that he is planning for the economy—just like the local authorities that he admires, it should have no debts and therefore no investment?

Mr. Butterfill: No, I am suggesting that the level of debt should be reasonable and appropriate to balance the budget and ensure decent housekeeping. That is why I commend the Budget of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. He has ensured that we shall have sound finances and he has laid the foundations for a growing economy—the fastest growing in western Europe at the moment. That is the right thing to do. In the process, he has of course had to reduce some aspects of Government expenditure.

I commend the Chancellor on the fact that, within a policy of general spending restraint, he has found substantial additional money for the national health service and education and has found enough to increase police expenditure by 3 per cent. while cutting Home Office expenditure as a whole. That shows that he has his priorities right. It is the right way to run the economy. All the commentators whom I have read certainly believe that to be so.

I now turn to VAT on fuel, which is, of course, a controversial item. I greatly respect my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir. A. Bowden), who made a passionate plea on behalf of pensioners. I also have many pensioners in my constituency and I know that many of them find great difficulty in meeting their fuel bills. However, we can exaggerate the problem.

A constituent came to my advice centre earlier this month and she showed me her fuel bills. She said that she was very worried about her ability to meet them if we increased the level of VAT to the full 17.5 per cent. The interesting thing was that she thought that she was currently worse off as a result of the previous increase than she had been before. She spends a small amount—about £37 a quarter—on fuel.

When we went through her bills, we discovered that far from being worse off, even with only the 50p increase we have given this time, she was better off by a few pounds a year than she would have been without the changes we have made. If we take into account the reductions in fuel costs in the past two years, she was actually significantly better off. It is wrong to alarm all pensioners, as the Opposition have done, because although some of them will undoubtedly be a little worse off, the great majority of them will have their bills met and some of them will, as I have illustrated, be better off.

I am especially pleased that we have found more money for home insulation. The £10 million proposed means that many pensioners will be able to spend about £300 per house on insulation. The most vulnerable will, of course, be eligible for the large increase in cold weather payments that the Chancellor has been able to make, and I am very grateful to him for that.

I made a number of representations to the Chancellor before the Budget and I especially drew to his attention the predicament of those who, because they have small savings or a modest occupational pension, are just outside the level at which they can obtain benefits. It is true, of course, that they have had an especially difficult time during the recession. I was especially pleased, therefore, that the Chancellor was able to raise the level of personal allowances, which most benefits those on the lowest

[Mr. Butterfill]

incomes. I was pleased in particular that he was able to raise the age allowance by £430, which is a considerable sum and will certainly be of great assistance to my pensioners who have modest incomes from a source other than the state retirement pension.

The increase in the number of people paying the lower rate of income tax is also especially welcome and is something that I urged on my right hon. and learned Friend. About one in five of all taxpayers now pay at only the 20 per cent. rate. That is something on which we should and, I hope, will continue to build.

The other matter that gave me particular pleasure was the help that we have given on business rates. When we passed the Local Government Finance Act 1988, I tabled an amendment urging the Government to keep any increase to a maximum of 10 per cent. At that time, the Government did not feel able to go that far, but they met my concerns by agreeing to a maximum of 15 per cent. I am especially pleased that now, with things getting a little better and with a revaluation coming up once again, the Government have recognised that the impact of sudden and unexpected changes in business rates can be very disruptive, especially for small businesses. The restriction of any increase on a transitional basis to a maximum of 10 per cent., with a maximum of 7.5 per cent. for small businesses, is therefore especially welcome and will give great heart to that sector of the economy, which is so vital in securing our economic recovery.

The changes that we made in national insurance will not only help many of the unemployed back into work, but will be of great benefit to many small businesses. All in all, this is a good Budget for small businesses. The encouragement of the provision of capital other than through bank borrowing—through business angels or venture capital trusts, for example, where we have made important improvements—is another aspect of trying to recreate a more secure capital base for business and I greatly welcome the Chancellor's action in that respect.

I am also pleased that the Chancellor has given help for personal equity plans, PEPS, by widening their investment criteria, thus enabling many people to invest more widely—perhaps sometimes more wisely in the present climate—than they have been able to do hitherto. The roll-over that the Chancellor has given to tax-exempt special savings accounts—TESSAs—will mean that some of the schemes will not have to close down and that these important savings areas will be safeguarded.

TESSAs are very important. I point out to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who talked about lack of investment, that, historically, the problem in this country has been that our savings ratio has been so much lower than that of our competitors—lower than that in almost any nation except the United States. The encouragement of savings produces the funds for investment, so it is vital that we continue to encourage saving as against giving incentives for borrowing or spending. That is the path on which the Government have been embarked for a considerable period and I hope that they will continue on it.

On a personal note, last year I tabled a new clause to the Finance Bill in which I asked the Government to exempt from tax liability the indemnities that companies give directors and other employees against claims being made against them in the performance of their duties; those indemnities are called directors' and officers' insurance. I am delighted to note that the assurances given to me by the Financial Secretary at the time have borne fruit and that the Government have announced this year, in the document IR6 from the Inland Revenue, that all my representations on that subject will be met in full. In future, this important safeguard for companies, employees and the public at large will be secure.

I am a little sorry that the Government have not been able to reform the capital gains tax regime; we may be able to debate that further in Committee. In terms of encouraging saving and investment, it cannot be right that a man who has spent 10 years of his life building up a business is taxed on its disposal at the same marginal rate as applies to somebody who makes an overnight, speculative gain on the currency markets. We must do something to encourage more long-term investment. At the moment, it pays people to strip the money from companies through dividends and exorbitant salaries, which we should all like to discourage, rather than to leave the money in the company, thereby helping it to grow. I hope that, in the fulness of time, the Government will look at that area.

I also hope that the Government will look at the impact of inheritance tax on small businesses. I hope that they will look in particular at some of the inheritance tax concessions, such as gifts on marriage or gifts to an overseas-domiciled spouse—we purport to support the family—and will realise that it is important that they are indexed. Many of them have not been increased in line with inflation since inheritance tax came in. I hope that the Government will look at that matter at some time in the future.

Having said all that, I believe that this is a prudent Budget. It has clearly been welcomed in all quarters. The financial markets have given a favourable verdict on it. It has kept Britain on its course—and strengthened its position—as the fastest-growing economy in the whole of the European Union. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on a thoroughly prudent and well-judged Budget.

7.47 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I appreciate the problems that Chancellors have in budgeting. I remember that when I was a university student studying economics in the late 1960s, the Labour Government had problems and were forced to bring in what seemed to me to be draconian cuts in public services to keep the International Monetary Fund happy. I remember that the sum was £3 billion, which seemed like a very large sum. I have since read Lord Healey's excellent book "The Time of My Life", in which he explains that when the outturn figures were eventually presented to him two or three years later, he discovered that the £3 billion which he was supposed to have as a deficit was in fact not a deficit, and that the balance of the Budget would have been fine in that year.

Lord Healey was, of course, driven by the statisticians. He recounts a story about the time when he was in the Army and was asked to check the people going to and from a railway station—people getting on trains and off trains, transferring to other places. He bribed the guards on each train to give him a figure and he bribed the chap on the gate to give him the figure for the gate. When he eventually left the station, they all had a little celebration and he said, "You were quite accurate with your figures.

How did you manage to count all those people?" They replied, "We just made up figures and added them together." Every one of them made up a separate figure and all the errors balanced out and it became quite an accurate account of the people who went through the station. Lord Healey realised that he should have drawn on that experience when looking at the statistics which were presented to him in relation to the Budget.

Let us consider the public sector borrowing requirement figures presented in the economic indicators in the House of Commons Library—the latest of which were for 28 November. There is absolutely no doubt that the figures for the United Kingdom show a very stark difference between 1988-89 and 1992-93—and, in fact, 1993-94. There is no doubt that the Government had got themselves into such a mess with a £45.95 billion deficit in the public sector borrowing requirement that they had to do something very serious.

What they have done is very serious, all right. It is very serious for the people of this country because the Government's plan, as announced by the Chancellor in the latest Budget, is to take another £24 billion off public spending. That is not just about money being lopped off bank balances and deals being done with the Bank of England: it means £24 billion off services.

Given that the Government have been in power for 15 years, those services must initially have been set by them—albeit perhaps reluctantly. They may not have wanted to provide them because they had a different philosophy—but they seemed to think that they had to respond to the people and provide services. Now they are slashing those services and selling off assets and they are still having to cut the public sector borrowing requirement by cutting public services further. It is not a fiddle or a Healeyite statistical error: it is a real attack on people's services.

The second thing that the Government felt that they had to do—it is important to return to this as everyone mentions it in the debate—was to attack the poorest in the country by putting a tax on yet another unavoidable use of resources: full VAT on fuel. People have been asking why Labour does not find another tax. There is nothing wrong with the idea of taxing people who received share options when they were senior officials of privatised industries—often, the same officials as those in charge when the industries were public. They got large salary hikes and, on top of that, share options. Those share options have become valuable—some of those officials are millionaires.

It is very strange that those same people were running the industry when this Government were saying how inefficient it was but that when they became private sector chief executives or chairmen or whatever they suddenly became extremely competent and talented entrepreneurs deserving of large salaries and very large slices of the available shares. Why not tax them?

I am told that taxing the share options and other gifts to those people in the privatised industries alone would raise enough money to enable us to keep VAT on fuel at 8 per cent. That seems to be a perfectly adequate transfer of responsibility away from those who are struggling to those who have made large amounts of money.

Mr. Butterfill *rose—*

Mr. Connarty: I noted that the hon. Gentleman said, in contradiction to his hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), the chairman of the all-party pensions group, that most people would not be worse off. His hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown said that most people would be 56p per week worse off even with the Government's compensation scheme.

Mr. Butterfill: I wanted to explore with the hon. Gentleman the idea of taxing options at the time at which they are granted. Of course, shares can go up or down, as he will appreciate. Suppose that the hon. Gentleman raised a tax on a gain which has not yet been realised—in other words, charged somebody up front before that person dispensed with the shares. Would the hon. Gentleman give him a rebate, with interest, if those shares were subsequently sold at a loss?

Mr. Connarty: The theory would be to tax people on the realisation of the asset. If people receive share options, after a certain number of years, they can capitalise on them. Those shares then have a value. Those people have share options which they can take up. They are taking up those options at the price that was offered on the market when the private sector got its hands on public assets. As we know, the Government's incompetence has meant that every privatised industry has been sold vastly under the market value on day one but that its value has increased very quickly—and then, over the years, has increased massively.

In fact, those taking up share options are getting the value of the share as it stands in the market when it is taken up by the chief executive or whoever was bribed with the offer, compared with the value at which the Government sold it. So in a sense such a tax would not only be a windfall tax: the Government would be taxing their own incompetence, which would be quite valuable.

Mr. Butterfill *rose—*

Mr. Connarty: I do not wish to get into a dialogue with the hon. Gentleman, but he obviously wishes to intervene.

Mr. Butterfill: I am puzzled by what the hon. Gentleman said. He said that the tax would be levied when the asset was realised. Of course, that is what happens now: we do not tax the gain until somebody gets the money by selling the shares. But I understand the hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends to be saying that they would levy a tax up front on a notional gain, before the asset was realised. In other words, a theoretical gain would be taxed.

Where would people get the money to pay such a tax, because they would not have it from the realisation of the shares? And what would happen if the share value went down subsequently? Would Opposition Members then repay the tax with interest?

Mr. Connarty: Although it is a very interesting theoretical debate, the question what the word "realises" means is worth looking at. If the share option is offered at, say, 100p a share, and three or four years later when people are allowed to take it up, it is worth 500p a share, that is the point at which those people would be taxed. Yes, that would mean that they would have to realise some of their vast windfall asset to pay their tax burden. There seems to be no unfairness in that at all.

[Mr. Connarty]

It would appear that the Government do not care that a pensioner knows that he or she cannot afford to pay VAT on fuel without cutting something else—without cutting expenses on food or other expenses, which are meagre at the moment. That does not seem to bother the Government or their supporters. Is it because the burden is spread among so many millions of pensioners that the Government do not have to look them in the eye and see the pain? I know that the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who is present, has told the pensioners that he sees their pain and is distressed about it. I hope that that pain is carried with him to the day on which we vote against the Government next week.

I received a delegation from Scotland yesterday and the day before, led by Mrs. Ina Craig, a retired nurse, whom I would wish to commend. She is the secretary of a local pensioners group. The members of that delegation spoke eloquently to members of the Scottish parliamentary Labour group, and to others who wished to be present about the real hardships that pensioners will face and the choices that they will have to make between putting the heating on or putting a cooker on.

It is a strange world. I was told by one of them that things have got so bad in the world of social security benefits under this Government that a cooker is now not considered to be an essential item of household furniture if one lives in an urban environment where fast-food shops are round about. People cannot even get a social fund loan for a cooker. But if people do have a cooker, they will have to choose whether to cook food or put on the heating because they will have to find extra money.

According to the figures given by the chairman of the all-party group on pensions, a Conservative Member, the deficit per pensioner per week will be 56p even after the compensation schemes. The deficit will be up to £3 per week for a pensioner couple, even with the compensation. Pensioners are having to take real-life decisions. They do not have to take theoretical decisions about how many millions of pounds or hundreds of thousands pounds they will have after their share options are realised and have to be taxed. Instead, they are having to worry about where they get the money for food and heating when the Government take VAT from them.

As I turn to the Chancellor, I am reminded of the story of the person who once asked whether Hitler was a bad or a good man and was told that he was good at the job he set himself. The Chancellor is good at his job. He wants to bring down the public sector borrowing requirement; he wants to cut expenditure; he wants to bring down inflation. There is some movement in that—there is no doubt about it. He cut £8 billion last year and is on for a target of £28 billion.

In that environment, why did the right hon. and learned Gentleman not say that we could be softer on the elderly sector of the community? Is it because the Government have another agenda? Do the Front-Bench spokesmen have to be tougher that anybody else in the Conservative party now to get any support for any future position? It would have been sensible and politically adept of the Chancellor to relax in this Budget—not to have put the 17.5 per cent. VAT on fuel; to have worked out another taxation strategy; even to have let borrowing go up slightly. The cost would not be so fantastic that it would affect the Government's calculation over the longer period. I do not understand why they did not do it. Is it because they are determined to go down in a suicide pact on one vote or another?

On the question of taxes, I had thought that the Conservative ranks always looked for the support of the middle income person. In fact, every analysis of the tax burdens placed on such people in the previous two Budgets and this year's Budget shows that Mr. and Mrs. Average will be hit. Some of the figures struck me as very interesting. Someone earning £14,000 a year will be £9.52 a week worse off under this Government. Someone earning £19,500, which is roughly what Mr. and Mrs. Average earn in the community in which I live, where we have quite high average earnings because of the petrochemical industry, would be £12.52 a week worse off.

Getting closer to the Mr. Average who socialises with Members of Parliament, someone earning £29,000—which is about what Members earn—would be £21.58 worse off a week. That sort of salary is usually a joint income in my community. Someone earning £40,000, a potential Conservative voter in most parts of the country other than in Scotland where people's income does not take away their social conscience, would be £26.74 a week worse off. Someone earning £60,000 would be £32.50 a week worse off. On earnings of £80,000, someone would be £38.26 worse off. Even someone earning £100,000—which must be natural Conservative-voter territory—would be £44.02 worse off.

Not only are the Conservatives attacking each other, which seems to be their favourite sport this season; they are attacking the people who have given them their present mandate and the mandate that they have held for the past two Parliaments. Tax is not something in respect of which the Chancellor is doing the Government any favours.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman has just referred to someone earning £100,000 a year. I suggest that that person is considerably well off and certainly does not move in the circles in which I move. The hon. Gentleman referred to the high levels of tax that such individuals are charged. In the past, the hon. Gentleman said that the Conservative party has not hit such people with high tax bills, but he is now arguing the reverse. There seems to be some confusion.

Mr. Connarty: When the hon. Member for Ayr speaks, there is always confusion—not just sometimes. The elements of tax are income tax, national insurance, VAT and other indirect taxes. There is no voter in the country who does not know that this Conservative Government are the Government of high taxation. All voters have got the message that indirect taxes have substituted for direct taxes and that we are carrying a higher and more unreasonable tax burden than our neighbours in Europe.

We are talking about incompetence. If the tax burden was meant to lead to investment in manufacturing to reclaim our manufacturing industry given that it has been almost destroyed by Conservative ideology, we would not mind. People would put up with that. However, people are fed up with paying high taxes because of the Government's failure and the fact that 5 million people who want to work are languishing on benefits or the dole—[HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] If hon. Members want to challenge my figure, they can do that later. I am interested in employment. I am carrying out a task for the

parliamentary Labour party in Scotland which has made me look closely at employment and unemployment figures. We can debate whether unemployment is at a certain level and whether investment is at the level that the Government claim it is or whether it is heading in the direction in which everyone else says it is heading, but the Government are not listening.

According to the Scottish analysis, a single parent will be £5 a week worse off. On average, a pensioner couple will be £2 a week worse off. A low-paid family will be £2.20 a week worse off and a higher-paid family will be £3.80 worse off. An average family on an average wage will be £1.15 a week worse off. A single person will be £2 a week worse off.

That is the result of this Budget. That is what the Conservatives have done in the Budget to the people whom I—perhaps falsely—thought they were trying to win round. The Conservatives must know that they have to win the people round because the Conservative party is not the electors' favourite party. The electorate will not wait long enough for the Government to get their act together and get the economy going.

I want to consider the real economy. The Chancellor has done something about inflation. My Opposition Front-Bench colleagues may not want to jump up and down about this because that could have created the headline: "Opposition Front Bench commends Chancellor". However, I believe that controlling inflation is a good thing. Inflation is not necessarily generated by the United Kingdom Government. It is created mainly by world forces and those who control oil prices and the prices of the raw materials that we used to get so cheaply when we exploited the world as our playground and as a source of cheap raw materials. When fair prices began to be charged, the British economy could not cope with that and we have been paying the price ever since.

There is an investment debate in respect of the real economy and I want to consider some of the statistics provided by the Government in their "Financial Statement and Budget Report". I presume that the Government did not put the statistics together on one side while they drew up the Budget. They must have collected the statistics at the same time as they drew up the Budget.

The most important point is the level of fixed investment in the economy. That is the measure of our ability not just of coping at the moment or taking advantage of the world upturn or the trade cycle or Germany's recovery from its depression and from its problem of overheating when it took in East Germany. According to page 27 of the Red Book, business investment was only 1.25 per cent. higher than it was a year ago. That is not enough to put our economy on an upward growth path. It is enough for us to turn over and take some advantage of the trade cycle, but until the upturn reaches 3 per cent., we will not be able to say that we are investing enough to be on a growth path.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) said earlier, we are slightly hiccuping up on a continuously downward trend. That is clear if we consider the statistics over a considerable period. There is clearly a downward trend in investment in this country. Chart 3.11 on page 27 of the Red Book shows that there has been a decline from 1989. According to that chart, the estimates suddenly take a sharp upturn for 1994 to 1996. However, there is no evidence that that is happening.

I attended a briefing with the Engineering Employers Federation a couple of weeks ago. The federation makes it clear that, in terms of investment,

"The 24 per cent. reduction in fixed investment"

by volume in the manufacturing industry since 1990 is a very significant trend. If we cannot get our manufacturing investment up, we can only eke out our spare capacity in the upturn. We must take the next step and jump out of the trough and begin to grow. There is no evidence that that is happening so far.

According to the federation's table on fixed investment in manufacturing and non-manufacturing, it is clear that engineering fell steadily from the third quarter of 1989. The latest figures available, that is for the first quarter of 1994, show the same downward trend. In engineering and non-manufacturing, there is a bit of a turn up after 1992.

What element has caused that? It may be a positive element. It may be possible to say, "Yes, we are doing something. Our manufacturing industry is turning up." However, that is actually happening in housebuilding. It is the same old trap for the Conservative party that was in evidence during the Lawson boom when the Government pumped up the economy which pumped up the housing sector. At the end of the day, after the Lawson boom, it went down like a deflated balloon.

Page 28 of that wonderful document, the Red Book, shows that Government fixed investment rose by 5.25 per cent. in 1993. Despite themselves, the Government are way ahead in percentage terms in investment in comparison with the rest of the economy, so what are the Government going to do? The Chancellor said that he was going to cut several hundred million pounds off the roads programme.

When that element of the roads programme switches to private investment, that will not be investment in new projects. It will be investment in exactly the same projects for which the Government should have been responsible. However, if they ever come off, it will be called new investment. I have never quite managed to work out why the Government are so pleased when they can do that. It is the same investment and it has the same result for the real economy.

What can we do? It is important that we consider what could have been done in the Budget to get out of the trough and to leap beyond that turnover percentage. The Engineering Employers Federation did an excellent job by making recommendations for the Government but the Government did not seem to pay much attention to them.

The EEF sent us all a brief and I have kept in touch with the federation in Scotland and in England for some time and I believe that the federation should have been listened to. The Engineering Employers Federation said:

"Inflation indexation of existing capital allowances for plant and machinery"

should have been brought in. It also suggested a

"100 per cent. capital allowances for the initial £200,000 of plant and machinery investment".

The Chancellor and others often talk about quality investment. They would leave it to companies: they are not given incentives so they pick the best projects in which to invest. That is rich coming from a Government who brought in the business expansion scheme, which was supposed to be the last marvellous incentive for industry. It brought about a massive, pumped-up level of housing investment. It did not create many more houses,

[Mr. Connarty]

but it created massive inflation in house prices. That was caused by a Government who were badly tailoring, badly guiding and badly constraining an investment package. The bubble burst. I bought a flat in London which was worth almost £20,000 less than was paid for it two years earlier. People could not get their equity back. They had to abandon their homes because their mortgage debts were worth more than their properties.

All that we needed to achieve quality investment was for the Chancellor to heed the suggestion of the Engineering Employers Federation and say that the proposal would apply only to plant and machinery and only to things that can be sold. Things that should have been done were not done, and things that should not have been done were done.

The Chancellor made much of employment levels. I was in the House in October when the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that we should not take account of people on benefit because there was a problem with that. We had statistics showing that 500,000 new people were on category E income support—that is, for disability, single parenthood and sickness—and that 2 million people were receiving that category of benefit who did not register as unemployed. We were told, "Don't look at that, look at the work force count."

I always like to consider matters that the Chancellor recommends, on the basis that he thinks that he is an intellectual, as my colleagues say, because he wears Hush Puppies. I have never liked Hush Puppies, but the Chancellor obviously favours them. I do not think that they are the mark of an intellectual. Perhaps they are the sign of someone who is locked in an era before people wore sensible shoes. However, the Chancellor told us to look at the employment count, so I have been looking at the employment count in the House of Commons research documents.

The 1994 figures show that there are 1,992,300 fewer people in the work force. That includes people in employment, the self-employed, Her Majesty's forces, and people on work-related Government training programmes. There are almost 2 million fewer people in employment now than there were in 1990 at the previous peak in unemployment in England and Wales. According to the Scottish statistics, there are 55,000 fewer people in employment in Scotland than there were in 1991.

The Chancellor says, "I don't mean that you should look at the work force count. I was only kidding. You should look at something in this wonderful document that the Government have produced." At page 31 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" we find that the labour force survey is mentioned. Much to my amazement, the right hon. and learned Gentleman told us in his Budget statement that there are 334,000 more people in employment in 1994 than there were in 1992-93.

We are always told that employers are closer to the Government and that they are the people whom the Government should consider. Their statistics are almost the same as those in the research documents of the House of Commons, which show that almost 2 million fewer people are employed in our economy. The balance of two to one is against the Chancellor. We must seriously consider how his policies and those of past Chancellors have affected employment. We have a £40 billion to £50 billion deficit in the public sector borrowing requirement because people are not employed. They are not contributing in taxation. They must live on benefits and other support. That is the crux of the problem in our economy, and it is closely linked with the statistics relating to investment levels in the United Kingdom economy.

Some of the employment measures that the Chancellor mentioned are deeply offensive. Once or twice, he mentioned the encouragement of low-paid employment—saying that we should actually encourage people to take low-paid employment. I do not see the virtue in that. I see a virtue in work and in employment. The Chancellor seems to be fixated on the idea that there should not be a national minimum wage. The Government wave Euro-banners which they hope will frighten the public and stampede them into voting for the Conservative party.

There is no evidence around the world that jobs are lost if people are paid a decent wage. I believe that Winston Churchill said that if we do not have wages councils and minimum wages, we will have poor employers at the cost of good employers. We have a strange system in which family credit means that poor employers who pay low wages are supported by taxpayers. Employees are paid low wages to keep them at an adequate standard of living, not a decent standard of living, while the employer is commended by the Government for creating low-paid employment. It is a very strange country indeed.

We heard the Chancellor say that exports are turning up. Nothing from the Engineering Employers Federation confirms that. Its analysis of exports and imports is that imports are increasing faster and staying ahead of exports in manufacturing. As the analysis is that fixed investment in manufacturing is not increasing in the productive and non-building sectors at the required speed, we will soon run out of capacity to compete with imports. We will suck in imports so that we can fulfil suppliers' demands even from our local economy. Certainly, in respect of products that we send to other countries, there will be a greater percentage of foreign input. That is the consequence of not getting back on a manufacturing track. The Chancellor stands rightly condemned for that.

The Engineering Employers Federation candidly says that, in 1993-94, we are having the benefit of a once-and-for-all effect of the devaluation of the pound in the autumn of 1992. When we are on a level playing field, we will fall badly behind our European and other world competitors.

There has been a sharp increase in electronic imports and an exceptionally high level of aerospace equipment imports. That is not to be commended, because they are supposed to be at the sharp end of high technology.

I shall give another statistic on the problem of fixed investment, as I want to place on the record the matters that the Government have failed to address. In 1971, more than 10 per cent. of our net domestic product was in net fixed investment. We are now talking about 5 per cent. The trend is clearly downward. There are little blips, but there is mostly a continually decreasing trend.

Having dealt with several points of interest to the economy, I shall refer to one or two matters that I found rather offensive. In fact, I probably shouted from a sedentary position yesterday, because it seemed that the Chancellor's housing benefit amendments attacked people at the poorest level. We know the rents that people must

bear. I place the statistics on the record because they are very important. Average local authority rents have risen by 35 per cent. since 1988. Housing association rents have doubled in the same period. Private sector rentals have risen so rapidly that the mean assured rent was £53.65 a week in 1993-94. Government pressure mounts to cut the housing benefit bill.

When I was the leader of a council, we went through the trauma of the Government switching support from bricks and mortar, to which everyone then had access, to support only for people who could prove that they were on low incomes. I always found it rather odd that, if I wished to buy a house, I could get mortgage interest tax relief on up to £30,000. People who had to pay rent had to prove that they were very poor before they could receive any state subsidy. I personally look forward to the day when there is no mortgage tax relief, because I believe that it should be replaced by a housing benefit for everyone. Those in the private and public sectors should gain some support for the principle of having a roof over people's heads. They should not be discriminated against on the basis of whether they are poor or not.

There have been eight amendments to eligibility for housing benefit to take people out of housing benefit. It is becoming more and more difficult to get an adequate level of housing benefit, and the latest attack will make it more difficult for more people.

I do not know why the Conservatives are doing what they are doing if they are looking to win an election. They appear to be attacking people who, at this moment, are in great difficulty anyway. If people with a mortgage become unemployed or are made redundant, it is a difficult trauma because they obviously thought that their standard of living was rising and thus went into the private sector.

The Chancellor announced that he is going to find a way of cutting support for such people, so from October 1995, if they take out a mortgage they will lose everything if they are made redundant. Those people will not get support from the Government in the way that others do at the moment. I think that that is a foolish move and one that will obviously deeply offend many of the people that the Government are looking to for support.

The Government have not managed to deal with the problem that they created with the explosion of the Lawson boom. A total of 160,000 people are in serious mortgage arrears in 1993-94 as a carry-over consequence of the Government's responsibilities in that period.

I want to make one or two comments about the effect on Scotland, because it seems to me that, as usual, Scotland will bear the brunt of the Government's attacks. The Scottish budget will go up by only £200 million to £14.3 billion—a rise of 1 per cent. That means in fact that the Scottish budget will be seriously cut.

That budget will be wholly inadequate in providing housing in Scotland. It means that—I know that the hon. Member for Ayr understands this—the effect of the local government reorganisation and transition costs added to that will cut available moneys for public services very severely.

The effect of the care in the community programme will not be paid for by the rise in funds available for councils in Scotland. There will be massive cuts in services in other areas so that community care can be brought in.

I want to make one special plea in relation to something about which the Chancellor has failed to do anything. I represent the port of Grangemouth. It received a very good submission from the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers about the Budget, which presumably went to the Chancellor as well but about which nothing was done.

The figures in the NUMAST submission show that in 1976 there were 1,614 ships under United Kingdom ownership. We are down to 258 ships in 1994. The age of those ships is now an average of 15.4 years, and only one fifth of our fleet are under 10 years old. The average in the world is one third of fleets 10 years old or less. We are not the great seafaring nation that we were. We are not looking seriously at the needs of those who work in shipping and exporting and those who get the added value.

Currie Line, the firm at the port that I know best, has to lease German shipping in order to ship materials from the United Kingdom. That is the pattern now. Germany has put in place a financing method whereby small investors can get together to form a consortium, buy into shipping and then lease it out to the world. The British—the great sailing nation of the world—now have to rent German ships in order to export British goods. That has become a shame on this Government and they must look at that matter very seriously.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): My hon. Friend has raised a very important point which, as far as I can see, the Government continue to ignore. Future projections regarding shipping investment are tremendous and the increases in investment in shipping that will be made over the next decade will mean that this country will be left far behind the rest of the world. We are a maritime nation and rebuilding the British merchant fleet will not only mean a great deal to Britain's economy but will improve the viability of shipyards in Tyneside, Merseyside and Clydeside. The skills that they have accrued over many years could be adapted to future shipbuilding to give this country a great role to play in the industry's future. My hon. Friend has raised a very important point.

Mr. Connarty: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. I do not represent anything that could be called a shipbuilding area; as he represents Liverpool, Garston, my hon. Friend obviously has a greater knowledge of the industry than I do.

As a Scot, I can plead one unique statistic to quote. The largest passenger-carrying fleet in Britain today is the MacBrayne fleet, which plies its trade between the islands of Scotland. It was always seen as a joke by the great liner and shipping companies of the past but it has now become the single largest passenger-carrying fleet in Britain. That is a shameful indictment of the Government.

I conclude by saying to the Conservatives that the Budget did not help anyone. It was not a boring Budget; I am prepared to be bored by someone who is being rational and is showing a little sensitivity. Often when people talk about responsive policies they do not do so in histrionic terms. It was a Budget which showed that the Government did not really care about anything apart from their own wish to be re-elected and to store up some goodies in the cupboard to dish out before the next election.

[Mr. Connarty]

I think that the public have twigged that. They took the pill last time; they said, "We'll give them one more chance," and they have been seriously let down. They have been betrayed on the promises about VAT and they have been betrayed on all the promises about the economy. It is no longer enough to stagger along; if Britain wishes to recover, it needs to get off its knees. I am afraid that the Chancellor did not in any way give us the incentive to do that.

8.26 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): I was absolutely shocked by the speech of the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have never heard such a shallow, ill-thought-out sham from someone who poses as the chief economic spokesman of the Labour party.

In fairness to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), at least he tried to put a constructive argument together. However, it was heavy going following much of what he said. When he talked about a housing subsidy for everyone, I am afraid that he lost me completely.

I agree with the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)—it would have been very nice to hear a little more about what the shadow Chancellor has in mind for the economy. Instead, we heard something—it is a pity that you were not hear to listen to it, Mr. Deputy Speaker—which was more like a musical turn than a serious speech. He failed to recognise that the economy does not stand still and that circumstances and conditions change. Instead he bleated about the Government not having made these changes years ago. The fact is that conditions change.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we should plunder funds from the sale of council houses. He said that this was the great salvation: everyone will be in work if we dig into that money. That is utterly ludicrous. He does not seem to realise that the money is invested to keep down the rate of council tax. What will happen to council taxes if we spend all the money which has been squirrelled away from the sale of council houses?

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) said that there was fear in the countryside. I believe him. I think that people are frightened by the horrendous thought that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) might one day take the place of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has just come into the Chamber.

Thoughtful commentators recognise the value of my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget. Large employers and many other people have commented that it is quite a dull Budget, with nothing much for the larger employers. Today when larger companies invest, information technology means that they invest in plant and machinery rather than in people. But I have heard small employers say on the radio—it is rather refreshing to hear favourable comments about the Budget on the radio—that my right hon. Friend's measures will help to create more jobs for the long-term unemployed.

So I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's speech. What he has achieved by sticking to principles is excellent. I believe that principles in political life are essential. We have principles in the Conservative party and we stick by them. They include opportunity, ownership, low direct taxation, helping those who are in need and promoting and endorsing the principle that the user should pay through value added tax. I agree with that.

In recent years, whenever VAT has been discussed, we have been reminded that food, rent, fares and children's clothes are zero-rated. We always took some pride in the fact that fuel for domestic heating was also zero-rated. I applauded that. I am sorry at this stage to have to sound a note of discord. To me, VAT on domestic heating and lighting costs goes against the grain. Heat and light are essential. Every family in the land is affected by the tax. People have no way of choosing to avoid it. I like indirect taxation because, if people do not want to pay the tax, they do not spend the money in the first place. They can save it. With VAT on heating, there is no way of avoiding paying.

I applaud the extra money that has been made available for the insulation of homes. It costs a lot to insulate homes, yet, I am sad to say, those who live in rented accommodation may not have an opportunity to make use of the money that has been made available. Much of the rented accommodation that needs to be insulated is in Labour-controlled boroughs. Those authorities will not make money available to take advantage of the opportunity to conserve energy in such homes.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman knows more about farming and investing in Lloyd's than running public authorities. As a former vice-chair of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, I assure him that the heatwise, heatsave and energy saving schemes came from local authorities. They did not come from central Government Departments. They were all introduced by local authorities, which have asked for funding. They asked not for a piffling £10 million a year but for a great deal more to get up to the speed of the rest of the continent.

Mr. Marland: I have already commented on the hon. Gentleman's belief that everyone should receive a housing benefit, so I regard with some scepticism his point that the idea of insulating homes came from local authorities. I am sure that they would like to join in with that, but the point that I made and which I stick by is that the landlord has to make a contribution if people who want to insulate their home live in rented accommodation.

Sadly, as we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), too many Labour-controlled local authorities have large debts and cannot come up with the money to pay their share of the cost of insulating their properties. That is a disgrace. It is a fair indication of the way in which the Labour party, whether potentially in national government or in local government, talks a great deal but effects poor stewardship of our affairs.

I approve of the aim and ambition of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to hand back considerable sums of money to help pensioners and those on income support with their heating costs. However, I am worried about those who struggle to earn whatever money they can and are just above the threshold. They are on low incomes, but their income puts them just above the threshold. They will receive no help with the extra cost of heating.

In my constituency, pay levels are pretty modest. I would have liked the Budget to keep everyone in the Forest of Dean warm on cold winter nights. Furthermore, massive rebates go against the principles of a Government

who believe in deregulation. Rebates are well intended but costly. There will be some winners and an awful lot of losers.

The proposal reminds me of selective employment tax, which was a muddle created by the Labour party. I remember wrestling with it when I was trying to run my farm—to which the hon. Member for Falkirk, East referred. Selective employment tax was a muddle and a mess. We should not go down that path.

I have found in my constituency that there is a considerable problem with communication about increases in the pension to compensate for VAT on heating costs. If the proposals go ahead, which I am sure they will, and increases in pensions are given, the Government should make more effort to ensure that pensioners understand precisely what proportion of their increase comes from the compensation package to give them more help with their heating costs.

The only people who will be genuinely pleased with the system of enormous rebates are those who will administer them. I believe that we have far too many administrators already and not enough people adding value and creating wealth. We have too many people redistributing other people's efforts. We have learnt that the economy is going much better than forecast. That is a great credit to my right hon. and learned Friend's stewardship of our affairs.

However, it is high time that we demonstrated to the citizens of Britain that we want them to share in the success of this Administration. It is a great shame that it has not been possible to drop the second tranche of VAT so that a little warmth could flow into every home in the land and people could share our success.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor rightly asked where those who suggested that the second tranche should be dropped would get the money. I made some inquiries this morning in the statistical section of the House of Commons Library. I was told that the revenue from the second tranche would amount to £1,500 million. That is the figure that my right hon. and learned Friend has used on the radio. From that we have to deduct the refunds to pensioners and others, which amount to £600 million. That leaves a net gain of £900 million. From where could we obtain that amount?

The increase in road fuel tax will yield £1.33 billion. I believe that we should have put another penny per litre on road fuel tax and let pensioners and everyone else share in the recovery of our economy. The rest of the money could have been mopped up from the general economic recovery. That is what I suggested that we should do. I hope that by now I have made clear my view on the imposition of the second tranche of VAT.

I should like to move now from one struggle to another. This struggle involves small businesses and modest property owners. The problem that I want to bring to the attention of my hon. Friend the Paymaster General is highlighted in a small town in my constituency called Cinderford. I make no apology for being parochial because the town demonstrates the problem. Sometimes things are easier to understand if a real example is put before us.

Cinderford was once the busiest town in the Forest of Dean. All the local activity revolved around it. However, over time other towns in the district—Lydney, Coleford and Newent—have flourished while Cinderford has declined. That small town now has far too many empty shops and offices. It looks rather dreary.

In order to do something about the problem, the mayor of Cinderford, Mr. Graham Morgan, and I have put together a task force of local business men and wealth creators. Graham Morgan is a socialist. He and I have decided that we will put our party differences to one side and work together for the benefit of the citizens of Cinderford. It may interest hon. Members, especially Labour Members, to know that Graham Morgan's peer group in the Labour party in the Forest of Dean is extremely cross with him for working with the wealth creators and me to solve the problems of the town. I get the impression that too often they would rather leave the town in its current difficult circumstances and do little about them.

So poor Graham Morgan has been criticised by his peer group. I respect him for standing up to that criticism and doing what he can to help out.

Mr. Connarty: May I suggest, to assist the hon. Gentleman, that he should go to Stirling and talk to people there? It has a Conservative council because of a strange quirk of the electoral dice. He will find a pattern through the 1980s similar to the one that he describes. He might find some good examples in which there was no antagonism between the parties because the purpose was local wealth creation.

Mr. Marland: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that suggestion. I appreciate it, but I shall now stay with my speech and I shall not give way again.

I do not see why what I suggest for Cinderford should not work for Stirling as well. One of the biggest problems that has emerged during the past five years is the fact that 50 per cent. of the uniform business rate is payable on empty shops and offices after three months.

The charge represents a huge drain on the owners, many of whom are people of modest means who saved like mad to buy the property, but find that instead of being an asset it is turning into a millstone around their necks. They have no money to paint the shop front, to do it up inside or to promote their premises and attract a new tenant. The uniform business rate is such a drain on their resources that they often find that they must dig into other savings accumulated during their working lives so that they do not get into trouble with the local authority. Banks now regard shop premises not as the asset that they should be but as a possible liability that may drag them and the person who borrowed money to buy them into considerable trouble.

We must encourage small business people. The imposition of 50 per cent. of the uniform business rate on shops and offices that have been empty for more than three months is a disgrace. Local authorities have no discretion over the rates and the situation is causing much resentment.

When I took the matter up with the Department of the Environment, I was told that owners of such premises had to pay 50 per cent. of the rate in case they wanted to call out the fire brigade or the police force. That might happen in some unfortunate circumstance, but it seems over the top to charge 50 per cent. of the UBR in case someone

[Mr. Marland]

has to call out the fire brigade. I should have thought that 5 per cent., or a maximum of 10 per cent., would be much more in order.

The anger of shop and office owners is compounded when they discover that the owners of empty factories and warehouses do not have to live by the same rules. They do not have to pay any uniform business rate if their premises are empty for more than three months. It is utterly wrong that one proprietor should have to pay when the other does not. What happens if an empty factory is vandalised or catches fire? Would their owners not call the fire brigade? The owners of empty factories should pay the same as shop owners, or better still, those who own empty shops should pay nothing at all.

In Cinderford, to give the town a boost and make the high street look busier, the owners of empty shops are willing to let other traders dress their shop windows. It gives the town a better look as they try to stimulate business in their shops. That is a generous and a good idea, but there is a problem. The full amount of uniform business rate becomes payable if the windows are dressed. The local authority has little or no discretion in the matter. If it did and the district auditor found out, he would pounce.

A little local initiative is being strangled at birth and a shop owner who once thought of his or her property as an asset has found that it has turned into a liability. I am sure that a similar problem exists in Stirling.

Will my hon. Friend the Paymaster General reflect on what I said about the UBR and its impact on the local business community? We want businesses both large and small to flourish, but we are seriously penalising those citizens who have made a commitment, saved up to buy their commercial property and find that it has turned into a millstone. Will my hon. Friend discuss that scourge—UBR on empty premises—with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to find out whether they can come up with something practical and instant between them to help our small businesses?

8.43 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): First, I congratulate the Chancellor of the Exchequer—Conservative Members may be a little surprised about that, but I congratulate him on his sheer brass neck.

We are witnessing a classic Conservative strategy: first create the problems and then claim the credit when they begin to be less of a problem. The Conservative party and the Government would love people to forget the past 15 years and to concentrate on what is happening now. The Government talk about reducing unemployment and give statistics and figures that everyone knows are massaged out of existence, but they want the people to forget that they trebled unemployment. We are here to ensure that they do not.

The Government want the country to forget that they murdered 30 per cent. of our manufacturing industry and that—as we heard from my hon. Friends—they are continuing the policies that did that. Conservative Members continually talk about manufacturing industry, but they have only to look at the statistics to realise that, in spite of what the Chancellor said, our manufacturing industry continues to decline.

The Government create the problem, hope that the country will forget that fact, and then claim some credit for any marginal improvement that may take place. There has been an improvement, they are taking the credit for it, and saying that it is a result of deliberate Government policy. They want the country to forget what happened on black Wednesday and the fact that that selfsame Government deliberately kept to a policy that slaughtered our economy and destroyed whole tranches of our manufacturing base year in and year out, until they were thrown out of the exchange rate mechanism. Of course, we know what happened after that.

We are looking at a blip, but the trends are there for us to see. We do not intend to allow the Government to get away with it. We do not intend to allow them to con the people into thinking that the past 15 years do not matter and that the only thing that does matter is what the Chancellor said yesterday. The Government know what they are about and have put their case subtly and ably. They want to concentrate on the here and now and they want the country to forget what has happened in the past 15 years. I believe that the people understand that.

I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) when he talked of principles. I happen to agree. I know the hon. Gentleman well and was glad that he raised that issue. Where was the principle in a Government who told the country, "We have no intention of raising taxes"? Where was the principle when the Prime Minister, when challenged, deliberately told the people that there would be no extension of, or increase in, value added tax?

The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West and his right hon. and hon. Friends preach to us and to the country about principles, but they should examine theirs first. If they did, I am sure that we would hear no more lectures about principles. We remember January and March 1992, when the Prime Minister gave commitments to the people on taxation and VAT. We shall continue to remind them of those commitments and to ram them down the throats of the Conservatives at every possible opportunity, so we want no lectures from Conservative Members about principles.

I wish to refer to a comment made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), which was probably a part of the Conservative party's strategy to convince the country that everything in the garden is rosy. The hon. Gentleman said that pensioners would be better off as a result of the VAT increase. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures, but no statistic can justify that statement.

Let us take that logic a bit further. When the Chancellor extends VAT to passenger fares, books, children's clothes and possibly food—as I predict that he will—presumably hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West will tell pensioners and the British public not to worry because, although the Government are imposing extra taxes, they will be better off.

The Government have failed to understand, and continue to do so, that pensioners and the low-paid do not believe them when they talk about taxation and about the meagre compensation package with which they try to alleviate the effects of VAT increase. They do not believe the Government—not because of how much VAT that compensation package may offset in their bills—but because you told untruths. *[Interruption.]* I nearly did say

the dreaded word. They do not believe the Government because you went to the country and gave promises which you cynically broke at the first opportunity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I hesitate to intervene, but the hon. Gentleman keeps referring to "you". The Chair is responsible for none of the things of which the hon. Gentleman is speaking. He should refer to Conservative Members.

Mr. Stevenson: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am still on a learning curve, and I apologise if I gave offence to any right hon. or hon. Member.

I return to what is a very important point. The people do not trust the Government, not because they have produced a compensation package which they keep pushing, but because the Government broke their promises. That is why people are angry, and that is the reason why the Government will never again be trusted, particularly when they talk about taxation.

Another element of the imposition of VAT which is a real source of anger is that, of all the taxes that the Government could have chosen to reduce the PSBR, they chose the most regressive tax. They chose the tax that will hit pensioners and the low-paid worst.

The Opposition have been challenged by the Government to talk about alternatives. The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West pointed to one alternative, and there are many others. So let us have no more talk from Government Members about there being no alternatives. Hon. Members know that there are alternatives—what is missing is the political will to address them.

I shall give the House an example of a matter which the Government have not yet addressed, but which I hope that they will address during the debate. When the electricity companies were privatised, they were given the national grid, which was valued at £1 billion. They are now about to dispose of it, and its value is about £4.5 billion. What are the Government doing about that? Are they simply going to wring their hands and say—as the Prime Minister often says—"It is nothing to do with us"?

The national grid was a public asset which was cynically given away by the Government. The people who are in charge of that ex-public asset are about to get a massive windfall. Are not the Government even prepared, in the public interest, to look at that windfall to see what can be done with it? Nobody in the regional electricity companies has done anything for it—the windfall will be a gift to them from the Government. Christmas is coming early for the regional electricity companies.

The Government and the Chancellor have made their usual attack on public expenditure. I was interested to hear the Chancellor talking about how public expenditure would be cut, and I remembered that that was the same Chancellor who sent a letter saying that, between now and the end of the decade, the European Union budget was to increase in volume terms by 16 per cent. There we have the hypocrisy of the Government and the Chancellor. On the one hand, public expenditure is to be cut drastically in this country. On the other, the Government are perfectly prepared to increase the European Union budget in volume terms by 16 per cent.

Where will those cuts fall? Housing is one example. In my constituency, the waiting list for social housing increased by 12 per cent. last year, and the housing investment programme submitted by Stoke-on-Trent showed that it needs to double its provision of social housing to meet the demand. There is no chance of that at all. People, including young couples, who are waiting for housing will get no joy at all from the Government.

If I have one major criticism of the Budget, it is that I did not hear the Chancellor, or any of his hon. Friends, address chronic short-termism. It is a fact that we suffer from short-termism. Banks and financial institutions want their returns quick and high. If one tries to invest over a period of five years, one is not likely to get any positive response from them. Short-termism is rife, and the Budget does not address it at all.

Share dividends are going up, and average dividends have risen by between 8 and 10 per cent., yet investment has dropped to levels equivalent to those of 1979. We have billions of pounds which could be used in positive way, but they are not being used in that way because of short-termism. The Chancellor of the Exchequer did not address that issue at all. One can conclude only one of two things—he does not recognise the problem or he is not bothered about it. If the Chancellor has taken either of those two views, the Budget will fail the country for that, if for no other, reason. Unless we get to grips with short-termism, we shall not get the economy moving in the way in which we want it to.

I shall conclude by making a few remarks about the Government's frustration at the lack of the feel-good factor. I know why that factor does not exist in my constituency or in the midlands region—Severn Trent Water has just announced another 750 job losses, and job losses in our manufacturing capacity are affecting people in my constituency. They do not have the feel-good factor because the Government's policies—in spite of what we are told—are simply not working in a way that will positively affect the ordinary people of this country. They still believe that their jobs are not secure and that their children and other young people have no future.

The Budget has done nothing to address those fundamental issues and until the Government do so there will be no feel-good factor, no matter how hard their propaganda machine tries to convince people that they should feel good. The Government cannot continue to tell people that; they can only produce the policies to engender that feeling. For years the Government have failed to deliver such policies and, as a result of the Budget, they will continue to fail to do so.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have been listening with considerable interest to the hon. Gentleman, who represents an area where manufacturing industry is important. I accept that there is a lack of a feel-good factor and that the Chancellor has done very little to help the manufacturing industry. He also failed to discourage short-termism. Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that there are many good economic indicators? For example, unemployment has fallen by nearly 500,000, the rate of inflation is at a 27-year low and our growth rate, at 4 per cent., is the highest in Europe. Surely those indicators herald well for the future.

Mr. Stevenson: I can tell the hon. Gentleman quite openly that I do not accept the unemployment figures because they are false. I said earlier, however, that some improvements are apparent in the economy, but as I pointed out, they have nothing to do with Government

[Mr. Stevenson]

policy. The Government have benefited from them almost by accident and the hon. Gentleman knows that as well as anyone else.

We could make a start on improving the economy if, next Tuesday, right hon. and hon. Members of the Conservative party joined us in voting down the second stage of the VAT increase. That would force the Government to rethink their strategy and perhaps we could then make a start on getting the country back to work.

8.59 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): Budget days are great occasions in the parliamentary year, but in any modern economy people would be wise not to overestimate the effects that a Chancellor or a Finance Minister can have upon the economy in the short term, or even the degree of accuracy that may be attributed to any forecasts that are given. The summer economic statement, which the Chancellor presented to the House only four months ago, offers an admirable example of the difficulty of forecasting with accuracy. He forecast that growth in the current year would run at 2.5 per cent., but in the Budget statement that he produced yesterday that forecast had been revised to a growth expectation of 4 per cent. for the current year.

I certainly accept that bad Chancellors and bad Governments can harm an economy, but I believe that the best Chancellors work with the grain of the domestic economy and take into account global economic developments.

There is some pessimism in the country about Britain's prospects, but I think that we have a great deal to be optimistic about, because Britain's performance has improved markedly. The world is moving in Britain's direction, because the policies that we advocated in the 1980s, based on free markets and privatisation, are the very policies that are creating success across the global economy. Free markets are working well; 10 years ago just 1 billion people worked in the global free market system, but now that number has risen to 5 billion people. The global economy has changed markedly, but it has done so in the United Kingdom's direction and to our advantage.

I welcome the Chancellor's efforts to reduce the Budget deficit projections for the coming years. I also welcome the fact that he has endeavoured to cut increases in public expenditure. In the five years to March 1994, public expenditure in the United Kingdom increased by £96.1 billion. If hon. Members take note of that figure they will appreciate that taxes have had to be increased to pay for that substantial increase in public expenditure. I do not remember any Opposition Member, be it the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), or whoever, arguing against those public expenditure increases.

I welcome the reductions that the Chancellor has made in future public expenditure plans. I note in particular that that expenditure is set to reduce, according to next year's forecast, by £8 billion. My right hon. and learned Friend is now projecting a reduction in public expenditure of 0.8 per cent. in real terms next year. That sounds like a pretty tough Budget, but I would draw the attention of hon. Members to last year's Red Book, in which the Chancellor predicted a reduction in the control total of 1.3 per cent. in real terms for the current year.

This year's Red Book shows that the control total for the current year has increased by 1.4 per cent. in real terms. On public expenditure, there has been a 2.7 per cent. swing between what the Chancellor forecast and what has been delivered. That difference accounts for about £6 billion. Therefore, scope remains for ensuring that departmental budgets are drawn more tightly, and that expenditure is firmly controlled.

I welcome the comments of the Chancellor about reducing the running costs of Government; that is a sector in which a great deal of effort needs to be made, and in which the number of civil servants has expanded quite a lot over the years. The Chancellor has set a flat Budget for running costs in the coming years. I think that he should go further, to ensure that projections are achieved and running costs fall. It is essential that Government Departments and agencies produce projections for their manpower levels for the coming three or four years, and that the Government ensure that those manning reductions are achieved. Much needs to be done to improve the Government's management techniques, and to ensure that that is carried through to the agencies.

The rate of growth in the economy for the current year is estimated to be 4 per cent. That is very strong growth for the UK economy. The Chancellor yesterday said that he would adopt a "neutral" budget stance. I think that neutrality may not always be enough and that, when growth in the British economy is so strong, further tightening on the public expenditure front in addition to what is in the Red Book would have been welcome.

In the past two years, monetary policy has been one of our outstanding economic successes. The Chancellor and his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), have established a domestic monetary framework that will ensure that we can achieve low inflation in the United Kingdom. Hon. Members will remember that one of the reasons that was advanced for our membership of the exchange rate mechanism was that we could not achieve an effective domestic monetary framework—that we needed an external guide to achieve low inflation. We have now shown that we can do that in our domestic economy, and we should be proud of it.

Floating exchange rates have worked well in the past two and a half years. They worked extremely well from 1979 to 1986, a period of great economic success for the Conservative Government, and I think that, as long as we hold true to floating exchange rates, economic success for the Conservative Government will prevail.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend referred to a monetary policy that has been extremely effective. Does he agree that the Chancellor said that he might have to increase interest rates again? Is he aware that the inflationary pressures in the economy are not domestic pressures on the economy but external pressures resulting from the price of raw materials, over which we have no control? Does he accept that it would be devastatingly damaging for manufacturing industry if interest rates were increased again?

Mr. Legg: I think that inflationary pressures in the economy are well subdued, and that significant increases

in interest rates should not take place. As I said earlier, a tighter fiscal stance would probably have helped to achieve that.

The Red Book has plenty of good economic news in it, especially on the export side. In the current year, exports have increased by about 8.25 per cent. It is extremely good news that export-led growth is emerging.

The report of the Panel of Independent Forecasters, submitted to the Chancellor in November, reflects that dramatic growth in exports. The panel noted that, in July and August 1994, the volume of exports to countries outside the European Community was about 10.2 per cent. greater than the comparable level in 1993, and about 21.1 per cent. greater than the 1992 averages. We are achieving good increases in export volumes. Paragraph 3.53 of the Red Book shows that invisible exports are also growing strongly, and that there was a sharp increase to a surplus of £3.5 billion in the first half of this year.

Earnings from overseas investments are at a record level of more than £4 billion a year. That shows the British economy at its best. Britain is a global trading nation and a global investor, and the changes in the world economy are going Britain's way. We are able to invest successfully in the fastest-growing economies and are directing our exports to those economies. I welcome the changes in Export Credits Guarantee Department cover because they are in line with the endeavours of private manufacturers to strengthen Britain's economy.

I congratulate the Chancellor on reducing public expenditure compared with GDP. It is to come down from 43 per cent. in the current year to 41 per cent. by the end of this Parliament. Public spending under each expenditure heading is being kept flat, is reducing or is increasing by less than the rate of growth in the economy as a whole. The economy is growing at 4 per cent., and, with one notable exception, public expenditure under every heading is increasing by less than that. That exception is the UK contribution to the European Community. The Government have committed themselves, and consider it a high priority to make payments to the EC in excess of the rate of growth in our economy.

Overall, public expenditure is moving in the right direction. The Chancellor had little scope for taxation measures, but those on national insurance contributions and personal allowances are welcome. I was encouraged by his comments on simplification of the tax system, and I endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) who pleaded for a root and branch reform of capital gains with, hopefully, a tapering system replacing the present complication and confusion.

The Chancellor has provided the right framework, with tighter control, and an unequivocal acceptance of Britain's global economic interests, which should deliver prosperity and success to the British people.

9.12 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I think that it was Harold Wilson who said that a week is a long time in politics. A year in politics is a lifetime, and it is easy for hon. Members to forget last year's Budget in which the Chancellor had two key requirements. The first was to reduce the enormous deficit and the second was to ensure that any taxation changes did not harm the recovery. At that time many people were concerned about whether the Budget judgment would prove right.

It is pleasing to note, and we should never forget, that the past 12 months have been a period of economic success. In that time the economy has turned round. Growth has been 4 per cent. and although some people think that is a little too high, I do not. The public finances have been brought into much better shape. Therefore, last year's Budget was a great success. Likewise, this time next year this Budget will have proved to be a great success.

Last year the Chancellor was rightly tough on public spending when he reduced planned growth. I say that deliberately because my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) rightly said that when politicians talk about cuts in public spending they mean cuts in proposed increases which, of course, are much easier to make than real cuts. This time last year taxes were put up to try to put Britain's budget on an even keel. Therefore, this year, it was obviously right also to try to keep public spending on a tight rein.

It is easy for Opposition Members to suggest that we should increase spending here or not have this tax there, but we should not forget that the public sector borrowing requirement planned for next year will still be £21 billion and be increasing our national debt. Therefore, we cannot take a relaxed view of the PSBR. Quite rightly, the Chancellor judged, and I am sure that most would agree with him, that it would not be appropriate to reduce taxes when public finances are in their present situation.

The Budget provides the opportunity to continue to build on the strong foundation that has now been laid for our future prospects. We have low inflation and we have growth, and for two years running growth will be higher than the level of inflation, a situation that we rarely achieve in the management of the economy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) rightly pointed out that the Government's key role is to create a stable macro-economic framework which enables businesses to get on with their job, which is to produce the goods and services that people wish to buy here and overseas.

Opposition Members talk a lot about investment, but the reality is that businesses invest only if they believe that there is an opportunity to sell more goods and services. They do not invest simply because Governments or Opposition Members say that investment is a good thing; they invest if they know that they are likely to sell what they produce.

As was pointed out earlier, there is a double edge to the sword of investment. In many areas, more investment will lead to more of the product being produced but with a reduced labour force. It does not necessarily follow that increased investment leads to increased employment. That is one of the problems for all modern industrial economies.

The key is for Governments to keep out of the way and let businesses produce their products. That is why all the initiatives, such as deregulation and freeing up the labour market, are important, but equally important is the need to ensure that the tax burden on businesses is not too

[Mr. David Congdon]

great. Last year's Budget went a long way towards helping businesses and that is one reason for the growth in the economy during the past year.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Congdon: I would very much like to, but I am short of time.

This year's Budget rightly took the view that something had to be done about the revised business rates and that has led to £600 million of extra expenditure there. I am pleased to see that that threshold has increased and that various other measures have been taken.

At one stage it was predicted that the Budget deficit would be £50 billion in 1993-94. We now understand that it reached a level of about £45 billion. Much has been said about how we arrived at that situation, much of it wrong. Of course, a lot was the result of the recession which meant that some expenditure on cyclical social security rose. But equally importantly, tax revenues were down by £20 billion in real terms between 1990-91 and 1993-94.

It is equally fair to point out that about half of that deficit was the result of growth in spending which was welcomed by all hon. Members. We did not hear many Opposition Members complain when spending on health was increased in real terms by £4 billion, on education by £3 billion and on Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales by £4 billion. We have never ever heard from Opposition Members where they would cut public spending because, in reality, they would like to see it increased continually.

The trend for public expenditure has been continually to increase. One only has to look at page 134 of the Red Book to see that it normally increases year on year. It rose vastly from the late 1980s, but initially that growth was masked by buoyant tax revenues. Once they declined, there was a high deficit. It is critical that we never find ourselves in that situation again, which is why I welcome the determination of my right hon. and learned Friend, despite the difficulties, to rein back public expenditure.

Despite the tight settlement, I am pleased to see growth in key areas. Much has been said about the health service, but few people have commented that as a result of not clawing back the excess provision made for inflation, which was lower than forecast, NHS expenditure this financial year will grow 3.75 per cent. in real terms. That follows significant growth in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

The Budget provides for another 1 per cent. growth in the next financial year, and in education as well. That is the way to frame a Budget—rein back less necessary expenditure, such as that on administration to which my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West referred. That will provide the freedom to provide growth in areas where it will be most useful. The NHS has a good record of expenditure growth—70 per cent. in real terms since 1979, and significant increases since 1991.

It ill behoves Opposition Members to complain, particularly in respect of community care, of a shortage of funds when social service departments throughout the country have enjoyed more growth than ever before. It is about time that they got their act together.

I warmly support the Budget and look forward to saying next year that it embodied the right judgment. I am sure that Britain will enjoy continued growth in future years.

9.21 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): It is interesting to sit through a large part of a debate and hear different ideas of reality. Several hon. Members claimed to deal with the real world, but their worlds seemed far from those that our constituents face.

The hon. Members for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) said how pleased they were that civil service administration is being cut. Their speeches seemed to be based mainly on press releases and they did not seem to have examined the fine detail. Red Book figures for the health service show anything but a real increase in spending of any note this year, and there will be a decrease next year. That is another broken election pledge.

In so many ways, the Budget is dishonest. It is aimed at a short-term fix for the Chancellor and his troubled party, rather than at devising long-term solutions for the economy and the British people. Whatever the Government may like to think, the electorate have not been fooled and will not be fooled. A former Conservative Member of Parliament who now holds a senior post in the Conservative party said:

"What we are saying is completely at odds with their experience."

There have been too many broken promises and wasted opportunities and too much public money has been squandered.

We have had many lectures from the Conservatives about our wish for more public spending but, in the past year, we have identified many spheres where public money has been squandered on the Government's ideological fantasies. Their latest escapade involves a private sector hospital in Scotland, which has not been bailed out although the Government intend to put a further £30 million into it to try to rescue something. It is a waste of money that could and should have been spent elsewhere.

The Budget gave the Government the opportunity to remedy some of their worst errors. The Chancellor was pressed to think again by some Conservative Back Benchers about what people regard as his most heinous crime—his failure to cancel the proposed increase in VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. Instead, he claimed that he was introducing a wonderful rise in the compensation available but, if one examines the figures, one finds that there is no such rise. The amount that pensioners will receive is no more than they should have expected last week; there is to be no rise over and above what they had already been told.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) has made it clear that he finds the compensation package inadequate. I hope that the Paymaster General will prove that he is listening to what Back Benchers are saying but I am confident that he will not. I therefore hope that the hon. Member for Kemptown will join us in our genuine attempt—[HON. MEMBERS: "Genuine?"] Yes, genuine. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join us in our efforts to ensure that the Government learn to listen to people outside.

The Government offered no new money. Instead, the Chancellor gave us a cynical publicity stunt, of which he should be ashamed. Whatever he may think about that stunt, he should realise that it will not work because people do not trust the Government any more. However, at least he did not try to follow the example of his predecessor, who first announced the new tax and tried to tell us that it was a green tax imposed in response to the Rio summit. I suppose that we should be grateful for that.

The increase in support for insulation schemes is so derisory that it will probably create more problems than it will solve. The Chancellor announced that he was making available an additional £10 million for the scheme, which, I understand, will, on current costings, insulate approximately 60,000 more homes. There are already 90,000 homes on the waiting list, and in some areas there is a six-month backlog.

The reality is that, far from being a wonderful effort to help people to pay the increase in VAT, the Chancellor's action will merely raise people's expectations. People will apply for the grant but the organisations that will deal with it tell me that their credibility will be undermined when they have to push people back down the queue. It is no surprise that people just do not believe what the Government say.

Let us think again. It is important to remember what the Government have said—I know that they do not like us to do this—and then to see how they have done something quite different. The Conservatives have, again and again, yesterday and today, proclaimed themselves to be the party of low taxation. They obviously did not like hearing the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes we did."] I hope that Conservative Members enjoyed them and that they learned from them, too.

The Conservatives cannot continue to say, in whatever way they want, that their instinct is for low taxation and then take no notice of their instincts, their words or anything else. The Conservative party said in its manifesto:

"We are the only party that understands the need for low taxation."

This Government have raised taxes by more than any other Government this century and they have ensured that the typical family is paying £840 more in taxes as a result of their changes over the past two years.

If I was being generous, I could imagine, I suppose, that the writer of the manifesto simply did not have time in the rush before the election to finish the sentence. Perhaps it should have read, "We are the only party that understands the need for low taxation the year before an election and the need for very high taxation in the intervening years."

The Government proclaim themselves as a Government of opportunity and a Budget is always a time for a new opportunity, yet this Budget is limited in the new opportunities it gives. Public expenditure cuts—real cuts—will mean job losses in the construction industry and in the civil service. Last night, Customs and Excise unions were told that 4,000 jobs were to be cut, including jobs in the front line of tackling drug smuggling. Yesterday, the Prime Minister told the House that this was simply an efficiency measure which would not affect the detection of smuggling. I do not believe that, and neither do drug officers or those who have been caught smuggling drugs at ports of entry.

The Budget was supposed to offer new opportunities for those seeking to get back into work and those seeking to equip themselves to get back into work. However, one of the meanest measures of the Budget deeply affects those who are seeking new opportunities for learning in their later lives. Yesterday, the Chancellor announced a mean measure to phase out the means-tested allowance for mature students. That will mean the loss of about £1,000 a year for the students over 29 who are least able to make the move back into education.

From my experience of training mature students before I came to the House, I know that before they take the decision to go back into education and training, they consider every option. The last thing that they want to do is to make life even more difficult for their families, so they work out in detail exactly how they will sort things out. The loss of an extra £1,000 for those who can least afford it—those who are means-tested—is penny-pinching and mean. More than that, it is an incredible disincentive for the very people whom we should ensure get back into learning, into reskilling and into developing their talents so that they can change their careers and get back into work.

Today, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury spoke about the effort that the Government had made to listen to unemployed people and to understand the barriers that they faced in getting back to work. I agreed with the right hon. Gentleman on the three points that he made, but he missed another two critical points. First, many people have become unemployed because their skills have become redundant.

The men who have been made redundant at Swan Hunter, who should have been kept on, are now having to think about a change in their work pattern. That will not be solved by the sort of scheme that will give them three weeks' trial in a work trial. That will not be sorted out by giving them the sort of short-term measures that the Government seem to be proposing in this Budget. They need good-quality retraining opportunities, they need to be able to afford to take those opportunities and they need to be able to find those opportunities in the area where they live.

Mr. Aitken: If the hon. Lady would, just for a moment, look at this problem of Swan Hunter employees from the point of view of an employer from that area, she may see it from a completely different perspective. I think that I know the Swan Hunter work force quite well from my days as Minister of State for Defence Procurement. I had long talks with the convenor, Mr. Eddie Darke. One of the problems facing all the admirable men at Swan Hunter, who finished ships to the highest quality, will be finding a new job because all employers will doubt whether a man who has been on the employment register for a certain length of time is back in the habit of work and should be taken on.

Surely the scheme that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has proposed is good because it offers a trial work scheme and a range of measures that will make it easier for the employer to take such good

[Mr. Aitken]

people on. The hon. Lady is leaving out of her calculation what employers may think of the admirable schemes that my right hon.—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was a very long intervention.

Ms Armstrong: I understand the anxiety that the right hon. Gentleman feels in trying to get to the heart of the problem. I agreed with his three points, I give him that. Those measures will meet some people's needs, but I am dealing with a different problem. One cannot, with those measures, sort out the needs of people who need proper reskilling and proper retraining. If his measures are the only measures on offer to the men who have been made redundant at Swan Hunter, they will join the ranks of the long-term unemployed before they get another chance. That is the problem. We want them to get jobs now. We want them to have other opportunities of proper reskilling and proper training. Instead, savage cuts have been made in the training programme, showing that the Government have no serious intention of reskilling the work force.

The second point that the Chief Secretary missed is that jobs need to be created to get those who are unemployed back into work. Those men from Swan Hunter are not the only people on Tyneside or in Wearside who are looking for jobs. Thousands and thousands of people are looking for jobs who will not be re-employed until new jobs are created in the economy. The Budget has provided no new incentives for manufacturing investment, it has provided no incentives for business start-ups, and, if anything, opportunities have been reduced. The enterprise allowance, for example, will be all but extinct. Certainly, it will be extinct in my area because the single regeneration budget does not include the enterprise allowance scheme.

The Government have been in the habit of boasting that unemployment has fallen by more than 400,000 since the end of 1993; but they have neglected to mention that total employment has also fallen by a little under 440,000 since the middle of 1992 through the recession. Of the jobs which have been created since 1992, 90 per cent. are part-time. We want to see a flexible labour market so that people have the choice to work full or part-time. Instead, we have an economy in which employment opportunities have shrunk and those opportunities that are available tend to be limited far too much to low-paid, low-skilled and part-time work.

The Government have taken no steps in the Budget to increase the capacity of the economy. That limits our competitiveness and growth in employment. The Government's short-sighted approach is most apparent when we consider the building industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East explained earlier how that problem could be tackled. We have spelt out clearly how we could have a decent welfare-to-work programme. We have acknowledged the importance of providing individual support and the importance of that for social cohesion. We could have got many more people back into work.

The programme offered nothing for women. There was no incentive for women with children to take up opportunities for child care. From our previous exchanges, the Chancellor is aware that I know that that can be achieved in partnership with local authorities in ways that improve the quality of opportunity for the child and give parents a decent choice about their career and development.

In all ways, the Government have failed to meet the opportunities that were available to them yesterday. The Secretary of State for Education promised 10 days ago that there would be new money for nursery education, but no money was included in the Budget yesterday for nursery education: what a betrayal and a lost opportunity.

We had a Budget yesterday that Conservative Back Benchers cheered. We should be used to that. Even in my short time in the House, I recall the way in which they cheered Nigel Lawson and I remember the real problems that the economy faced after that. I remember how Conservative Back Benchers cheered the present Chancellor's predecessor and how quickly his Budget unravelled.

Order Papers were waved yesterday. Perhaps for once Conservative Members were really being honest. The speech made by the Chancellor yesterday was meant to satisfy Conservative Members that the Government's craving for short-term, short-fix income tax cuts in next year's Budget are what is really on the Chancellor's agenda.

However, those cheers hide the stark reality for the British people this year. They hide the reality of the new taxes that they will face. They hide the reality of the increase in VAT on fuel and the attack on living standards. They hide the increasing divisions in this country.

The Government have thrown away the major opportunities to change and give this country long-term growth and opportunity. They are out of touch and, at the next general election, we will make sure that they are out of office.

9.42 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The background to this debate is one of a steadily strengthening economy in which all the main economic indicators are favourable. We heard a note of desperation creeping into some of the speeches made by Opposition Members today as they searched Europe for countries outperforming us in one sector or another. As they found fewer and fewer of them, they tended to go global in their search for economies which, allegedly, are outperforming us. However, if they found such a country, they would discover that the policies pursued by that country would have very little to offer the Labour party.

The point that was brought home in the debate by Conservative Members was that that transformed economic outlook still requires discipline, particularly over the public finances, and a continuing and sustained drive to reduce the deficit, which still exists, between what we are raising in taxation and what we are spending. That was one of the messages spelt out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) who made a speech—I do not think that we could exactly call it a maiden speech—which relaunched him on a new phase in his career as an elder statesman. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should rephrase that and call my right hon. Friend a statesman. In due course, he will become elder as well. My right hon. Friend made well the powerful point that the indispensable element in the recovery and in the

Government's achievement over the past few years is the creation of macro-economic stability, which has eluded almost all Governments since world war two.

In the past, we had a good combination of growth and low inflation, but the tendency has been to watch with increasing exasperation how inflation tends to rise and how prices and assets start to take off. After three or four years, the bright economic outlook runs into the sands of yet another macro-economic hitting of the buffers. As my right hon. Friend said, this time we have the fundamentals in place. All that we hear from the Opposition is how they would add to public expenditure and relax taxation.

Mr. Livingstone: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman has made his contribution. I hope to respond to one or two of his points.

The easy part of politics is to spend other people's money. The difficult part of politics is to restrain public expenditure and, where necessary, to put up taxes to cover the deficit. By history and by nature, the Labour party is the party of public expenditure, whether it is good or bad, efficient or inefficient, affordable or unaffordable. For Labour Members, the state, almost by definition, is better than the individual when it comes to making decisions.

Dr. Spink: Is my hon. Friend aware that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is even calling for inefficient public expenditure at the moment?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, we have noticed that. Instead of modernising and reforming the public service, Opposition Members want to load it with excess labour, against the wishes of the organisations involved.

We heard the voice of the past from the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), when she bemoaned the prevalence of part-time jobs. She has not understood a recent labour force survey showing that 85 per cent. of people in part-time work are quite happy to have that part-time work. The world has changed since the Labour party was in office.

Despite Opposition Members' efforts to update their economics—the so-called new Labour economics—we still hear the authentic voice of the Labour party from the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who tried to intervene. I listened carefully to his speech. Not for him the new Labour gloss. He gives us a more authentic voice of a Labour party which might be past but which is not unrepresented in the House. Labour Members still believe in the power of officialdom over the power of the market. They always will, and, to some extent, they always should. At the election, people should choose between that philosophy of the economy and the one which we offer.

On taxation, we had again the two new Labour friends, loophole and windfall. That is not a tax policy, it is an illusion. It gives a glimpse of what a future Labour Government would be like, running around looking for loopholes and windfalls, instead of taking clear, if difficult, decisions on how to run the economy.

We had the shadow Labour Budget last week. It was certainly a shadow, but it was not a Budget. There was no precision in it, no figures, and nothing was costed. It was another appeal to their new friends, loophole and windfall. The Government believe in picking up and blocking loopholes where they exist. This Budget, like the ones before it, protects revenue against potential loss from real loopholes where they are identified.

I will not weary the House with technical and complex details, but I will give hon. Members an idea of one loophole. There is a perfectly good commercial practice of lease and lease-back. However, businesses which are exempt from VAT—particularly those in the insurance and banking sectors—have been exploiting this practice to spread their VAT over 2,000 years. We are all in politics for a long time, but we wish to see VAT on transactions made today at least recouped in our own lifetime, even if not in the present Parliament.

We have closed that genuine loophole. The value of that and other measures on the indirect taxation side—which is my particular concern—amounts to £340 million. They are real anti-avoidance measures, which have been properly and precisely targeted, in contrast with the broad political sideswipe attempted by the Labour party.

The subject of VAT on fuel was raised again. No Conservative Government like to increase taxes, but the VAT on fuel is an indispensable element in the package of tax-raising measures announced in last year's Budget. The value of that package has been demonstrated in getting national finances under control and creating real growth with low inflation. Now is not the time to relax our discipline and knock away the very foundations of the economic recovery.

Fuel is a rather sensible commodity to tax. That is why all other countries in the European Union impose VAT on fuel—most of them at standard rates. The four Nordic countries, many of which are considerably colder even than Scotland, tax fuel at rates of either 22 per cent. or 25 per cent. It makes environmental sense to tax a commodity which is so directly related to environmental concerns such as the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which leads to the greenhouse effect.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am answering the point raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). In front of other audiences, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have constantly argued for environmental taxes, including a carbon tax. One of the Liberal party's slogans from a few years ago was "Think globally, act locally". That has now been changed to "Tax globally, but not specifically". The Liberal Democrats are very keen on the idea of environmental taxes, but when measures are brought forward to tax fuel, of course they oppose them.

Mr. Wallace *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I must press on as I have to respond to a number of other points which were raised during the debate.

Sensible environmental pressure groups like Friends of the Earth have agreed that a tax on fuel is a sensible measure.

Mr. Wallace *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I will not give way because I need to make some other points.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

Of course, fuel tax must be allied with other measures in order to protect the most vulnerable. That is why the Government have provided substantial help to pensioners, widows and the disabled. Assistance is also given to other poorer households, such as to those on income support.

I want to pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), whose work for pensioners and pensioner organisations is well known and much appreciated on both sides of the House. He understands not just the problems of pensioners, but the solutions to those problems.

He was generous in his praise of the raising of the age allowance. I am therefore particularly concerned to examine the figures that he brought to the House and the worries that he has about uprating. If I cannot answer his questions decisively this evening, I will write to him about the matter. I believe that there is a genuine misunderstanding about the effect of the uprating on this year's pensioner figures. I can assure my hon. Friend that next year there will be a full 50p uprating for a single person. It will amount to that in April of next year. I hope that, with the uprating that takes place in any case of the rest of the pension, that meets the concerns that my hon. Friend raised.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am sorry. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) who answered the debate for the Labour party has left me extremely short of time and I have a number of points to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) made the valid point that pensioners are often not aware of the help that they are receiving. I have no doubt that we shall have to return to that issue. He made the specific suggestion that we should drop the second tranche of VAT and instead put a penny on road fuel tax. I have to tell him that a penny would not be enough. An extra 2p a litre on fuel would be required. I ask him to consider the consequences that would flow from doing that. My hon. Friend and I both represent rural constituencies. Motorists in rural areas would begin to find such an increase, on top of the extra 5 per cent., not simply taxation but penal taxation. As the fuel cost would also feed through into the costs of hauliers, there is a competitiveness argument to be answered, too.

I shall have to get back to my hon. Friend on his point about the uniform business rate. I wish to make some further points about the compensation package for VAT on fuel that we have put in place. The home energy efficiency scheme has been mentioned several times. The funding for the scheme has been more than doubled in the past two years. It provides grants, usually at 100 per cent., for insulation, draught-proofing and so on. More than a million homes will have been treated by early next year and we expect another million homes to be grant-aided in the next three years.

Cold weather payments were the subject of some disparaging remarks from Labour Members. I remind them that, when the Labour party was last in office, there were no such things as cold weather payments. All the cold winters that we remember in the 1960s and 1970s happened without cold weather payments going to anyone.

The other point about VAT on fuel is on prices. Some Labour Members talk as if energy prices have risen continually. Perhaps they remember the days of the last Labour Government. Since the utilities have been privatised, prices have fallen substantially in real terms. Even with the addition of VAT this year, gas and electricity prices are 1 per cent. lower in real terms than they were two years ago. If one adds the compensation package to that, one can see that, arithmetically, many people must be better off.

I draw the attention of the House to another feature of the energy industries. We all agree that one of the criteria that we use in judging a supplier company or industry is the way in which it treats its customers who get into trouble with debt and face disconnection. Does the company reach for the disconnection switch or help the customer manage the debt? The old state-owned domestic utilities presided over by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—I see that he is in his place—when he was Secretary of State for Energy reached for the disconnection switch far more frequently than today's privatised utilities.

I can give the figures to the House. Since privatisation, the electricity companies have reduced their disconnections by a remarkable 98 per cent. British Gas has reduced its disconnections—I have the precise figures with me—from more than 45,000 in 1986 to just more than 16,000 in 1993. That is a reduction of two thirds. All that the Opposition parties want to do is reduce the wages of the chief executive. We have reduced prices—or the companies have—and the incidence of disconnection. Those old, cosy, state-run utilities were far more brutal with the old and the cold than the private sector companies are today.

The debate has shown up the natural sharp divisions between both sides of the House, but it is increasingly recognised that the Budget is building on firm foundations. The recovery is based on production, investment and exports and builds on the supply-side reforms of the 1980s, which turned those sluggish domestic utilities into world-class companies. It is not a recovery based on consumer expenditure, or on an asset boom. For that reason it may not get the quick—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PRIVILEGES

Motion made, and Question put,

That Mr. Tony Benn be discharged from the Committee of Privileges.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITIONS

Mellor Primary School

10 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): My first petition has about 1,500 signatures, which have been collected by parents, staff and local councillors on behalf of Mellor primary school in Clarke street, Leicester. The people who signed the petition are very concerned about the traffic situation outside the school and have been campaigning every Tuesday and Thursday morning for a crossing to be installed.

The petition states:

we urgently need a pedestrian crossing to be installed outside Mellor primary school, near the Checketts road entrance, to protect the lives of pupils and parents who have to cross the busy Checketts road every day on journeys to and from school,

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House takes note of the danger faced by children and parents every day on journeys to and from the school and makes provision that local authorities should provide safe crossings where necessary, to protect lives.

And your petitioners as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Millennium Commission

10.1 pm

Mr. Vaz: The second petition is presented on behalf of Mr. Gurdip Gujral, Mr. C.B. Patel, Mr. G.K. Noon and about 1,000 members of the Asian community in Britain, who are very concerned that the new Millennium Commission which has been set up by statute in the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, does not contain a representative from Britain's Asian community. They felt strongly that, to be fully representative, the Commission ought to contain someone of Asian origin. I pointed that out to the Secretary of State for National Heritage. The community has, therefore, asked in the petition that the Government appoint someone of Asian origin to that Commission.

To lie upon the Table.

Merseyside Police Budget

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

10.2 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): First, I offer the Minister an apology, as he has had less than the usual notice of this debate. I do not know whether he is aware of the fact, but my original title was changed because of a material change in the subject, so the Home Office did not get the usual amount of notice. Secondly, I thank the Office of the Speaker for advice on how I could change the title last Friday.

The funding of the Merseyside police budget is a matter of great concern and speculation, especially in respect of the funding formula and how it is applied to Merseyside. The Minister will be aware that the standard spending assessment, as applied to public expenditure for the police, amounts to about £6 billion per year. The formula proposed, which has caused all the problems nationally and on Merseyside in particular, is based on seven areas of police work that the Association of Chief Police Officers identified from an activity analysis. Those are: core management, crime management, public order, traffic management, community relations, security and pensions. Those are now built into an adjusted regression analysis formula which is, in effect, the funding formula. ACPO provided those suggested areas of activity, but it has serious reservations about the way in which the formula will be applied.

For example, the formula does not take into account the willingness—or, for that matter, the unwillingness—of the victim of a crime to report that that crime has taken place. Anybody with experience of localised crime, such as burglaries, thefts from cars, break-ins and so on, realises that there are many reasons why people often do not feel able to report that a crime has taken place. That means that the true level of crime in any given area can often be underestimated. Merseyside police authority certainly feels that that applies in our case.

People may not report a crime because of their perception of what might happen if they report it. It is not unknown for people to be afraid of reprisal if they report a crime, and it would be unwise to underestimate the fact that, in some areas, people are physically afraid of reporting crime because of the consequences. It also depends on whether the victim has adequate insurance to cover the replacement cost of any item that has been stolen, because it is invariably necessary to have a crime number to report to one's insurance company if a theft has taken place. If they are not insured, people may take the view that—as there is little chance in some crimes of goods being recovered—there is no point in reporting it.

It becomes a vicious circle. People do not report a crime because they do not think that the criminals will get caught. Because they do not report it, the crime statistics are suppressed and not enough resources are put in to make sure that proper levels of policing are applied. There are specific problems about the way in which the formula can be applied.

ACPO questioned the statistics. It feels that in some cases when an incident has been reported, there may be more than one crime involved, but that not all the specific crimes that have been committed within the compass of

[Mr. George Howarth]

one incident will find their way into the reporting system. Again, that leads to a statistical under-recording of the actual level of crime.

Merseyside police produced statistics to show that the cuts will have a major effect on the police and civilian numbers employed by the police authority. Those estimates show that a reduction of 2 per cent. would mean the loss of 170 police officers and 35 civilians. Given the fact that the Government place great stock on taking away paperwork from police officers and moving it to civilians, the number of civilians lost will equally affect the fight against crime.

If we take the upper end of the possible reductions that have been talked about—a 6 per cent. reduction—that would mean 500 police officers and 100 civilians lost. The effect of that would be catastrophic. As a result, there has been a great deal of pressure from the police authority, the local community and local hon. Members—particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and for Bootle (Mr. Benton), who are here tonight. Some Conservative Members have been involved also.

I understand—although I have not seen it in print—that a member of the Cabinet has lobbied the Home Secretary on this very issue. That ought to speak volumes about the public reaction on Merseyside to the possible consequences.

The Government did appear several weeks ago to climb down on the formula, but there are no guarantees that that will resolve the problem. They have not resolved the underlying difficulties with the formula itself, and there has been no effort on the part of the Government to enter into any meaningful consultation with the police authorities and other bodies, such as the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of County Councils.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the considerable difficulties that have arisen because of the Government's failure to produce the fair and transparent formula for which we have been calling for a number of years. Does he agree, however, that that formula would change only the size of the pieces into which the cake is cut? During the 1992 general election campaign the Conservative party promised to increase the number of police officers by 1,000, but they delivered a cut by 401 in the 12 months following the general election. Surely that shows that we have a problem with a formula that is designed to share out a cake that is not as large as the Government had promised to make it.

Mr. Howarth: As ever, my hon. Friend hit a well aimed hammer on a nail that was presented to him. The figures that he gave are correct. He is also right that the Government have failed to deliver even a proportion of their electoral promises on law and order.

The Minister should be aware that it is not just a Cabinet Minister and Labour politicians who have been exercised about the formula. I have a press release from Merseyside police authority, which hon. Members may be surprised to learn is controlled not by a Labour chairman but by a Conservative councillor from the Wirral. Recently, two Conservative members of the authority, Councillor Kate Wood and Councillor Norman Williams, met the Home Secretary. They issued a press release, dated 18 November, which said:

"We will not know the outcome for next year's funding decision by the Home Secretary"—

even though they had just met the right hon. and learned Gentleman—

"until December. The question of inflation provision will have an important bearing on how the Home Secretary's decision will affect Merseyside. If no allowance is made for inflation, this will equate to a reduction of 170 police officers and 35 civilians."

Those are the figures that I gave earlier, so if the Minister is unwilling to accept my assessment, surely he will listen to members of his party.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in future, fewer police officers will be available on Merseyside to perform the most important task of crime prevention? One of the greatest assets of the police is their physical, visible presence. Because of the cuts that have effectively already been made, police officers will be unable to carry out that important role on Merseyside. Does my hon. Friend agree that that task is an important part of the debate?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend, with his great experience in the House and of Merseyside, makes an exact, proper point. I agree that the visible presence of the police, not necessarily in great numbers, on the streets and patrolling estates, is a positive deterrent against crime. Their presence also reassures people and we should not underestimate how important that can be. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to those important considerations.

It would be improper of me not to try to take into account what we can glean from the bundle of documents produced with the Budget. I am sure that the Minister will quote some of the statistics in those documents.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Some weeks ago I met the chief constable of Merseyside to discuss the formula, because I had been told by the authority's treasurer that the reduction in the police force's budget, announced by the Home Office, could cause the council tax in Liverpool to be increased greatly. The Home Office has refused to answer my written questions about that. I hope that the Minister will give an adequate response to them when he replies to the debate.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

There are only two options. If the full cost of providing an adequate police service on Merseyside is not covered by the formula, or what passes for a standard spending assessment settlement on a modified formula—which, apparently, will be announced tomorrow—there are only two ways of closing the gap. One way is to increase the council tax—but there are capping limits, which will be brought into play—and the other is to reduce services. The consequences of that would be horrendous.

Where do we stand according to the Budget? According to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, which was kind enough to provide me with briefing on that today, the shortfall can be met only—as my hon. Friend the Member for Riverside said—by a reduction in other vital services already provided by local authorities, which would mean cuts in social services, education and other vital services, as a result of the revenue support grant

settlement. If the police budget is protected—I hope that it will be—it will be at the cost of other sectors of local government expenditure, and that would be equally unacceptable.

In any event, it will not be clear until tomorrow exactly where the police stand. In the absence of meaningful consultations, we must, regrettably, assume either that there will be cuts in policing and expenditure on policing or, if they are protected, that there will be cuts elsewhere in local government expenditure, which would be equally unacceptable.

My constituents, and people throughout Merseyside, are rightly outraged at the implications of cuts on spending for the police on Merseyside. It will place an enormous burden on the police authority and might mean reductions in staff. Not since a notorious Bill in the previous Parliament instigated by, I think, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), have I had so much correspondence on one subject as I have had on police funding as it applies to Merseyside.

The problem is that the police have a straightforward job—although it is at times difficult to deliver—of catching criminals and also, as my hon. Friend the Member for Garston said, of instituting crime prevention measures where possible, so that those crimes never take place. If that is in any way undermined on Merseyside, the progress that we have made in the past few years—I acknowledge that there has been some progress—will be seriously undermined.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a further danger? Merseyside police is to be congratulated on its success in apprehending dangerous criminals. There comes a time when criminals have to appear before the Crown court and they need professional escorts. The Merseyside police force is on a knife edge already, before the cuts, in its ability to provide adequate escorts for those dangerous criminals.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend makes another good point. The Government's record in holding on to criminals once they have caught them is not of the highest standard already, and if there is any further security risk of that type, it will be unacceptable.

In some debates, the signals that we send out to the wider community are often almost as important as the substance of what is under discussion. What signals do we send out if the issue is not resolved? First, criminals will rightly say that there is a green light. They will say, "The Government might talk tough about law and order, but they do not really mean it, and there will be fewer police, so we shall have more freedom to roam, causing difficulty and carrying out our worst."

There could also be a disastrous effect on inward investment. If prospective investors in the region feel that there is inadequate security and that it will be open season on their premises, they may well think twice and move somewhere else. Existing employers in parts of Merseyside, as in other regions, have difficulty with adequate security. If the levels of policing are reduced, they may even consider moving out of Merseyside. That is the problem that confronts us.

Every public opinion survey that is carried out shows and, for that matter, every Member of the House knows—or should know—that law and order is an issue about which people are very worried. Unless the Government can reassure people, especially those on Merseyside, by providing the necessary resources to avoid cuts in police cover, people on Merseyside will be entitled to conclude that the Government are not carrying out their responsibilities, and not only those which they accepted at the general election, but those which any normal Government should fulfil. People will be entitled to tar the Government with an entirely new mantra—soft on crime and bewildered by its causes.

10.19 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) for his kind but unnecessary apology for the short notice given for the debate. I was not aware that he had given us such short notice but I have such excellent staff at the Home Office that they would have been able to provide a response to the hon. Gentleman if he had told us about the debate only yesterday. However, I do not want him to do that for future debates.

My only criticism of the hon. Gentleman relates to his sense of timing. He alluded to tomorrow's business. If he had been content to wait until after tomorrow's announcement of the local government settlement, which, of course, includes details of funding for the free-standing authorities, all would have been clear and, it is to be hoped, his mind set at rest.

The Government's commitment to policing in England and Wales is as strong as ever. That commitment, which has resulted in an extra 16,000 police officers being employed since 1979, was underscored by yesterday's announcement in the Budget statement that provision for the police service in England and Wales next year will increase by approximately 3 per cent. compared with 1994-95. That is fully sufficient to enable the present number of officers to be maintained across the country if chief officers, in consultation with police authorities, choose to do so.

In addition, central controls on manpower have been abolished, giving police authorities and chief officers much greater flexibility in the way that they determine their spending priorities. Major efficiency improvements are enabling chief officers to make more officers available for front-line duties. We will, of course, have to wait until tomorrow's local government finance statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment before we know the individual allocations of police funding for 1995-96.

In the past, the Government's specific grant for policing has met 51 per cent. of whatever has been spent by the police authorities. To give the Government some say over how much police authorities spend, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has had detailed controls over items such as manpower numbers and capital expenditure.

Decisions about the best use of resources should be made by the people on the ground. Therefore the Home Secretary is giving up unnecessarily detailed controls on manpower numbers and on all but the largest capital expenditure. At the same time, to make sure that the income tax payer does not lose control of expenditure on the police, the police specific grant will be cash-limited. After all, there is no reason why the spending decisions of a police authority at one end of the country should be

[Mr. David Maclean]

subsidised 100 per cent. by income tax payers who live at the other end and who are not to benefit from the policing services that the extra expenditure is designed to provide. Therefore, in future, local decisions to spend extra money on policing will impact on those local council tax payers who are to benefit from the extra expenditure.

Given that central Government funding is to be cash-limited, its distribution to individual forces must be fair. A working group was set up in October 1993 to identify such a system of distribution—a needs-based allocation formula. As the hon. Member for Knowsley, North knows, that is the basis of the standard spending assessments or SSAs, which are already used to distribute funding for other local services such as education and social services.

The working group was chaired by Home Office officials, but it included representatives from local authority associations, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Metropolitan police service. The group issued a report in September which contained exemplifications of how a version of the funding formula might work. The figures in the report were provided only to illustrate the effects of the formula.

An existing consultation programme was launched following the issuing of the allocation formula working group's report. I deny completely that there was not full consultation. There has been full consultation on those exemplifications. We listened carefully to the concerns expressed—

Mr. George Howarth: If there was such full consultation, will the Minister explain why ACPO and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, both of which one would have expected to have a major role in any consultation exercise, deny that there has been any meaningful consultation whatever?

Mr. Maclean: I am sorry, but I am not aware of that. They have never made that clear to me. They have always made it clear to me that they disliked the exemplifications—many of us were unhappy with the initial exemplifications in the formula—but they have never told me that they were unhappy with the level of consultation. I am perfectly content that there has been adequate and full consultation. We have listened carefully to the concerns expressed by police and local authority associations about the size of potential gains and losses implied by that version of the formula and the figures then in circulation.

We have always realised that the size of some of the potential swings in funding produced by the working group's version of the formula were too large. Some of those swings would have jeopardised the need for stability in the policing of communities. So that the formula could take more account of that need for stability, my right hon. and learned Friend decided to include police establishments as an indicator within the formula for 1995-96. As hon. Members will be aware, police establishments were the basis for previous funding allocations. Including police establishments in the new formula therefore ensures continuity of funding and guarantees the capacity of police authorities to maintain existing levels of policing.

But funding, of course, is only half the equation. The other half, spending decisions, are the responsibility of local police authorities. It is the police authorities—not the Government—which set the budgets for their police forces.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Minister agree that, if a serious attempt is being made to combat crime, it should be on the understanding that the police should be where crime is prevalent? Crime is not distributed equally throughout the country. Some areas need more resources to combat crime. Conservative Members who come from the leafy suburbs do not recognise the problems facing inner cities as a result of crime.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman should be careful before assuming that crime occurs only in inner cities and that plush leafy suburbs are exempt from crime or that crime is not a serious problem there. Complaints about crime come from many parts of the countryside and the suburbs. I know from my visits to all the police forces in England and Wales that many areas complain that they are suffering not from their own home-bred criminals but from criminals who come from inner-city areas, and they would like a funding allocation to deal with their imported problem.

Mr. O'Hara: Does the Minister recognise that hardened criminals who realise that there are not rich pickings to be gained from inner cities often travel out to the leafy suburbs for their rich pickings? The crimes that are solved appear on the records of those policing the leafy suburbs, but the leg work in apprehending those criminals is done by the police forces in the inner cities. I do not want anyone to say, "That means that scousers are robbing people blind around the country." There are hardened criminals in all inner cities, and Merseyside police are to be congratulated on knowing who they are and helping other forces to apprehend them.

Mr. Maclean: No one is more in the forefront than me in congratulating Merseyside police on their fantastic success in reducing crime. Their figures are falling dramatically and excellently, along with the vast majority of other forces throughout the country. That is the reason for the largest fall in recorded crime in the past 40 years.

One requires a formula for distributing resources for the police that is based on need. That need is not as simplistic as the hon. Gentleman says. Of course inner cities have their particular problems, but they are not unique in having problems. It is too simplistic to say that if criminals in inner cities are committing crimes in other areas, those other areas are successful in arresting them. I wish that that were always true. In some cases it is, but in others it is not.

Police forces throughout the country complain that someone else is causing a problem for them, and they are right to make that point. We must be careful not to produce broad-brush solutions. We have been striving to find a formula that takes account of problems of inner-city and other forces.

Mr. Parry: Will the Minister answer my question as to the estimated increase in Liverpool council tax—one of the highest-rated in the whole country?

Mr. Maclean: No, I cannot speculate on such a hypothetical point. The hon. Gentleman does not know

the settlement or what budget Merseyside police authority will set, and I cannot speculate on the council tax level. The hon. Gentleman must wait until tomorrow to learn the financial settlement and the police allocations.

Merseyside was well to the fore, together with many others, in raising concerns about the possible impact of the new funding formula. However, whoever was behind the campaign that was mounted within Merseyside sought to scare residents rather than to inform them. I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Knowsley, North received a record number of letters. If millions of those scary leaflets were distributed, I would expect all the hon. Gentleman's constituents to write to him.

That misleading leaflet, which was circulated to 600,000 householders, suggested that 500 police officers were to be lost on Merseyside next year because a cut of £13 million was to be imposed. There was never any intention of imposing a £13 million cut on Merseyside. Even the changes proposed in the working group's report, if that formula was accepted—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 1 December 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords].*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 8 December .

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Forum For Peace And Reconciliation

1. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what ways the British Government have participated in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): None. This is an initiative of the Irish Government, within their own jurisdiction, to enable democratic parties to consult and share in dialogue together.

Mrs. Jackson: Is it not time that the Government built on the real hopes of all the communities in Northern Ireland, which have been increased by the cessation of violence in the past three months? Should not the British Government now agree to send a representative to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which has been established by the Irish Government, especially as they have been invited to do so?

Mr. Ancram: If I may, I should, first, correct the hon. Lady on a misapprehension. The British ambassador was invited to the opening session of the forum. That is the only invitation that the British Government have received. As for talking to parties, as the hon. Lady is aware, we have been holding bilateral discussions with the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland for a considerable time. It has been announced today that a proposal has been made to hold an open meeting for exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein on Wednesday 7 December in Belfast.

Rev. Ian Paisley: As the Government have announced today that they will talk with the men of blood next week, and as that is highly resented by a vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, will the Minister tell us whether he rules out full-blown talks with the IRA so long as it keeps its killing machine intact and holds on to its guns and explosives?

Mr. Ancram: We have made it clear over a long period that the exploratory dialogue would have three purposes: first, to explore the basis on which Sinn Fein would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process, secondly, to exchange views on how Sinn Fein would be able, over a period of time, to play the same part as current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland and, thirdly, to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence. Only after those exploratory talks are completed will the issue that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned arise. He might like to note that the last of the elements of exploratory dialogue would cover the decommissioning of arms.

Mr. John D. Taylor: As the southern Irish Forum for Peace and Reconciliation has not been particularly successful in resolving disputes between the Dublin political parties, does the Minister agree that much greater importance should be given to the two forums that the Minister has announced in his own jurisdiction?

Mr. Ancram: Indeed, those are the forums for which the British Government are responsible. We have great hopes that the investment forum will produce significant benefits for Northern Ireland.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although forums are important, the only real way to peace and reconciliation will be through the paramilitaries on both sides handing in their arms so that those guns and explosives can be taken off the streets and decommissioned?

Mr. Ancram: I hope that it is clear to my hon. Friend, who asks an important question, that, if we are to get around the table to discuss the future governance of Northern Ireland and the relationships between the north and the south and, indeed, between the two Governments, then around that table can be only parties that are there on an equivalent basis. Obviously, in that regard, the decommissioning of arms is an important element.

Mr. Winnick: Whatever may be the political position in the Republic of Ireland, it is a democracy and it will settle its differences in the normal way. Does the Minister agree that its outgoing Prime Minister, Albert Reynolds, played a particularly important role in the peace process and that tribute should be paid to him for the contribution that he undoubtedly made in seeking to end the violence in the island of Ireland?

Are not the Government doing precisely what they promised to do when they said that if violence ended there would be talks? As long as that continues to be the position and the Provisional IRA makes it clear that terrorism will not start again, there is every justification for doing precisely what the Government have said. They have the almost entire support of the House for saying that talks with Sinn Fein should begin.

Mr. Ancram: Today's announcement is consistent with the Government's policy, as enunciated over a long period.

On the hon. Gentleman's first question, I pay tribute to the acting Taoiseach—as he now is—for the role that he has played to bring about the present cessation of violence. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that a similar tribute must be paid to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for his role in that regard.

Democratic Accountability

2. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the restoration of democratic accountability to Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): We wish to see a much greater degree of democratic accountability restored in Northern Ireland. We hope shortly to publish our own understanding of how that might fairly and workably be achieved, in the context of a wider settlement addressing all the relevant relationships.

Mr. Molyneaux: Does the Secretary of State agree that the two economic forums—the one to be held in December in Belfast and the other in mid-January, at which local government representatives will meet the Prime Minister—will have the desirable effect of bringing together the people of Northern Ireland and their representatives so that they may work together in peace, which will in turn lead to the equally desirable objective of enabling them to design between themselves a practical and workable system for the governance of Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Everything that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned can only be beneficial in its effect. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is very anxious that there should be as wide an opportunity as possible for elected representatives covering the whole spectrum of parties and of Northern Ireland to express their views, deriving from their local and elected responsibilities, on how the economy of Northern Ireland can best be progressed.

Mr. Hunter: With regard to the restoration of democratic accountability, although I warmly welcome this morning's announcement, I remind my right hon. and learned Friend that many people are concerned. Will he take this opportunity to reassure them that this Government will not barter with the IRA, that there will be no surrender of principle and no appeasement and that this Government will not fete or flatter Mr. McGuinness, Mr. Adams and their henchmen because we cannot forget the evil that the IRA has done, and nor should we do so?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's expression of his personal support and for giving me the opportunity to acknowledge that suspicions of the sort he characterised remain. I have dealt with them before, but it is necessary to continue to state that the Government recognise that there are suspicions—on the one side of some clandestine deal and, on the other, that there is an intention to restore an unreformed Stormont Administration. Neither is true and neither is capable of being true, but it is very important that I continue to say so. The Downing street declaration, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister signed nearly a year ago with Mr. Reynolds, is informing and shaping the future of Northern Ireland, and will continue to do so.

Mr. McGrady: In his response to the original question, the Secretary of State did not refer in any way to the diminution of democratic responsibility in Northern Ireland in the past couple of years, whereby local representatives have been taken off health and social services boards and are being threatened with removal from education boards. A plethora of quangos have been appointed, as well as nine next steps agencies, and accountability in Northern Ireland, such as it is, has been diminished under this Administration. Are we to wait years before the people of Northern Ireland can get answers to the questions, which they need answers to, about local administrations?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much hope that, implicit in the hon. Gentleman's question, is support for the restoration of local democratic accountability in Northern Ireland. I believe that everyone who is concerned about the good governance of Northern Ireland very much believes that that restoration is sorely needed, but it must take place in a way that takes account of the special circumstances in Northern Ireland, and as part of an overall settlement. It is rather unjust, and uncharacteristically harsh of the hon. Gentleman, to say that democratic accountability has diminished under the present Administration. I do not think that that has been so at all.

Mr. Bill Walker: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware of the long historic connection between Scotland and Northern Ireland. Is he aware that many Scots are watching with concern the movement towards democratic accountability—of which they approve—as action may be taken that will have a damaging ripple effect on Scotland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am aware of the anxieties to which my hon. Friend refers, but everybody in Scotland has grounds for being extremely thankful that their society and community is not divided in the way that Northern Ireland's is, and that neither are there antagonisms deriving from a history that is special to Northern Ireland.

Ms Mowlam: I acknowledge that the Secretary of State has had a rather difficult time recently with not only the uncertainty in Dublin but minority government at home and, in the past 24 hours, a fair bit of external pressure. We should like to welcome the beginning of exploratory talks with Sinn Fein next Wednesday. Given the importance of economic changes to the future stability of Northern Ireland, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman make clear what the status of Sinn Fein and the former loyalist paramilitaries will be at the Government's economic conference in 12 days?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: On the hon. Lady's original remarks, I must say that I have come to believe that Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland are born with difficulties as the sparks fly upwards. None the less, it remains an excellent job to have.

We have made considerable progress with the investment forum, and acceptances are coming in at a satisfactory rate. We have today decided to write to individual elected members of the two committees concerned with economic development on each of the main city councils, Belfast city council and Derry city council, so that those people—by right of their elected responsibility for the matter in their localities—will have an opportunity to come to the investment conference. The parties involved will, of course, include Sinn Fein if it chooses to come. I believe that that is a proper step to have taken.

Peace Process

3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to meet the new Taoiseach to discuss the progress of the peace process and other matters.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I look forward to the renewal of our work with the new Irish Government at an early date.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the steps now being taken, including the announcement made today, on the road to a lasting and permanent settlement are a vindication of the Prime Minister's role and that of the acting Taoiseach in making their historic declaration more than a year ago? Is not the joint declaration still a road to peace that the new Taoiseach should take?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, who is of course absolutely right. The Downing street declaration was a very simple declaration of fundamental principles. It declared that democracy, and the wishes of most of the people in Northern Ireland, would decide its future. Both Governments are shoulder to shoulder in support of that principle. Parallel with that is the belief that there is no place for violence, and what has happened since the declaration was inevitable.

Those who were previously using violence to further their political ambitions had to recognise that they must stop, unless they were to declare for all the world to hear that they had realised that they could not get their way by democratic means and that they would go on using the bomb and the bullet. That would have been unacceptable, and recognition of that led directly to what has followed.

Mr. Canavan: In view of the concern that was expressed before the resignation of Mr. Reynolds that the British Government seemed to be moving at a much slower pace than the Irish Government in furthering the peace process, will the Secretary of State stop dragging his feet and arrange talks as soon as possible with the new Taoiseach, with a view to speeding up the peace process?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is an uncomfortable thing to drag one's feet. I am not in the practice of doing so and I have never done so since I took on my responsibilities for Northern Ireland. A lot of criticism was levelled at the British Government initially, when, after the announcement on 31 August, we did not say that it was marvellous and that we would enter into exploratory discussions straight away. That criticism of our caution has died away and I do not hear it now. On the contrary, I hear widespread recognition of the fact that we were wise to be cautious. Widespread recognition has equally been made of the fact that the Prime Minister was right to say in Belfast at the end of October that we were now making a working assumption, which has led us now to make the decision to enter into discussions on 7 December.

Mr. Mallon: Does the Secretary of State agree with me that the cornerstone of the peace process is not the position of the IRA, or of those who claim to speak on behalf of the loyalist paramilitaries, but the joint action taken by two sovereign Governments, working together to an agreed programme? Nothing should be allowed to interfere with that. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman also agree that the core of that agreement is those Governments' joint commitment in the joint declaration of 15 December to remove the cause of conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions that have resulted?

Will the Secretary of State tell us precisely what action his Government have taken to date to achieve those objectives, or are both Governments planning to allow the principles of the joint declaration to remain on the piece of paper and gather dust as nothing more than principles?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's statement, but, as to the second part of it, the underpinning of confidence in Northern Ireland is of critical importance by reason of the suspicions to which I have already referred in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). It has been of critical importance to furthering the objectives to which the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) referred that the Government have time and time again repeated that it is acceptance and agreement by most of the people living in Northern Ireland that will determine the future of Northern Ireland, that nothing will be sought to be imposed upon them and that the two Governments mean what they say in the Downing street declaration that democracy will decide the day. That is the most important thing that we could have done, and we have done it well and truly.

Mr. Beggs: When the Secretary of State meets the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, will he inform him that, in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, there is widespread distrust and suspicion of corruption arising from the failure of the former Prime Minister of the Republic to appoint a High Court inspector to look into the scandalous International Investment fraud, which was operated from Dublin? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman urge the new Prime Minister to appoint such a High Court inspector as a means of building a little confidence on the way towards peace in Northern Ireland? Can he assure the House that the Northern Ireland Office was guilty of no collusion in assisting the authorities in the Irish Republic to cover up that scandal?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am quite sure that I can offer the hon. Gentleman the reassurance that he has requested. I do not think that it is helpful for me to intervene in matters within the jurisdiction of another sovereign state, although they are of undoubted great importance and gravity, and I do not propose to do so.

Mr. Beggs: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Who will speak for the people of Northern Ireland if the Secretary of State will not?

Madam Speaker: I shall take points of order after questions.

Mr. Wolfson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept it from me that his earlier comments on the

reasons for and the correctness of his cautious approach to the peace process are widely applauded by the people of Britain?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend says, and I take note of it.

May I just say, Madam Speaker, slightly bending the rules, that, if I failed to appreciate the significance of what the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) said, I shall look into it? I may have done so.

Security Arrangements

4. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes in security arrangements he intends to make as a result of the IRA ceasefire.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): We have always made it clear that, when terrorism is seen to have ended permanently, but not before, it will be possible to remove the preventive measures that have had to be put in place to protect the community.

Various adjustments, based on security advice, have already been made, including the lifting of border road closures: the need for other measures is kept under review.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: As it appears that the Government have been pushed by the Americans into advancing those talks, and as this minority Government now depend for their continued existence on the support of the Ulster Unionists, and will therefore find it difficult to treat them impartially in any talks, would it not be sensible to make the one gesture that the Secretary of State can make—withdraw the troops from the streets? A return to normality is the best way of underpinning confidence.

Sir John Wheeler: I can assure the House that the Government are not pushed in any direction, but take decisions based on the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

As for the issue of withdrawing troops from the streets, it is for the Chief Constable to decide the level of security arrangements as operational necessity dictates, and local commanders will decide how much support they require from the armed forces in their areas.

Rev. William McCrea: In view of the stupid question from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who knows little about what is happening in the Province, and in view of the visits by members of the security forces to members of my constituency to tell them that they are being actively targeted by the IRA, how can the Prime Minister and Secretary of State agree to the removal of border road closure orders, particularly as many of the people who are under threat live along the border?

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman is no stranger to the evil of terrorism, so I fully understand and sympathise with the anxiety that he expresses on behalf of his constituents. However, in removing border road closure orders, the Chief Constable, supported by the Army, takes into account the need to maintain security and to protect people living in border areas. There is no suggestion of reducing the support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for the protection of those communities, especially in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Is the Minister aware of the unacceptable upsurge in ordinary crime since the ceasefire? Will he give the RUC sufficient resources to combat that more overtly?

Sir John Wheeler: I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman obtains his information, but yesterday I spoke to a divisional chief superintendent, who assured me that ordinary crime had not increased, but that there had been a welcome increase in support for and contact with the police.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the RUC's resources will remain strong and adequate to deal with the ordinary crime problem and the potential threat of any resumption of terrorism from any quarter.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will my right hon. Friend give a clear assurance that the Government will not negotiate with a criminal organisation such as the IRA, or with those who support them, such as Sinn Fein, or drop any hints or give any assurances about the gaol terms to be served by convicts who have been convicted of serious criminal offences, or offer any amnesties to people who have yet to be convicted of serious criminal offences or agree to differential policing arrangements in the Province? Will he assure the House that, whatever happens, we will never allow justice in this country to be politicised?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I can give him the assurances that he seeks. There is no question of negotiation on the length of prison sentences. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, there will be no amnesty for those who have been properly convicted and sentenced to imprisonment by the impartial courts in Northern Ireland; nor is there to be any change in the criminal justice system or the effectiveness of the police service.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that whatever security changes occur in Northern Ireland—and we hope that reductions will be made in security arrangements—the Government must do all in their power to provide jobs and training for those people working in security who will inevitably be made redundant? Will he assure the House that security changes will not mean an easier time in Northern Ireland for the burglar, the so-called joy rider or the drug trafficker?

Sir John Wheeler: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new duties at the Dispatch Box. I assure him that the Royal Ulster Constabulary is developing a series of programmes to deal with the threat of ordinary crime of the kind that he describes. There will no diminution in the resources available to the police service in Northern Ireland or any change in the criminal justice system that would enable ordinary crime to go undetected or unpunished.

Mr. Robathan: I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about greater contact between the public and the police. He will know that, notwithstanding the ceasefire, the campaign of intimidation against people

in both communities, which involves punishment beatings and expulsions from communities, is continuing and is carried on by both IRA and loyalist groups. As the security forces are now able to go about their business without direct threat to themselves, is my right hon. Friend able to comment on the progress being made by the Royal Ulster Constabulary to put criminal thugs who are intimidating communities where they belong?

Sir John Wheeler: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. There is no excuse at all for those who seek to usurp the law through any pretended duties of policing on the streets of Northern Ireland. The policing of Northern Ireland is a matter for the police service and for no one else. The RUC will vigorously investigate any allegations of the kind to which my hon. Friend refers with a view to making arrests and placing people before the courts.

Peace Process

6. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the development of the framework document on the future of Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Useful progress has been made, but there are still substantial questions on which more work is required. We hope to give priority to these in our relations with the new Government in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. McAvoy: Will the Secretary of State accept that the Opposition support the strategy of the peace process deployed so far of locking the paramilitaries on both sides into the process and making it impossible for them to go back to their campaign of violence? Does he accept the need to develop a peace process that encompasses the whole spectrum of opinion in Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. When he next goes to Northern Ireland he will be impressed by the quite new sensation of hope that seems to be apparent throughout the community, and the belief that it is unthinkable that violence should return. Those who may be minded to return to violence for political purposes will have to take heed of that. It is necessary that what is called the peace process should continue to retain the confidence of all sections of the community. Therefore, it has to be balanced.

Mr. Trimble: The Secretary of State referred to continuing difficulties with the Irish Government in these discussions. Have the Irish indicated that they will accept their international obligations by dropping the territorial claim in article 2 of their constitution, or are they continuing their blackmailing demand that the unacceptable price for that is some form of tampering with the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and thus the Act of Union?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not recall referring to continuing difficulties with the Irish Government. I said that much more work needed to be done on a number of topics. Obviously, as everybody knows, the question of a territorial claim embodied in the Irish constitution is a matter of great importance in this process. I will not break the confidentiality of the discussions that are going on, but the hon. Gentleman and others will wish to know that the importance of that topic is well understood by this Government and by the Irish Government.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Has the Secretary of State given any further consideration to publishing the minutes of the three-strand talks so that the House would be in a better position to determine how the framework document might throw light on the way in which it can overcome the difficulties that the minutes may highlight?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Quite an important part of the three-strand discussions in 1992 was the fact that they should be in confidence. That was more or less observed at the time. I do not want to go beyond that and publish accounts of what happened two years ago as I do not think that it would be helpful at this juncture.

Mr. Spellar: While developments are taking place, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman put on hold other measures that are opposed by the great majority of people across Northern Ireland—for example, the privatisation of the water industry?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have already made it clear that I do not anticipate introducing proposals in that regard during this Parliament. One matter that will have to be taken account of, at any time, is the very great anomalies in the charging system for water services in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Llwyd: I am sure that the Minister is aware that the House unreservedly welcomes the peace process, which brings with it the likely end of direct rule in the north of Ireland. Earlier, he said that he would favour a democratically elected assembly or forum for the north of Ireland. If that is so right—and it is—for the north of Ireland, why is it so wrong for Wales and for Scotland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I recall that in, I think, 1976, the question of devolution was referred to the people of Wales and of Scotland and it received a rather negative answer—

Mr. Canavan: The majority were in favour. The Secretary of State was wrong twice.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: That was a very loud Scottish intervention. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his point if he stands up in a moment.

Special factors apply to the community in Northern Ireland that make its governance almost unique. It is difficult to see a reliable read across.

NHS Community Care Trusts

7. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the guidelines on market testing in the NHS community care trusts.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): Health and social services trusts, including those providing community care services, are subject to Government policy on market testing as set out in the White Paper "Competing for Quality". In addition, they have been provided with guidance on the conduct of market testing in the form of a compendium of good practice.

Ms Squire: Does the Minister agree that Government guidelines on the market testing of NHS community care trusts in Northern Ireland are implemented more forcefully there than they are in the remainder of the United Kingdom? Does he further agree that there has been unwarranted Government interference in the operation of trusts, which has led to a deterioration in quality and in standards of patient care? Does he admit that the Government have been two-faced in their policy on health and social services and have acted against the general interests of the public?

Mr. Moss: The Government's definition of, and policy on, market testing in health and personal social services for Northern Ireland is the same as that applied to all other parts of the health service in the United Kingdom. I remind the hon. Lady that the purpose of market testing is to ensure that the resources available are used as effectively as possible for the benefit of patients.

The results for Northern Ireland show that market testing in health and personal social services has been a great success. For example, up to March 1993, more than £60 million of support services had been market-tested, with identified savings of £11 million per annum.

Mr. John Marshall: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his promotion. Does he agree that, wherever market testing has been undertaken, it has produced savings and value for money for the taxpayer? Its opponents are more interested in jobs for the boys than in quality of service to the customer or value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr. Moss: I am most grateful for my hon. Friend's warm welcome. The savings from market testing are used in the HPSS for the benefit of patients and clients. They are pooled with funds from other cost improvement programmes and the growth moneys provided by Government to fund service developments and meet new pressures.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I, too, welcome the Minister to his position and the shadow Northern Ireland team to its first Northern Ireland Questions today.

The Minister will recognise that in market testing and contracts it is not always wise to choose the lowest bidder because it usually turns out to be at the highest cost. Is the Minister satisfied that those in community trusts with the responsibility for the most vulnerable in our society at a time of child abuse scandals in the Province are receiving the necessary back-up and the financial support to do the job?

Mr. Moss: I agree partially with the hon. Gentleman that implementing in-house service level agreements without competition may improve efficiency and effectiveness, but they do not prove that the optimum levels have been achieved, nor do they satisfy market testing criteria. On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I take on board the current difficulties in the Province, but I am assured that there is no lack of funds in the social services to meet the needs of the population.

Ms Mowlam: One important aspect of being cared for in the community is the ability of elderly people to be able to afford to heat their homes. Do the Minister and his colleagues realise that they ignore at their peril the opposition that exists among the people of Northern Ireland and the representatives of all their parties to the imposition of 17.5 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel?

Mr. Moss: I recognise the opposition from Northern Ireland Members of Parliament, but I refer the House to the comments in the Budget speech only this week that proper compensation is to be paid to pensioners to compensate for VAT at 17.5 per cent.

Constituency Boundaries

8. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the final proposals for constituency boundaries will be published.

Mr. Ancram: The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland has stated that it will not be able to report its final recommendations before 1995. My hon. Friend should approach the Boundary Commission itself for further information concerning the timetable.

Mr. Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the impartiality of the Boundary Commission and its chairman, the House can rest in confidence that there will not be any intended or, I hope, unintended, political effects of the redesignation of the boundaries in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ancram: I totally endorse what my hon. Friend has said. The Boundary Commission is responsible to Parliament. It is independent, and that independence must be respected.

Mr. Maginnis: What representations have been made from either the Maryfield secretariat, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin or Dublin Government Ministers through the intergovernmental council to influence the findings of the Boundary Commission? Will the Minister assure us that he has responded by rejecting any approach and by telling Dublin bluntly that the business which is conducted under the chairmanship of Madam Speaker is none of its business?

Mr. Ancram: That matter has been raised on two occasions at the intergovernmental conference. On both occasions the Irish Government have been reminded of the independence of the commission.

New Roads

9. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums he intends to spend on new roads in Northern Ireland in each of the next five years.

Mr. Moss: Subject to the overall public expenditure situation the Department currently plans to spend about £12 million on major road schemes in each of the next five years.

Mr. Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give us an assurance that none of that money will be frittered away

on the restoration of cross-border roads, which would quite possibly be nugatory expense? Will he remember the absolute necessity of massive upgrading on the road between Belfast and Larne?

Mr. Moss: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing my attention to the importance of the road from Belfast to Larne, but expenditure on roads, including bridges and street lighting, should remain in excess of £150 million per annum during the next three financial years, and the current top expenditure priorities are maintenance, bridge strengthening and traffic control in urban areas. They do not include the border crossing areas.

Mr. Tim Smith: May I welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box and wish him every success with his new responsibilities? When will the Belfast cross-harbour bridge open, and will it not be a welcome addition to Northern Ireland's road network?

Mr. Moss: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. We hope to open the cross-harbour bridge to traffic in January 1995. It was built at a cost of £60 million—which was in addition to the normal expenditure on roads in the Province.

Peace Process

10. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on developments in the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Downing street declaration continues to underpin our approach to the peace process. We have proposed that exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein shall commence next week. We intend shortly thereafter to do likewise with representatives of loyalists.

We expect to resume work with the new Irish Government on the joint framework document as soon as practicable.

Mr. Etherington: Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of progress with talks on the framework document? I refer particularly to the uncertainty of the Dublin Government and to the fact that the British Government are now a minority Government.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The most notable obstruction or difficulty in the way of progress with the joint framework document is that we do not have a new Government in the Republic at the moment. I am confident that the British Government can look forward to a fruitful period of discussion, for as long as necessary, with the new Dublin Government on the joint framework document. I am confident also that all parties in the Republic are as keen as we are to make progress.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Coombs: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to study the speech made by the French Prime Minister, Mr. Balladur, on the need to resist centralism and federalism in Europe? Is not that speech evidence that the entente is especially cordiale at present, and that the British Government are winning the arguments over the right kind of Europe for the future?

The Prime Minister: I certainly did read Mr. Balladur's speech. In fact, we discussed what he was likely to say when we met at Chartres a short while ago. I would have been pleased to make the speech that Mr. Balladur made—I nearly did at Leiden. He is right to reject federalism in favour of flexibility, say that we should avoid the encroachment of European institutions on national institutions, and talk of the need to look again at European policies as well as institutions, to keep costs down as we examine the question of enlargement. That is clear confirmation that the arguments made by the British Government for some time are increasingly gaining ground across Europe.

Mr. Blair: As to value added tax on domestic fuel, given that it is now clear that eight and three quarter million pensioners will not even be eligible for cold weather payments, and given the Prime Minister's specific promise at the last general election that he would not raise VAT, will the right hon. Gentleman agree to Labour's amendment next week, so that the House can vote on whether he has kept his promise?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have already had four votes on VAT. He neglected to mention that, in real terms, even after last year's VAT increase of 8 per cent., fuel prices actually fell. The position of the 15 million people who receive compensation for the VAT increase is, in real terms, better than it was before VAT was imposed on domestic fuel.

Mr. Blair: I gather that the Chancellor is in one-to-one meetings with the Back-Bench rebels over VAT. Would not it be better if all Conservative Members of Parliament had one-to-one meetings with their constituents so that they could know of their anger at the promise betrayed?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends might care to discuss carbon tax with their constituents and explain to them—*[Interruption.]* Clearly they do not wish to discuss anything with their constituents, such as why they oppose VAT because it is politically expedient for them to do so, and why they propose a carbon tax that would have precisely the same effect on fuel prices.

Mr. Garnier: Will my right hon. Friend outline briefly his Government's policy on the deployment of troops in Bosnia and confirm the House's support for the actions of General Rose?

The Prime Minister: I most certainly and unequivocally reaffirm the House's support for the actions taken by General Rose. He has had an extremely difficult job. I believe that he has done that job as well as it could have been done by any commanding officer anywhere in the world. If I may say so, I believe that most hon.

Members and most people in this country will bitterly resent the criticism of General Rose voiced in some United States newspapers.

I have seen the arguments and comments about the position in Bosnia. There is no doubt that the position in Bosnia is serious at the moment. I have no doubt about that at all, but I have to say to the House that, if the embargo was lifted and UNPROFOR was forced to withdraw, the position would be even worse, and particularly so for the Bosnians. The belief that that would produce a level playing field is not, in my judgment, right. It would produce a level killing field.

Q2. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Sir David Steel: During the past couple of days, the Prime Minister and his colleagues have tried to persuade us that all their tax increases are something of a temporary aberration from Conservative instincts. Even if that were so, how does he explain the fact that, under this Government, the top 1 per cent. of taxpayers received tax cuts of something like £47,000 on average, while the low-paid have seen their taxes increase by about £400 a year? Is not that a permanent feature of Conservative instincts?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what is a permanent feature of Conservative instincts: the fact that real, disposable net incomes, at all levels, have risen. That, of course, is what affects people's living standards. Post-taxation, they have more spending power in their pockets than they had before. That is undoubtedly the case right the way down the scale and, I believe, will remain the case.

Mr. James Hill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way in which to get the unemployed back to work is to give them incentives and training, and not to bash business men with a minimum wage and a training levy?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I certainly agree with my hon. Friend about that. Priority is given to getting the unemployed back to work. We have seen unemployment fall more dramatically in this country than in any other European country. There was a wide range of measures in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget which will add to that return to work.

Q3. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Connarty: Does the Prime Minister accept the advice of the all-party group on pensions that, despite the Government's compensation package, the individual pensioner will be 56p a week worse off if VAT on fuel rises to 17.5 per cent? In the light of that, will he tell his hon. Friends who are committed to defending pensioners against that attack to stick by their principles next week?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what I had to say to the Leader of the Opposition just a few moments ago. The hon. Gentleman will also be aware of the consistent position that we have taken about VAT on fuel and the consistent position that the House has endorsed on at least four occasions.

Mr. Stephen: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the grave concern expressed by many of our constituents about people who are not ordinarily resident in this country coming here to litigate their disputes in the English courts at the British taxpayers' expense on legal aid? Will he consider withdrawing civil legal aid from such people in future?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly seek the advice of my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. I am aware of the concern that has arisen. As my hon. Friend knows, the matter is very complex, but it raises a great many concerns among many people in the country. I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Q4. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Prime Minister confirm that he is still committed to the Rio environmental targets, and in particular to efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions? If he is committed to reducing carbon dioxide emissions, how will that commitment be financed? Does he accept that the Government's policy was to use the Energy Saving Trust, and that so far the trust has virtually no money with which to reach its targets?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his question.

We are currently considering a range of options for funding the trust, including the involvement of private sector finance and input from the energy consumer. We remain totally committed to meeting the targets to which I signed up at Rio, and with that in mind the trust has already prepared a plan setting out how it intends to proceed towards its contribution to carbon emission reduction as part of the climate change reduction programme.

I would add that our decisions regarding VAT on fuel have a strong environmental impact.

Q5. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arnold: What does my right hon. Friend think of the trench warfare being conducted against grant-maintained schools by Labour-controlled councils, particularly Kent county council? Kent has vetoed the only application for a new nursery unit in Gravesend because the school is grant-maintained.

What does my right hon. Friend think of a man who is prepared to reject all the schools in his Labour-controlled borough, and to sneak his son eight miles across Greater London to a grant-maintained school?

The Prime Minister: I have no comment to make about any right hon. or hon. Member who seeks the best

for his or her children; I am sure that we would all do that. My only criticism would be that the policy for everyone should not be to remove the same choices from millions of other people.

Q6. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Byers: Is the Prime Minister aware that, according to the latest figures, the average household fuel bill in Northern Ireland is 27 per cent. higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom? Can he explain why the VAT compensation package announced on Tuesday failed to take that difference into account?

The Prime Minister: As Northern Ireland would be the first to accept, we are a united kingdom as a whole, and our legislation stretches across the United Kingdom: that position is taken very firmly by Northern Ireland Members of Parliament. It is also true that we see from Government support across the United Kingdom—I take these figures broadly from memory—that the degree of underlying public support for Northern Ireland is substantially higher than that for other parts of the United Kingdom. The figure for Scotland is substantially above that for Wales, and the figure for Wales is substantially above that for England. It is in that way that we seek to ensure a proper equity of support for services and people throughout the United Kingdom.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Following my right hon. Friend's talks with the Republican leader Senator Dole, will he confirm that he made it clear to the senator that, whatever the differences may be over Bosnia, they should not be allowed to undermine the commitment of his country and ours to the Atlantic alliance?

The Prime Minister: I had an extremely useful exchange with Senator Dole. We spent some time considering the Atlantic alliance and there is no doubt whatever about Senator Dole's whole-hearted support for NATO, both now and in the future.

Q7. **Ms Estelle Morris:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Morris: The Prime Minister has been asked three times this afternoon to justify his policy on VAT; three times he has failed to answer the question. Does he accept that, no matter what he says, pensioners do not believe him, because they know that an extra £1 a week will not pay their bills? Why has the Prime Minister betrayed the pensioners of the nation?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady may have repeated a question that has been asked before, but she should have listened to the answers. In reality, we have put in place a generous package to compensate not only pensioners but others for the effects of VAT.

Mr. Connarty: Not enough.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman shouts, "Not enough," and that is just another illustration of the fact that the Opposition claim that they would not put up taxes, they oppose every tax increase, but they would choose to put up expenditure and have no idea how they would fund any one of their policies. That is not new Labour: it is the old Labour that the electorate have rejected time after time.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend think that many people in this country would support the legalisation of cannabis or the party that advocates it?

The Prime Minister: I certainly would not support the legalisation of cannabis, and I do not believe that the overwhelming majority of people in this country would support it either.

Q8. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hutton: Why has the Prime Minister sanctioned the dismissal of 600 uniformed front-line customs officers this week? Does he agree with the Paymaster General that the dismissal of those 600 officers will compromise the Government's fight against illegal drugs and pornography?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) asked that question on Tuesday and I told him then that it will not. Since then I have had the opportunity of discussing it with the chairman of Customs and Excise and she confirms that it will not.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I have two statements first.

Local Government Finance

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the local authority finance settlement for England for 1995-96.

In forming my proposals, I have listened carefully to the views of local authorities and their associations, and I have considered fully the demands which will be placed on local authorities in the coming year.

I have also given weight to the interests of the economy as a whole, and in particular the Government's objective of reducing the public sector deficit. Local government accounts for around a quarter of general Government expenditure and has been rigorously examined, as have all other spending programmes. I have had regard to the level of inflation, with the retail prices index increase to October at 2.4 per cent., and the underlying rate currently the lowest for decades.

Thanks to the Government's firm control of inflation, the resources available to local authorities this year are worth considerably more than they otherwise might have been or than local authorities expected them to be. I have also taken into account our policy that increases in pay and prices within the public sector must be met through greater efficiency and economy. It is clear that many authorities have considerable scope to increase their efficiency.

That is the background to the aggregate figures I published on 29 November. The Government's view is that the appropriate level of revenue spending for local authorities in England in 1995-96 will be £43.511 billion. Central Government grant and income from non-domestic rates in support of that expenditure will be £34.672 billion.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 4 November that the Government propose to make available in 1995-96 a special grant of £647.6 million for the further increase in the number of people needing community care. That amount is included in the figures that I have just quoted. The figures also reflect some minor changes in local authorities' functions next year and a separate provision of £50 million for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation.

My proposal, including provision for community care and reorganisation costs, provides for a 2.2 per cent. increase in local authority spending year on year, including the spending of police authorities. Leaving aside the increase in provision for community care, my proposal still amounts to an increase in provision of just under 1 per cent. year on year. In allocating that sum between services, we have decided to give priority to education and to the police.

On 29 November, I announced that the distributable amount of non-domestic rates in 1995-96 should be nearly £11.4 billion and I am today publishing details of the distribution. I proposed that the revenue support grant should be £18.32 billion. In addition, some £5 billion of specific and special grants would be available.

I turn now to the means of distributing revenue support grant. At its heart is the standard spending assessment for each authority. Last year, we carried out a thorough review of SSAs in partnership with the local authority associations, although each of the associations tends to have a different series of priorities from the other, naturally reflecting its own interests in the matters about which it is concerned.

For this year, we have brought up to date our data on the SSA indicators wherever we can. That has been beneficial to authorities in inner London in particular. Aside from those data changes, I propose a year of relative stability in the methodology used to distribute resources among local authorities, which had to deal with a significant change last year. I felt that stability was the most important element this year. I know that many councils will welcome that because they were apprehensive that the sometimes large fluctuations in SSA would be repeated, even though those changes were damped. Last year, that damping helped many councils.

My proposed changes are quite limited and I shall not list them here, with two exceptions. First, we have revised the formula for the fire service SSA to take account of various factors that lead to higher costs in some authorities, and the formula for authorities such as Cornwall and the Isle of Wight, which have particular coastal problems.

Secondly, the police authorities reforms that we have put in place this year have made it necessary for the financial arrangements to be changed considerably. For many years, just over half police expenditure was met by a specific grant from the Home Office. Now, the police specific grant will be cash limited and distributed using the same formula as for police SSAs. In the past, that formula has been based on numbers of police in establishments approved by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. From 1995-96, however, the Home Secretary will no longer approve such establishments. It follows that a new formula is needed.

There has been considerable work by representatives from the police and the local authority associations, along with the Home Office and my Department, to find the most satisfactory way of representing the needs for spending on police. We considered the new analyses in the context of factors that have previously been used to assess expenditure needs and of the scope for further work to be undertaken on the formulae.

We concluded that, for 1995-96, the size of the approved police establishment should be included as an indicator in the funding formula. As a result, the extent of change next year will be limited. It assists in providing stability and continuity of policing. The Home Office and my Department will carry out further work on the formula in 1995.

I propose that the change in police SSA and specific grant will be damped by a special grant in 1995-96 where they are reduced by more than 2 per cent. as a result of the changes. That is part of a policy to ensure that, where there are necessary changes in the money going to a local authority, and where the changes are above what can reasonably be borne in a particular year, a damping system to help them is in place. That grant will be paid to support expenditure by police authorities, cushioning the impact on council tax payers.

In view of the limited nature of my remaining SSA changes I do not propose to damp those. However, I propose to continue to damp the effects of the large changes made last year; that will be an encouragement to many local councils. In 1994-95 we are paying SSA reduction grant to protect council tax payers from the

effects of the 1993 SSA review and the incorporation into SSAs of detailed data from the 1991 census. Grant is paid to authorities whose SSAs were reduced by more than 2 per cent. I propose a similar grant in 1995-96 in respect of the same changes, the threshold to be a further 2 per cent. I know that that will be widely welcomed.

The council tax has now been in operation for two years, and is well established as an equitable means whereby local residents contribute to the cost of local services. Council taxes will vary widely, depending on the spending decisions of each local authority and its performance in collecting the tax, on the circumstances of each household, and on individual entitlement to exemptions or benefits. There is therefore practically no meaning in talk about average taxes within or between authorities.

I remind the House that when we announced the figures last year it was widely reported that they would automatically lead to a 6 per cent. increase in council tax, but that in the event the increases amounted to only about 2.2 per cent. I therefore warn the House again that at this point there is no way of assessing any kind of average tax increase.

However, I am required to identify notional taxes for each valuation band for a standard level of spending—the so-called council tax for standard spending, or CTSS. *[Interruption.]* Had Opposition Members listened to the corresponding part of my statement last year they might not have gone out frightening people with figures that turned out to be entirely wrong. So I hope that this year they will listen.

My proposals incorporate a CTSS of £491 for band C. I emphasise to the House that that is merely an element in the grant distribution formula. If hon. Members remember that, the faults and mistakes of last year will not be repeated. It is neither a prediction of individual council tax bills nor a national average.

When the council tax was introduced in April 1993 we promised a scheme of transitional relief for at least the first two years, to help those facing the largest increases above their community charge bills. At present 1.4 million households benefit from transitional relief and many would face a considerable increase in their bills if it ended this year. I therefore propose to make available £30 million to enable transitional relief to continue for a further year. Relief in 1995-96 will be withdrawn at the same rate as in 1994-95; taxpayers will receive last year's relief less an amount ranging from £67 a year for band A to £137 a year for band H.

I also propose to remove the requirement for local authorities to repay community charge transitional relief grant, community charge reduction scheme grant and council tax transitional relief grant, in respect of charges that are written off or remain uncollected. I do not propose to make any change in the arrangements for recoupment of community charge grant.

I shall now deal with capping. We remain determined that local authorities should make a full contribution to the control of public expenditure, and should set budgets that their local taxpayers and the country can afford. I am today announcing my provisional capping criteria for 1995-96. I am also issuing proposals for the calculation of notional amounts for those authorities whose boundaries or functions will change from 1 April 1995, for reasons that include the transfer of responsibility for the police service from county councils to the new free-standing police authorities, and the reorganisation of the Isle of Wight. Those figures are the base from which I shall measure increases in budgets when determining whether those increases are excessive.

In addition, my provisional capping criteria make allowance for that expenditure on care in the community which is met this year by the special transitional grant, and for the abolition of inter-authority recoupment payments in respect of most pupils. Those adjustments allow a fair year-on-year comparison of budgets.

Where budgets are very substantially above SSA, I intend again to seek budget reductions. My general intention is that the provisional capping criteria should allow larger year-on-year increases for authorities with budgets closer to their SSAs than for those with relatively higher budgets. I have had particular regard, however, to the effect of our settlement proposals on the year-on-year change in provision for spending by different classes of authority.

My current intention is that there should be different criteria for police authorities and inner London boroughs than for all other authorities, reflecting the fact that those classes of authority have somewhat larger increases in aggregate SSA provision than others.

I must acquaint the House with the effect of my intended criteria. I am sorry that this is a detailed matter, but it needs to be put in the public domain clearly. First, for police authorities, any increase of more than 2.5 per cent. over 1994-95 will be considered an excessive increase if it gives rise to a budget requirement above the authority's SSA plus police grant. Any increase of more than 1.5 per cent. over 1994-95 will be considered an excessive increase if it gives rise to a budget requirement more than 5 per cent. above the authority's SSA plus police grant. Any increase of more than 0.5 per cent. over 1994-95 will be considered an excessive increase if it gives rise to a budget requirement more than 10 per cent. above the authority's SSA plus police grant.

For inner London boroughs the criteria will be comparable, but with increases of 2 per cent., 1.25 per cent., and 0.5 per cent. For all other authorities, any increase of more than 0.5 per cent. over 1994-95 will be considered an excessive increase if it gives rise to a budget requirement above the authority's SSA. In addition, I intend that any budget requirement more than 12.5 per cent. above SSA will be considered excessive, save that an authority will not be designated if it fulfils certain conditions equivalent to those which have applied in previous years.

Those criteria are necessarily provisional. I cannot take my decisions on capping until authorities have set their budgets for 1995-96. When I come to take those decisions, I shall of course take into account all relevant considerations.

In presenting this statement, I must emphasise that my Department is today writing with details of the settlement to every local authority in England. That package includes a consultation paper setting out how we propose to distribute central Government support between authorities, including my proposals on SSAs, for continuing to damp SSA losses from 1994-95 and for the new police authorities. It gives details of the proposed council tax transitional relief scheme. It sets out my

[Mr. John Gummer]

provisional capping criteria and it includes my proposals for notional amounts. Copies of the package have been placed in the Vote Office and the Library.

The proposals that I have outlined today represent a balanced and reasonable response to the conflict between the pressure to provide ever more resources for local government and the need to control public spending. I promised the local authorities that I would not seek to present the proposals in anything other than a direct factual way and that I would, above all, insist that the settlement, although tough, was one that could be worked within. Therefore, I have sought neither to underplay the difficulties nor to overplay the advantages. So I am sorry that I have to end by drawing attention to a factual inaccuracy in some of the statements that have already been made.

You will know, Madam Speaker, that at the beginning of the year the standard spending assessment, gathered up together with other grants, reaches what is known as the total standard spending. That is the amount of money that the Government expect local authorities to be able to work within. That is assessed before the year in this statement. That is what we are talking about today—our assessment now. At the end of the year we discover that local authorities inevitably have spent more than that. They draw down from balances, they find money from various activities and they spend more than that. In those circumstances, we need to compare either the beginning-of-year figure from one year with that of another to get a fair measure, or the end-of-year figure. We cannot compare the beginning-of-year figure for one year with the end-of-year figure for another. That is precisely what local government organisations have done, however, to try to pretend that the package means a cut of £1.5 million. They have done so by comparing what they ended up with last year with what we are suggesting as the standard spending requirements, the TSS, for this year—a wholly fictitious figure.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The right hon. Gentleman does not know what he is talking about.

Mr. Gummer: For the hon. Gentleman to say anything about not knowing what he is talking about after his performance at Question Time yesterday would make Conservative Members extremely suspicious. The TSS will increase next year by £935 million, after adjusting for changes in the way in which the organisation operates. I do not claim that that represents anything other than a tough settlement, but one has to tell the truth rather than mislead the people of Britain by pretending otherwise.

Mr. Dobson: As we wake ourselves up after 20 minutes of moderate tirade from the Secretary of State, I can say for a start that the settlement is a bad deal for council tax payers throughout England. Next year, they will pay more and get less.

On the Government's figures, which were issued on Tuesday, the council tax will have to increase next year by an average of 6 per cent., which is more than twice the rate of inflation. According to their published figures, the Government expect council tax payers to cough up an extra £2.8 billion in the next three years, which is equal to almost 1.5p in the pound on the standard rate of income tax—another tax increase that the Chancellor did not quite get round to mentioning on Tuesday.

The deal is also bad for anyone who uses local services because councils will be forced to cut back. Next year, the cash available to councils for local services will be £1.5 billion less than they are spending this year. That figure makes no allowance for increased demand, for example, from the 110,000 extra pupils who will go to school, the increasing number of old people, inflation or any pay settlements that will have to be reached. The simple truth is that next year people will pay more council tax and get fewer services in return.

The Secretary of State said earlier this week that local services will not suffer. Tory Secretaries of State have said that every year, but it has never been true. Behind all the jargon and the fiddled figures, in real towns, cities and villages throughout the country, real people have suffered and will suffer further.

Let us take housing. In 1979, councils in England built 66,724 new homes, but last year the total was 1,235. In the mean time, rents have soared. How many new homes will councils build this year? Will it be more, or even less? I challenge the Secretary of State to deny the fact that average council rents will increase next year by three times the rate of inflation.

Look at what has happened to school meals. In 1979, 64 per cent. of school children took school meals. Last year, it was only 43 per cent. and that is because the price has increased from 20p in every school in England in 1979 to more than £1.20 in some areas today. With record levels of child poverty, will the Secretary of State tell us what will happen to school meal prices next year as a result of the settlement? Will they go up or down?

Let us take class sizes. Primary school classes are 9 per cent. bigger today than they were 10 years ago, and the same is now happening with secondary school classes. Can the Secretary of State tell us, since he says he is giving special priority to education, whether class sizes will go up again next year or down?

When compared with 1979, the number of meals on wheels served by luncheon clubs has slumped from 15 million to 7 million. Can the Secretary of State tell us whether the new settlement will allow councils to reverse that trend, or whether the number of meals will fall again?

Everybody knows that care in the community is not working properly. People who cannot cope are walking the streets, and others have to put up with neighbours who cannot help being a nuisance because no one is looking after them and because there are no acute or secure beds available in a crisis. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that this settlement will mean that enough funds will go to councils and the health service next year to resolve what everybody recognises is a crisis in community care?

The Secretary of State knows that the settlement will drive up the council tax and lower the standards of council services for local people. He will try to shift the blame on to local councils, but I must warn him that he will not succeed. Local people have seen through the Tories' lies. Forcing people to pay more to get less will not work any more.

Mr. Gummer: It is difficult for someone to grasp how things work at the beginning, but the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) should have done more homework than that.

First, the hon. Gentleman talked about housing capital, when today's announcement is about revenue. We are talking today about revenue expenditure, and housing capital issues do not arise in the announcement. We can have that argument with him on an other occasion. The hon. Gentleman threw that in because he thought that it might have something to do with the announcement.

We must judge the hon. Gentleman also on the fact that he repeated his misunderstanding of the figures. The £1.5 billion to which he referred is totally untrue. He is comparing totally different figures from one year to another year, and the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself for misleading the House. The House can forgive him only because he has not been doing the job long enough to know the difference between the TSS and the budgets of local councils and their spending at the end of the year. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know that he should do his homework before he comes here, and not dump a load of old rubbish in front of the House.

The same is true about the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of successive Tory Secretaries of State. His predecessor, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), tried to play the same kind of game. He said, for example, that a settlement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary when he was Secretary of State for the Environment would mean job losses for teachers.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): That was true.

Mr. Gummer: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has just come in. He says that that was true, and he said that there would be job losses among teachers in one year, the next year and the year afterwards. I now have the figures—395,000 schoolteachers in the first year, 396,000 schoolteachers in the second year and 397,000 schoolteachers in the third year. The hon. Gentleman was wrong about every year. That is what the Opposition say every year, and every year they have been proved wrong. But the hon. Gentleman never comes to the House and says, "Madam Speaker, I would like to make a personal statement. I was wrong in what I said." The hon. Gentleman has never done that.

The hon. Gentleman's successor, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, was wrong in the way in which he attacked the settlement. Sadly, he was wrong in a worse way than the hon. Member for Blackburn, because his hon. Friend had at least done his homework and understood how the system worked.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that we are not having a debate at this stage. I shall now want brisk questions if hon. Members wish to be called. I am not sure that all hon. Members who wish to be called will be, and they certainly will not be called if we go on at this pace. I now want brisk questions and brisk answers from the Minister.

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, for the second year running, Northamptonshire will have a disappointing settlement? Is he aware that, as a result, it is highly likely that many teachers will have to be made redundant because of the need to finance a new pay rise? Will he bear that fact in mind when he comes to make a decision on the capping of Northamptonshire county council?

Mr. Gummer: Although it is true that, last year—and this year, in advance—hon. Members representing Northamptonshire drew to my attention that they thought then, and feared now, that Northamptonshire had received less SSA than it should have done, its settlement was above the average last year. I hope that the outcome will be the same this year, but until the figures are agreed with the local authorities, I cannot be sure of that. If Northamptonshire has particular problems, I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to talk about them.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the Secretary of State agree that staff salaries are by far the biggest part of education costs and that pupil numbers are going up in many areas? The efficiencies that must be achieved to pay for staff salary increases must mean that teachers will be sacked and that pupil-staff ratios will deteriorate.

Mr. Gummer: The fact is that local authorities will be able to decide how to spend their money. We have specifically insisted that significant extra resources should go into education, but it is for local authorities to decide their priorities. I am sure that the hon. Member would agree that the priority of many local authorities will be to ensure that the requisite number of teachers is available. That means that, if savings are necessary, they will have to be found in other areas. It is for local authorities to make that decision. Frankly, we are asking local authorities to do only what is already being asked of a large part of government and what private companies have had to do year in, year out during the recession through which we have now passed.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Will my right hon. Friend say a word about the position of Cornwall, particularly in the light of the thoroughly predictable annual exercise by the majority group on the county council, the Liberal Democrats, who, a week before every settlement, always prophesy doom and gloom and claim that the county council's finances will be thrown into chaos? Will he accept from me and other Conservative Members our thanks for at last doing something about the SSA for the fire service, which will benefit the people of Cornwall and the population of the Isles of Scilly?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend. I hope very much that those improvements will be widely welcomed in my hon. Friend's county. I am sorry that the county council has gone in for that popular activity of presenting a wish list for the kind of budget it might have had if everyone gave it every penny to fund everything it wanted—only to complain that it did not even get that money. It is important for the people of Cornwall to recognise that the SSA is a fair settlement—it is not an easy one—in which the county has been particularly carefully looked after, not least because my right hon. and hon. Friends have raised with me the difficulties in the far west.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the SSA for Newham is £259.5 million? Does that include or exclude the supplementary transitional grant for community care? Bearing in mind the fact that, according to statistics, Newham is the most deprived borough in the country, is

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

the right hon. Gentleman aware that £20 million must be deducted from education and community care due to defective formulae for homelessness and capital repayments? Is not that unjust by the standards of the old testament, let alone the new testament?

Mr. Gummer: By any of those standards, Newham has one of the highest SSAs of any part of the country. One cannot suggest that we have been other than very conscious of the particular problems of Newham. I cannot comment on the details for this year, because we have to agree with the local authorities the methodology upon which the details will be based. I am not prepared to offer any relevant figures for which the methodology has not been agreed by those authorities. That will be done as rapidly as possible, and I will then be happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman about the effect on Newham.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): On the police, my right hon. Friend will be aware that Cambridgeshire has fewer police officers per head of population than any other county in the land. Can he assure me that the representations I persistently made about that to the Home Office have been taken into consideration when deciding the settlement for Cambridgeshire? Will he also assure me that the new arrangements will mean that the Lib-Lab county council will not be able to tinker with the money allocated and salt it away for other purposes?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for that, and for his constant pressure in relation to this issue. Cambridgeshire county council tackles those matters very badly, but we have tried hard to ensure that legitimate demands are met as regards the police. I think that my hon. Friend will find that there has been a significant increase in the settlement.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team on that statement, and I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French).

I am all for prudent public expenditure, except in Gloucestershire. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will take on board my annual plea to reconsider the area cost adjustments element of the SSA, bearing in mind the fact that there should be some taper out from London rather than a sudden line saying, "There is Oxfordshire, which is eligible for ACA; there is Gloucestershire, which is not."

When my right hon. Friend reconsiders the method of funding the police forces, will he remember that there are three royal residences in my constituency, which require full-time permanent protection? That is very different from a temporary requirement arising from, for example, a party political conference.

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for that. We have already moved in the direction of a tapering system for the area cost adjustments, and I think that he will be pleased at the way in which we have sought to take on board many of the requests that he and other hon. Members made, although we have not been able to meet all of them.

We have also accepted that the real need is to try to move more closely towards travel-to-work areas. That is another aspect that I hope will be taken into account, but I cannot now tell my hon. Friend whether it will have the effect in Gloucestershire that he so sorely needs.

As for the police, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is on the Bench, and no doubt will have taken note of that.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does the Secretary of State realise that if local authorities—especially Labour ones—have used their balances to protect local services, it is because that is what local people want, despite the Government onslaught against local government finance? If the 2.2 per cent. overall settlement is to include special transitional grant, does the Secretary of State accept that that is a cut in real terms which will have serious effects, especially in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent, which I represent?

Mr. Gummer: I do not suggest that the settlement that I have announced will provide Stoke-on-Trent, or any other part of the country, with a considerably increased amount of money to spend on a range of things. I never suggested that. I say to the hon. Gentleman that there is sufficient grant, and local authorities have sufficient resources, to provide the services of a high standard that they should provide, without the fearsome cuts that the hon. Gentleman suggests will be necessary. That is all that I am saying, and I think that it can be achieved.

No doubt the hon. Gentleman will ask local authorities in his constituency to use some more of their balances, if they have them. Other local authorities will also make those decisions. It is up to them; that is what they need to do. If we want local democracy, people must decide how to spend their money.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the Secretary of State accept that a half per cent. capping increase for most local councils is a draconian settlement, which cannot be achieved without substantial cuts in services? Does he realise that outside the House he will go down as "Gummer the Godfather"? His hand may not be on the knife that makes the cuts, but he will be responsible for organising them behind the scenes.

How does the Secretary of State explain to schools, which account directly for about half local government expenditure, how to make efficiency savings? Is not the reality that they will have to sack teachers and increase class sizes, which are already running at 35, and are increasing to 38, 40 and beyond in my constituency?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Go on, Scarface.

Mr. Gummer: On the Government Benches, the word "godfather" is rather a polite one, so I shall take it in the most polite sense. However, I say to the hon. Gentleman that if Sheffield city council did not have such a mess to clear up, it would not have the difficulties that it has, and the hon. Gentleman is the last person in the House to lecture anyone on how to run a local authority. He left behind a mess that the present Labour-run authority is having difficulty clearing up, and I have real sympathy with it.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the welcome news—the culmination of a 32-year campaign—to revise the standard spending

assessment for the fire service on the Isle of Wight will bring welcome relief to the hard-pressed community care budget? Does he agree that, if he and I had £1 for every time that the Opposition tell us that it will be the end of local government, we should have repaid the national debt five times over?

Mr. Gummer: I am not sure that that is entirely what we could have done, but we might have been able to help Sheffield to clear up the mess in which it was left. I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Minister accept that when my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and others use figures they are adopting the methodology used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget? Like everybody else, he does not use year-on-year measurements. That was what my hon. Friend was doing in terms of showing the difference between the amount that is spent in any given year by local authorities, and the amount that he proposes they should spend in the next year. Why does not the Minister admit that, cumulatively, over the past 15 years, well over £50 billion has been taken by the Government from local authorities? That is what creates misery for pensioners and schoolkids and all the others. That is why we in Derbyshire are calling for more money.

Mr. Gummer: First, the hon. Gentleman comes from a county whose mismanagement is recognised even by the rest of the Labour party. For that reason the hon. Gentleman cannot teach the House how to run local authorities. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman should remember that it is not sensible statistically to compare a figure in one year with a wholly different figure in the next year. That is done only if one wishes to mislead and that is what the local government associations wish to do. It is what the Opposition have tried to do, and the Opposition spokesman has done it accidentally because he does not understand it.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does the Secretary of State recognise that there will be a general welcome in Cumbria for the extra £180 million for the police, some of which will go to Cumbria police authority? That extra money refutes the malicious rumours put around some weeks ago about cash cuts. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is a great pity that Liberal and Labour councillors in Cumbria have already had their feet in the trough and have voted, against Conservative opposition, to grant themselves an increase of between 400 and 500 per cent. in attendance allowances for members of the regional authority?

Mr. Gummer: I do not know of the particular decisions of Cumbria county council, but, obviously, there are many areas in which savings can be made. For example, I have looked carefully at the London borough of Camden, where the opportunities for savings are considerable, although that borough is much overburdened by the fact that it is still paying for large debts that were incurred when some hon. Members were councillors in Camden. If the Liberal-Labour group in Cumbria is behaving in that way, it is typical of Lib-Lab pacts all over the country.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the Secretary of State recognise that, despite what he has said about community care, county councils such as that in Lancashire will have to continue cutting services for the most vulnerable sections of the community? Will he assure us that county councils will have sufficient funding to provide those essential services?

Mr. Gummer: Lancashire county council has been pinpointed by Labour Members as inefficient. The former Opposition spokesman on local government, the hon. Member for Blackburn, spent a great deal of time explaining that he wanted his district council to take over the functions of Lancashire county council because it was so poor. I should have thought that Lancashire county council could certainly find ways to safeguard front-line services.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his decision to concentrate so much of the settlement on supporting the police in their fight against crime will have widespread support? Can he confirm that every police force will benefit from the extra cash and that nearly two thirds of all forces, including police in Staffordshire, will benefit by 3 per cent. or more?

Mr. Gummer: I can certainly confirm those improvements. I notice that only from the Conservative side has there been support and praise for extra help for the police. That is because the Conservative party cares about law and order, while those in opposition only talk about it.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that, despite smears from some of his hon. Friends, which they immediately retract when challenged, Birmingham city council is acknowledged under all objective criteria and by the Audit Commission as being well run. Can he confirm that Birmingham will lose a further £18 million in grant this year, and that that is equivalent to more than £1 a week for the average council tax payer? These are hidden taxes for the people of Birmingham so that the Government can save money in their coffers to hand out next year in tax cuts. They will applaud themselves for that, although it will just be handing back to people money that they have already paid.

Mr. Gummer: If the figures were anything like the hon. Lady suggests, Birmingham would benefit considerably from the damping grant, which is much more generous than anybody thought it would be. She should note that if, over the past three years, we had accepted the demands of Birmingham and other Labour councils—supported by the associations and promoted by Labour Front-Bench spokesmen—we would have had to increase VAT to almost 21 per cent. to pay for them, or, if the Opposition prefer, add £510 to the average council tax. That would be the effect of what the Labour party wants us to do—and has wanted us to do for the past three years, never mind what would have happened cumulatively as a result of what it had demanded previously.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does my right hon. Friend accept that this is a most welcome settlement that is relatively generous in the context of the whole Budget package, which had to produce a cut in the budget deficit of £8.5 billion? Does he agree that, if local authorities were to make as much effort as most private companies had to make during the recession, and as the Government are now doing with the freeze in running costs, those councils would have saved sufficient money through

[Mr. John Townend]

improved efficiency and by cutting the number of unnecessary administrators to prevent any reduction in service?

Mr. Gummer: It is absolutely essential for local authorities to find ways of using efficiency gains to ensure that they can protect their front-line services. As my hon. Friend said, the only alternative would be to increase taxation. I repeat that VAT would have to rise to 21 per cent. to fund the Labour party's proposals. I do not believe that the country wants that, so we must save the money through improved efficiency.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): When the Secretary of State plays around with statistics the public become angry, as we do. Why does not he come to my constituency, where I will take him to areas of great deprivation in which the local authority provides the only machinery capable of dealing with the problems? Does he realise that, in constituencies such as mine, it is the vulnerable, the elderly, the children and disabled groups who will have to pay the price? Why does he not recognise that when he makes statements to Parliament?

Mr. Gummer: I recognise that the taxpayer is paying £34.672 billion to ensure that those vulnerable people are cared for properly. The whole system of SSAs is designed to ensure that the money goes mainly to those places where the need is greatest. That is how the system works. When people hear figures, they want them to be accurate and they want accurate comparisons. People get angry when the Labour party compares apples with pears and figures from one end-of-year with figures from another to try to mislead the public.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Does my right hon. Friend agree that local authorities should be encouraged to marry with the private sector for the funding and development of, for example, public buildings? Therefore, can he assure me that local authorities' notional capital spending for guarantees given to the private sector for the funding of and participation in, for example, the building of an exhibition hall, will not be prevented by a rigid capping procedure?

Mr. Gummer: I have just introduced some proposals for loosening considerably the arrangements for those local authorities which wish to enter into reasonable arrangements with the private sector. I have asked the local authorities to come back to me with their views on that, but I have already put many of the proposals into operation so that no one need be held up. If my hon. Friend has any particular points to make on that, I hope that he will come and see me, because I am determined to bring the private sector as much as possible into the activities of local authorities. I very much honour those authorities that are doing that and I am pleased to find that, after all the years of opposition, quite a number of Labour-controlled authorities have now joined us.

Ms Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): When looking at the SSA for Lambeth, will the Secretary of State consider some extra resources, in particular to meet the difficult and sensitive problem that the borough has to face of finding extra resources for the homeless people who sleep in the bull ring, which will be closed fairly soon?

Mr. Gummer: We are in detailed discussions about those matters and I have considerable sympathy with the point that the hon. Lady raises. She, like us, operates against a background of a council which does not have a good reputation for collecting its rents or rates, or doing anything else. However, we must still look carefully at the matter. Lambeth is one of the worst councils and has been one of the worst councils for a long time.

Mr. Skinner: It is not as bad as the Government.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) should be pleased about that, because it is the one council that is worse than Derbyshire county council.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware that under previous Conservative-controlled administrations Wiltshire county council traditionally funded the Wiltshire police force well above the level of Government support? Therefore, will he confirm that his statement today means that, as long as the present hung county council continues to fund well up to the level of need in Wiltshire and even above it, there need be no cuts in local government support for the police force in Wiltshire this year?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will be going into details on that, but I am sure that he would agree that that is true.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): The Secretary of State will be aware of two particular problems with the SSA formula as it affects the London borough of Newham which have already been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). They are that the assumed outstanding debt figure within the capital financing element is a poor proxy for actual debt and that, in the past, the cost of meeting the statutory duties of local authorities with regard to the homeless has barely figured at all in the SSA formula. To what extent has one or both of those issues been addressed in the revisions to the formula this year?

Mr. Gummer: The latter point appears in the housing programme figures. There is always an argument about how the SSA should be made up depending upon which local authority group is pressing its point. I think that we have the balance right, but I am always prepared to reconsider.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, it is impossible to take into account actual debt, or one would reward those authorities which had borrowed without any concern for the future, not those that had been sensible. That would be an intolerable position. How would decent authorities feel if the kind of borrowing arrangements that some local authorities have gone into, and would still be going into if they had not been stopped by law, were rewarded? That could not possibly be done.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that on recent visits to the London borough of Newham and for many years I have shown a particular interest in the special

problems of Newham and I hope that he will find that the changes that have been made here will not be disadvantageous.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the effect of lower than anticipated inflation will be that many authorities will have over-provided for additional costs in the current year which will be incorporated into their balances carried forward to help them next year and that many of them will be able to effect a budget reduction by virtue of that lower inflation?

Mr. Gummer: Of course that must be so. If there had been higher inflation, they would have had to spend and find more money. They have not had to find that money. It is there and it can be applied in ways that they had not expected. It is also true that those authorities that have had a better performance in the collection of council tax—there are many—will have more money to spend as a result. I hope that efficiency therefore benefits the taxpayer.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, in cash terms, the grant to be distributed to local authorities next year will be 0.4 per cent. less than this year, and that he is applying the toughest capping criteria ever? Will he confirm also that residents of Nottinghamshire and throughout the country will face a double whammy—cuts in services but the privilege of paying more for them?

Mr. Gummer: They will face that only in those parts of Nottinghamshire where councils are not effective enough to make up, by better efficiency, that which they do not receive from the centre. If Nottinghamshire county council had not spent so much money on campaigning for its own continuation, but had behaved itself rather better over its spending, it might have more money in the kitty to help.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the level of community care funding that he announced is sufficiently generous that every local authority should be able to fund community care for all who need it? Does he agree that where authorities claim that they are unable to fund community care sufficiently this year, the problem is not underfunding but mismanagement of their social services budgets?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. We are providing significant extra sums for community care. Although local authorities were surprised by the generosity of the amounts, they used the opportunity to blame the Government for their own inefficiency. That is the long-standing view of the sort of local authority that takes no responsibility for its own actions but blames everybody else.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): It is nice to raise hopes that more money will be spent on education, which would be most welcome in my constituency—particularly in Tameside and Stockport, which must spend less on primary education than most other local authorities. However, most people will be disappointed that only pious words have come from the Secretary of State, not extra money. Does he agree that the only way in which local authorities can spend more on education is to cut other services? Does he not realise that local government is often the only employer in some deprived parts of the country, in terms of school meal and home help provision? People will be resentful if such services must be cut to improve education.

Mr. Gummer: That is precisely why, in a tough settlement, we have ensured that there is more money and a greater proportion for education, and why we have a system that is increasingly accurate in making certain that money goes to the neediest places. I know that the hon. Gentleman will be pressing his local authority to ensure that important front-line services are protected. That will be done by greater efficiency, more sharing with the private sector and ensuring that money that does not need to be spent will not be spent in less important areas.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): How much money do local authorities have in balances directly, and how much indirectly through local management of schools? Could not that money be used to improve local authority services, instead of being squirrelled away? What does my right hon. Friend propose in respect of capping the London borough of Barnet's SSA?

Mr. Gummer: Detailed arrangements will have to wait until we have discussed the matter with local authorities, both as a matter of courtesy and to ensure accuracy. As to the generality, a considerable amount of money is held in balances by schools and local authorities. I do not say that there should be no balances, because some are necessary. However, it is obviously sensible for local authorities to review their balances, to ascertain whether they should be spent in these circumstances. I have no doubt that they will do so. Unfortunately, some local authorities find it better to remove their balances from the public gaze.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): Will the Secretary of State admit that he has failed to cover the cost of the police negotiating body agreement and that police budgets will be stretched even further after the settlement?

Mr. Gummer: That is not true.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will my right hon. Friend send a clear message to local education authorities that increased resources should be directed at improving classroom provision, not soaked up by a top-heavy bureaucracy? Should not all local education authorities scrutinise their administration costs, particularly in the light of the increasing number of schools choosing grant-maintained status?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, and he now has the support of the Leader of the Opposition, who has clearly chosen grant-maintained schools because they spend their money on what matters and do not have to carry the extra costs of over-weighty administration.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): How will the new formula on police affect the position in Derbyshire? One of the problems that Derbyshire faced was that, because it had adopted a policy of civilianisation—a policy now recommended by the Home Office—and thus had a smaller establishment, it did not receive the grants based on the old formula. Will that be

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

taken into account? Will it be given any money back to compensate for the money that was lost through the fiddled formula that the Government operated?

Mr. Gummer: The long-standing anti-police attitudes of Derbyshire county council meant that it underspent on the police year after year. It will no longer be able to do that. An extra 5 per cent. is available for Derbyshire this year. The politicisation of the police by those who do not want to support the forces of law and order will now be overturned by this much better and independent method of funding.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware that no less a body than the Police Federation has just issued a statement warmly welcoming the settlement for the police? Will he confirm that the change in funding formula for the police will be warmly welcomed by the people of Gloucestershire, because it will become more transparent how much is being spent, for example, on the excellently run constabulary in Gloucestershire? I thank him very much for listening to the representations that I and my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in Gloucestershire have made so that we get a reasonable settlement of around 3 per cent. this year for the police in Gloucestershire.

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased that the Police Federation has announced that. It stands in stark contrast to the Labour party, which clearly cannot welcome anything that is ever given to the police, because it does not make it a priority. The Labour party does not believe that law and order comes first.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Last year, Cheshire county council made cuts in front-line services. The figures show that, this year, it will have to make further cuts. Will the Minister tell us who is right—the Government or the Tory-Liberal alliance in Cheshire county council? Is the definition of sufficient resources those resources that result in charging for mental health day care centres?

Mr. Gummer: The SSAs are worked out in consultation with the local government organisations. It is never possible to get all of them to agree on every one, because each has a different set of priorities, but we seek to do it as closely as we can. That is the basis on which need is assessed. Like other county councils, Cheshire county council has found significant money to promote its own case for continuation. Perhaps it will be able to find even more money to deal with the specific problems about which the hon. Gentleman speaks.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Part of the additional money that local authorities receive in the year comes, in London's case, from the sale of assets by the London Residuary Body. It is then distributed to the London boroughs. Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether, in the LRB's most recent accounts, the £10 million of deferred capital relates to the sale of county hall and is money owed by Shiriyama to the LRB? If that is so, when does the Secretary of State expect that the LRB will receive that money? When will it be distributed to the London boroughs?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to look at that particular matter, but I doubt whether it is has anything specifically to do with my statement today.

Mr. Dobson: I have two brief points. Before the Secretary of State attempts, as I predicted, to blame everything that is wrong in local government on the Labour party, perhaps he and the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason), who made his point and has now gone, should bear in mind the fact that the Tory councillor for Bromsgrove, Rita Taylor, said this morning, while speaking on behalf of the Association of District Councils:

"The public are going to have to pay more . . . Conservatives in local government are in despair at this settlement."

Like every other Member on the Opposition Benches, I perfectly well understand that the capital available, or not, to councils for building houses is not covered by the settlement. But it does nevertheless have revenue effects, because if councils are not allowed to build houses, more people become homeless. Councils have the obligation to rehouse homeless people. Instead of the sensible solution—putting people into new houses that they have built for them—they are forced to put them into bed-and-breakfast accommodation, or rent from the private sector at exorbitant rents.

We all know that it would be cheaper, more humane, more sensible and more practical if councils were allowed to build houses and put people in them instead of having to dump them all around London and other big cities in privately rented accommodation or bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I should have thought that, as a self-proclaimed expert on local government finance, the right hon. Gentleman would have known that capital expenditure, or non-expenditure, has an impact on the revenue demands on local authorities.

Mr. Gummer: There is an impact only if one adheres to the view that the only houses worth counting as houses are local authority houses. The coming of the housing associations means that there are many nominations to those associations which local authorities have and use.

That is one of the reasons why the number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has fallen steadily over the past few years: the fall is due to the Government's actions. It is one of the reasons why the number of people sleeping rough in the centre of London is now at an all-time low, according to figures provided by the charities concerned. It is also one of the reasons why Conservative Members believe that the hon. Gentleman has not read a figure or a fact for the past seven years: he is still quoting figures that are hangovers from a period of Labour government.

Business of the House

4.35 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House please announce the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement about the business for next week, which is as follows:

MONDAY 5 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER—Conclusion of the debate on the Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER—Committee and remaining stages of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

THURSDAY 8 DECEMBER—Committee and remaining stages of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

FRIDAY 9 DECEMBER—Debate on standards in education on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 12 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Health Authorities Bill.

The House will also wish to know that the following European Standing Committees will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 7 December, as follows:

European Standing Committee A: European Community Document No. 11496/93 relating to a European vessel reporting system in Community waters; European Community Document No. 5841/94 relating to ship safety and control of pollution; European Community Document No. 6655/94 relating to training for maritime occupations; and European Community Document No. 7919/94 relating to a European vessel reporting system.

European Standing Committee B: European Community Document No. 9400/92 relating to personal data protection.

[Wednesday 7 December:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 11496/93, Reporting System for Vessels in Community Waters; (b) 5841/94, Ship Safety and the Control of Pollution; (c) 6655/94, Training for Maritime Occupations; (d) 7919/94, Reporting System for Vessels in Community Waters. Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: (a) HC 48-x and HC 48-xxii (1993-94); (b) HC 48-xvii and HC 48-xxii (1993-94); (c) HC 48-xxii (1993-94); (d) HC 48-xxvi (1993-94).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 9400/92, Personal Data and Information Security; Relevant report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 79-x (1992-93) HC 48-xxiv (1993-94) and HC 70-i (1994-95).]

Mrs. Taylor: Will the Leader of the House tell us whether the Government will consider a vote on VAT on Tuesday to be a vote of confidence in them? Will he also give us an idea of the Government's intentions with regard to the new position that has arisen following the loss of their majority in the House?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, when similar circumstances arose in April 1976, the then Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Thatcher, tabled early-day motion 351, demanding that the Committee of Selection appoint Members to Standing Committees in equal numbers from Government and Opposition parties? Does he intend to move a motion in line with that approved by the House on 7 May 1976? That motion stated that

"only an overall majority in the composition of the House should guarantee a majority in each Standing Committee".—[*Official Report*, 7 May 1976; Vol. 910, c. 1738.]

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already made clear the position regarding any vote that might take place on Tuesday in relation to the matter to which the hon. Lady adverted. As for the second part of her question, the position is not on a par with that in 1976, which arose from changes in the composition of the House. These matters are for the Committee of Selection, and it is not for me to comment on or interfere in its business; let me point out, however, that the Standing Order governing the Committee's activities enjoins it to have regard to the composition of the House. It may have escaped the hon. Lady's attention that the composition of the House is exactly the same this Thursday as it was last Thursday.

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend expect that there will be a statement from the Government about the Child Support Agency before the Christmas recess, particularly as the Select Committee on Social Security has produced another important report? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the sooner we end what the Select Committee called the "chronic maladministration" of the CSA, the easier our constituency advice bureaux will be?

Mr. Newton: I am obviously conscious of my hon. Friend's concern about those matters, not least because he seizes every opportunity, whether formally or informally, to make that clear to me. My hon. Friend referred to the Select Committee report; I need hardly assure him that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is studying that report with great care, with a view to forming conclusions.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Will the Leader of the House tell us why there is no provision in the business next week for a debate on Bosnia, not least because it appears that the Foreign Secretary is to go to Belgrade this weekend as part of a team which may, by its negotiations, give undue reward to Serbian aggression?

Does the Leader of the House appreciate that many of us were extremely disappointed that the Government were unable to make a statement about Bosnia this week, particularly after the visit of Senator Dole, and that that disappointment might be alleviated if a debate were held in early course?

Mr. Newton: I understand and respect the reasons why the hon. and learned Gentleman raised that point. He has almost given the answer by referring to what will be quite an intensive further round of diplomatic activity over the next few days. I cannot undertake that that will necessarily give rise to a statement, but I know that my right hon. Friends will give careful consideration to when they should appropriately report to the House.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will my right hon. Friend consider providing time for an early debate on the progress of community care? Is he aware that 18 Liberal and Labour-controlled authorities appear to have lost control of their community care budgets, despite very generous funding, and are now cutting vital

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services for the elderly and infirm, even though they have reserves in the kitty due to lower inflation and the success of our economic policy?

Mr. Newton: I take note of my hon. Friend's comments. I took the opportunity to discuss some of those matters in my constituency, which adjoins that of my hon. Friend, when I was on a relevant visit just under a week ago. I hope that my hon. Friend's remarks will be taken into account by all those concerned with those matters.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Given the amount of time that we seem to have on our hands, and in order to keep us off the streets, could we have a debate next week or some time soon on the conference at Fort Lauderdale of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species—CITES? Many things were said about rhino, elephants, vicuna, whales and mahogany. We should have a debate or a statement about that, so will the Leader of the House please arrange that as early as possible? While he is on his feet, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether we are to have a Christmas recess and when it is likely to be?

Mr. Newton: Not for the first time, there is some tension between the implications of the second half of a question and the plain request of the first half. I do not in any way minimise the importance of the matters raised by the hon. Gentleman, but I am afraid that I cannot promise an early debate unless he wishes to sit on Christmas eve.

I can help the hon. Gentleman with the second part of his question. I said last week that I hoped that the House would be off on Christmas day. I can go a little further today and say that I hope that Christmas eve and Boxing day might be included, but I cannot go beyond that.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): May we have an early debate on the subject of far eastern countries, bearing in mind the fact that last night's Budget response by the shadow Chancellor—or should it be a party political broadcast?—suggested that Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan have faster-growing economies than our own? Would that enable us to express a view about whether the success of those countries is due largely to socialism or capitalism?

Mr. Newton: That is an interesting point about a broadcast that I have not had the opportunity or privilege of observing. I thought that lurking in my hon. Friend's question there might be an implication of a sort that I might be less willing to accept, but, taken at face value, it was interesting.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Leader of the House make time for a full debate on the inadequacies of the cold weather payments system? It is evident that vulnerable people should automatically receive extra money for heating. Is he aware that in my constituency the readings to trigger off the cold weather payments are taken miles away, yet many of my constituents live well above the snow line where it is much colder, so the readings are false? There are many inadequacies in the cold weather payments system. Given the growing number of deaths from hypothermia, the growing number of cold-related illnesses and the cost to the NHS, is it not time that the House discussed the issue properly?

Mr. Newton: I should be more willing to respond in the way that the hon. Lady wishes if she had at least acknowledged the extent to which over quite a long period the system of help with cold weather payments has been improved substantially in its administration and automaticity and, most recently, in its amount, with a further increase announced in the Budget only this week. I should also have been more willing to respond in the way that the hon. Lady wishes if she had acknowledged the extent to which all that has changed from a time when a Labour Government did virtually nothing about it.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Following what was said by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be useful to have a debate next week comparing the compensation packages that people will receive now because of the introduction of VAT on fuel with what happened in 1974-79 when electricity prices were soaring through the roof thanks to hyper-inflation and people received no compensation whatever? Where was the Labour party's care then?

Mr. Newton: That is a good point, and I must tell my hon. Friend that I have arranged a debate in which he might make that point. I do not know—although perhaps I ought to—whether he has yet taken part in that debate, but if not, it is called the Budget debate. There is still today and two more days to go.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Can we have a statement about the number of hon. Members on each side of the House? In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), the Leader of the House said that the situation now is different from what happened in 1976 when the Labour Government lost their majority, albeit due to by-elections and John Stonehouse finishing up in Australia after leaving his clothes on the beach in Florida.

The truth is that the Government have lost their majority because they kicked nine people out of their own party. In my view, the Government should be penalised for having the arrogance and audacity to take the Whip away from nine of their people and then the cheek to tell the nation that the situation will remain the same. If they had any guts and decency, they would remove themselves from that position. If they really wanted to be decent to the British people, they would get out and call a general election.

Mr. Newton: It appears that the hon. Gentleman is advancing a somewhat novel constitutional doctrine. When I replied to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), I said that there had been no change in the composition of the House since this time last week. There is a clear majority of Members elected as Conservatives, and the composition of the House is determined by the electorate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the fact that there is hardly anything more unpopular at the moment than putting the full rate of VAT on domestic fuel, would it not be proper for the House to reflect that

feeling, by at least having a free vote on that issue next week? Would not that be far more appropriate than using threats and intimidation against Tory Back Benchers who may well have the courage to reflect the feelings of their constituents, or are they to lose the Whip as well?

Mr. Newton: I have already said that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear the position for next week and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made clear on Tuesday the Government's policy on budgetary matters as a whole, including this one.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the British Waterways-opposed private Bill completed its Committee stage in the spillover period in October after intense scrutiny in both Houses over almost three years. Will my right hon. Friend find an early opportunity to list the Third Reading of that Bill so that we can be fair to the promoters and, we hope, get it on to the statute book?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly consider my hon. Friend's point, although I cannot give any commitments at this stage.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On Monday's business in Edinburgh, will the Leader of the House persuade the Lord Advocate to offer a statement in view of the Lord Advocate's deeply unsatisfactory response to Alan Francovich's film and his even more deeply unsatisfactory response on Monday to the representatives of the Lockerbie relatives? After all, it was the biggest crime of murder against western civilians since 1945. Will the Lord Advocate at least offer some sort of statement?

Will the Leader of the House comment on a letter sent to me by the Secretary of State for Scotland, which said that, apparently, the Lord Advocate cannot answer Adjournment debates? Furthermore, it solemnly gave the lack of seating arrangements for the Lord Advocate as a reason why it was difficult. Will the Leader of House inject some common sense into the position?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has advanced his arguments in a characteristically courteous way. I have three points to put. First, he will accept, if he has read the Secretary of State's letter—of which I have obtained a copy, as you, Madam Speaker, would say, for the sake of greater accuracy—that the seating arrangements are not presented as an argument. Secondly, the position on Ministers who were not members of the Committee taking part in Adjournment debates was made clear in the documentation provided before the Standing Order debate earlier in the year. Thirdly—the most important point—as the Secretary of State's letter says, it is open to the Lord Advocate to volunteer a statement if the usual channels agree that it is appropriate, as they do for statements on the Floor of the House. I take the hon. Gentleman's points as a request for the matter to be brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State through the usual channels.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I say, Madam Speaker, how much I hope that you will repeat your inspiration of a year ago and arrange for a Christmas tree in New Palace yard?

Madam Speaker: It will go up tomorrow.

Mr. Greenway: That will be very nice.

Madam Speaker: Does that answer the question?

Mr. Greenway: It does not, but thank you very much.

Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House draw the motion for the debate on standards in education on Friday next week widely enough to encompass the important principle of choice of school? That would allow my constituents—who like to choose between the eight grant-maintained schools available to them, and who know that those schools are seriously discriminated against in terms of resources and, particularly, in terms of special educational needs, by Ealing's Labour council and the Labour party, which would like to eliminate grant-maintained schools—to take account of the wish of one or two socialists, including the Leader of the Opposition, to send their children to those schools.

Mr. Newton: On the second point, I said that the debate next Friday will take place on a motion for the Adjournment, so it could hardly be more widely drawn. I should have thought that my hon. Friend's points would, subject to you, Madam Speaker, fall within the terms of the debate. On his first point, I express my gratitude to him and to you, Madam Speaker, for ensuring that you, and not I, will be the person responsible for Christmas trees.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Hon. members have many opportunities to discuss uprated benefits, but when will it be in order for us to discuss the 30 social security benefits and allowances that have never been increased since their introduction? The widow's payment, which was first announced in 1985, is particularly unfair. It replaced the widow's allowance, which was uprated every year. The widow's payment should be £1,600 next year, but it is frozen at £1,000. Is it not particularly mean of the Government not to allow increases in the payment, which is made to widows during the difficult time of bereavement?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will undoubtedly be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security made a substantial uprating statement only yesterday. With his experience in this subject, the hon. Gentleman knows well that an extensive series of orders follow an uprating statement to implement the uprating. That should provide him with an opportunity to make his points, if he wishes.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Leader of the House make further inquiries into the question of majorities in Committees? Does he accept that Lady Thatcher tabled her motion, not as a result of a death or resignation by an hon. Member, but because of John Stonehouse's decision to leave the Labour Whip and to join the Whip of, I think, the English National party? That is an exact parallel of what happened last week. There was a change, not in composition, but in the allegiance of

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hon. Members. Is it not important that the Government demonstrate that they are consistent rather than merely opportunistic?

Mr. Newton: Compared with other Labour Members, the hon. Gentleman has at least accepted the basic thrust of the point made earlier and he has implicitly accepted what I said about the composition of the House. On his second point, I do not think that he has a parallel on that front either.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): May I refer the Leader of the House to the reply in column *710* of yesterday's *Hansard* to a written question by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on the proposed extension of article III of the Anglo-American mutual defence agreement on atomic matters? Will the Leader of the House confirm that the Government intend to ratify that extension under the Ponsonby rule and that, unless an objection is raised in the House, the extension will saddle the British public with a bill of some £20 billion, covering the servicing, maintenance, operation and decommissioning costs of the Trident programme? Does he therefore accept that some hon. Members object to that going through and will call for a debate to be held within the next parliamentary week to discuss whether the extension should be agreed?

Mr. Newton: The right course is for me to say that I shall consider carefully what the hon. Gentleman has said and I shall, of course, bring it to the attention of my appropriate right hon. Friends.

BILL PRESENTED

JOBSEEKERS

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by Mr. Secretary Portillo, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. David Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Redwood, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. William Hague, Miss Ann Widdecombe, Mr. Roger Evans and Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, presented a Bill to provide for a jobseekers allowance and to make other provision to promote the employment of the unemployed and the assistance of persons without a settled way of life: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 5.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming debate on Question [29 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

Madam Speaker: I have to limit speeches between the hours of 7 and 9 o'clock this evening to 10 minutes for each hon. Member.

4.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): As Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I believed that the best way to create prosperity and jobs was for the Government to control their spending, borrowing and inflation, but times change and I am now Secretary of State for Employment. From my new perspective, I have come to the conclusion that the best way to create jobs is for the Government to control spending, borrowing and inflation because those are the only conditions for sustainable, economic growth.

Interestingly, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) believes that the only way to create jobs is for the Government to spend, to tax, to borrow and to inflate. In her previous job, her opinion was that the only way was to spend, to tax, to borrow and to inflate. The funny thing is that that was when she was shadow Chief Secretary. There is an inevitable symmetry between any object and its shadow.

I am delighted today to congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his Budget. It underlines the Government's absolute commitment to the fight against inflation. It ensures that the constraints on public spending are maintained and it charts the route to reduce the public spending borrowing requirement to zero before the end of the century. It is the reliability of those policies that gives Britain the prospect of a sustained recovery. We have created the framework within which prosperity and wealth are being generated by business and it is that framework that is attracting foreign investment to this country. It is by those means that jobs are created.

The Government believe in making it easy for one person to provide a job for another. We avoid imposing unnecessary regulations and restrictions. We do not deter employers from taking on extra people as their businesses grow. The Government do not believe in imposing on businesses in Britain costs that competitor firms elsewhere in the world do not have to carry. Costs must be contained if our firms are to compete, because the newly emerging tiger economies of Asia and south America increasingly have well educated and well trained work forces as well as a much lower cost structure.

However, the Government believe in helping those who would otherwise stand the least chance of getting a job, such as disabled people and people who have been unemployed for a long time. We must ensure that no one is denied the chance of getting a job simply because of prejudice among employers.

During the 1980s, the Government transformed Britain's employment laws. We brought the trade unions within the rule of law, we cut Labour's taxes on jobs and we swept away the unnecessary restrictions that made businesses unwilling to offer people jobs. As a result, Britain today has a flexible labour market, which means that, when the economy grows, unemployment falls quickly.

Within a few months of the recovery starting, unemployment began to fall. That is in contrast with the much longer time taken during the last recovery, when it was a full five years before the fall began. In this recovery there has already been a reduction of 450,000 in the number of people out of work, so that the total today is just above 2.5 million.

Recovery has reached other countries in Europe, too, but in most of those countries unemployment is steady or still rising. In Britain, it is falling because of the supply side reforms implemented by the Government, and consistently opposed by the Labour party, which has opposed everything that could give our people a better chance of work.

We recognised the need to give young people a better start in life, better education and better training. We did not think it good enough to have just 7,000 youngsters in training. But Labour did, because that was the number in 1979. We have increased that number to 277,000. We did not think it right to let young people start out on a life on benefit at the age of 16. But Labour did. We thought it necessary to improve educational achievement, so we introduced the national curriculum, testing and league tables in schools. Labour opposed us every inch of the way.

In 1979, Labour thought it good enough that fewer than 25 per cent. of our young people got five good GCSEs or the equivalent. We did not agree, so now the figure is 40 per cent. The proportion of young people getting A-levels has just about doubled, and Britain now produces, proportionately, more graduates than any other country in Europe.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): If the Secretary of State thinks that education and training are so important, why has he cut the training for work programme by £200 million?

Mr. Portillo: I shall deal with that later in my speech, but I will give the hon. Lady a preview now. I am interested not in what we spend but in the results we get. I want to get people into jobs, and I measure Government programmes by what they do for people, not by how much they cost taxpayers. It is indicative of the mentality of the hon. Lady and her colleagues that all that they are interested in is what is spent, not what help is provided for people.

We have introduced modern apprenticeships. In the White Paper on competitiveness we set out a programme amounting to £325 million of investment in people, to boost training in small firms and to make our vocational qualifications rigorous and up to date, and to provide better careers education and guidance and at least one week's work experience for all young people before they leave full-time education.

We have started accelerated modern apprenticeships for 18 and 19-year-olds so that they can achieve the technical and supervisory skills crucial to Britain's economic success.

In the modern flexible labour market we also need to encourage individuals to take responsibility for managing their own training and development. To help individuals to make informed choices, I am making arrangements with the training and enterprise councils so that they can spend up to £40 million over two years on pump-priming adult information and guidance services.

It is business that knows what business needs. Most training must be conducted by business; and it is—business spends £20 billion a year. But even in areas where the Government need to contribute taxpayers' money, business still knows best how that money should be spent. That is why the TECs are run by business people.

Increasingly, the TEC budgets are being determined by outputs—by what is achieved—rather than by what is spent. The output that matters to most people on most of our programmes is that they actually get a job. Only about one third of the participants in the training for work programme get a job at present, even after some months' training. We can do better than that. We shall increase the proportion of people on that programme getting jobs to 50 per cent. That means that we can increase the numbers going into jobs but spend less on the programme.

The Labour party may portray that as a cut, but Conservatives recognise it as better value for money, better value for my Department and for taxpayers, and better for trainees, too. I want to deliver more jobs for less money. So should the Labour party, if it were not trapped in the spend, spend, spend mentality so well exemplified by its Front-Bench spokesmen. None the less, we have committed ourselves to modern apprenticeships and a range of other programmes under the competitiveness White Paper, which, as I have already said, amount to about £325 million.

Our spending next year on training, education and enterprise will be almost £2.2 billion, as it is this year. That is twice as much in real terms as what was spent under the Labour Government. Most significantly, the number of opportunities in the coming year will be 1.5 million, the same as this year.

The most effective opportunities for unemployed people are often not training but other help in getting them into jobs. There will be more money for those other programmes, such as 1-2-1, workwise, workstart, work trial, job match and jobfinders grants. There will also be new money for Community Action. For people on the

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longer programmes, we shall switch some of the money so as to enable them to search more effectively for a job while still members of programmes.

The Budget continues to reduce the costs of employing people. It makes further changes to family credit to help people to return to work, and builds on the various successful pilot programmes that we have run over the past two years.

The Budget also focuses on the problems that people who have been unemployed for a long time face when they are offered a job. They often fear that they will be worse off in work, either permanently or at least for a while, so we have decided to give them the same help with rent and council tax for their first four weeks in a job, and to speed up the payment of housing benefit and family credit so that they can get quickly the benefits due to them when they are in work.

As a national programme, we shall also provide grants for people who have been unemployed for more than two years if they need help with work expenses such as clothes or tools.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Secretary of State says that the payment of housing benefit will be speeded up. As housing benefit is paid by local authorities, how can he guarantee that that will be done?

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will make arrangements with the local authorities to ensure that that can be accomplished. That will mean some changes in procedures.

We also want to encourage employers to take on those who have been out of work for a long time. We recognise that people who have been out of work for a long time undoubtedly face prejudice. We shall give them a chance to improve themselves. After April 1996, employers who take on a person who has been unemployed for more than two years will enjoy a 12-month national insurance contribution holiday. That will cut the average cost of employing such a person by more than £300. That provides a real incentive.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Everyone in the House shares the concern about the long-term unemployed. I feel that the Government have allowed long-term unemployment to go too high for too long. If the Secretary of State has suddenly acquired a concern for the long-term unemployed, will he explain to the House why none of the schemes will start until April 1996?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady is misinformed. I should say, incidentally, that if she has any concern for the long-term unemployed I hope that she feels a deep sense of shame at being a member of the party which imposed the national insurance surcharge, thus destroying millions of jobs in Britain. The hon. Lady is wrong. I have told her about the jobfinders grant, jobmatch, workstart and work trials. All those programmes will begin within that period. The hon. Lady refers to only one scheme—the national insurance contributions holiday. That will come in with the job seeker's allowance. It will be part of the Bill. It will be introduced in a timely way in April 1996.

We understand that employers may need to be convinced that people who have been unemployed for a long time can work properly. We are giving them the incentive to try people who have been unemployed for more than six months in a job at no cost to employers. Such a three-week trial gives employees the opportunity to prove themselves in a job of work. In the pilot programmes that we have run, six out of 10 people in work trials have been kept on in jobs.

We must also improve the motivation and self-confidence of people who have been out of work for a long time, especially the young. People aged under 25 who have been out of work for more than a year will be offered interviews and short courses. In the pilot programmes that we have run, the interviews and courses have produced good results. They help young people to improve their employability. For that reason, they will be made compulsory.

We must ensure that people with disabilities and illnesses who are capable of work have a good opportunity of getting a job, and we shall protect their opportunities under the training for work programme. We recognise that when we introduce incapacity benefit some people will switch from benefit and become jobseekers again. We will give them special help to find work.

I am delighted that some of the ideas that I have talked about have found their way into Labour party policy or, should I say more exactly, into the report of the Social Justice Commission. The House will recognise that the Social Justice Commission does not represent Labour policy. Labour accepts the kudos for anything that is suggested in the commission's report, but refuses to say how those ideas would be paid for.

None the less, the Social Justice Commission has looked at our pilot schemes and what we have done with national insurance contributions and adopted our ideas. For example, it suggested that there should be work trials for employers with long-term unemployed people. It forgot to say that we already had such work trials up and running as a pilot scheme. We welcome the conversion of the Labour party, but I hope that it will now take the next logical step.

If it is true that employers can be encouraged to take on extra staff by reducing employment costs such as national insurance contributions, they would obviously also be deterred from taking on extra people if we added to their costs by introducing a training levy, a national minimum wage or the social chapter. One cannot admit that reducing NICs helps create jobs and then pretend that adding costs does not destroy jobs.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The Secretary of State is a doughty opponent of a statutory minimum wage. Is he aware that one country which has boasted record employment creation in the past 20 years—the United States of America—has a statutory minimum wage, variable from state to state, and that the states with the highest statutory minimum wage have some of the best job creation records? If the Secretary of State is so proud about the Social Justice Commission taking up ideas that he says are Government policy, does he accept that almost every measure that he has just mentioned has been put

into practice in France since the late 1980s? As leader of the Tory party's Europhobe wing in the Cabinet, is he not ashamed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Interventions are supposed to be brief and to the point, and not speeches. I make it clear before we go further that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate and that interventions must be brief or I shall intervene in them.

Mr. Portillo: I had the honour of meeting my French colleague the other day. I found him in a slightly depressed state because unemployment in France was still rising despite—or rather, because of—many years of socialist presidency. The reference to the United States is interesting. For a decade, it failed to uprate its minimum wages, and the current Secretary of State, Secretary Reich, has recognised that raising the minimum wage could have adverse consequences for employment. So most of us are in agreement around the world, but as usual the Labour party is not.

Excessive employment costs of any sort destroy jobs. That is why we must keep our costs down. It does not mean that we must have low wages. Indeed, the opposite is true. If we keep down the non-wage costs we can be more competitive. That means that businesses will prosper, productivity will improve and wages will rise. That has already happened.

In the past 15 years, take-home pay for a married couple with one worker on male average earnings has risen by 46 per cent. more than inflation. By contrast, between 1973 and 1979, take-home pay for the same couple fell by 2 per cent. after taking into account inflation.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): How does the Secretary of State think that market forces will lift the real wages of people such as laundry workers and contract cleaners in the private sector in Britain?

Mr. Portillo: The massive programme that I have described to improve educational standards, which the hon. Gentleman's party has opposed, and to create youth training opportunities will raise the value of what people can offer.

Mr. Henderson: I am talking about ordinary workers.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman talks about ordinary workers. He has the patronising attitude that ordinary workers cannot be upskilled or enabled to achieve more. That is a typical patronising socialist attitude—the idea that people can be levelled down and that they cannot be achievers. We believe that they can; we want to raise the skills level in Britain so that people can make a higher contribution and earn a higher wage.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Is it not a bit rich to hear all this advice about youth unemployment from the Labour party when it advocates the very policies practised elsewhere in Europe which have resulted in significantly higher youth unemployment there?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend will know that in Spain, tragically, youth unemployment is three times as high as in Britain. That is in a country with a minimum wage. Returning to Britain, pay here is now as high as almost anywhere in Europe. Take-home pay for a manufacturing worker in Britain in 1993 was higher than in Italy and France and pretty much the same as in Germany. That is because Britain's economic performance has been transformed. We have set out on the road to sustained prosperity. We are creating a high-productivity, high-wage, high-tech, highly competitive economy.

Ms Abbott: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Portillo: I give way to the hon. Lady, who recently described me as a fellow immigrant on the make.

Ms Abbott: My gratitude to a fellow immigrant is undying. Does not the average figure for take-home pay conceal the fact that the vast majority of net new jobs created by the Government are part-time, low-wage jobs?

Mr. Portillo: No. This economy is creating every sort of job—full-time jobs, jobs with overtime, and part-time jobs. The hon. Lady's intervention is odd, for her. I do not know much about it, but I take it that the hon. Lady is a feminist. Recently, we have witnessed a tremendous return of women to work—women who are able to work at the same time as fulfilling their family responsibilities and who are looking for part-time work—and we have an economy that is flexible enough to respond to that sort of demand. I am surprised to hear the hon. Lady laying about her and denigrating part-time work, when that is what so many women need and want.

The economic revival that I have just described would be ruined by the social chapter. The Prime Minister refused to sign up to it at Maastricht because it gave the Community significant new powers to legislate on employment and social matters, mostly on the basis of qualified majority voting.

The social chapter would lay the United Kingdom open to new and damaging Community-level interference. It would threaten the Government's achievements in restoring a fair balance in industrial relations and freeing up the labour market. It would jeopardise existing jobs and inhibit the creation of new ones. Authoritative commentators, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, have repeatedly pointed out that the European Community needs fewer regulations and not more, if it is ever to match the job creation performance of our competitors.

The Community can deal with its unemployment problems, but only by deregulating its labour markets and cutting employment costs. That was recognised by a gentleman who will be well known to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Herr Gunther Rexrodt, the German Economics Minister. He said that Britain's achievements in deregulation, privatisation and reducing the burdens on business are "outstanding" and that Britain has

"achieved exceptional results in breaking down bureaucratic obstacles to starting up new businesses".

I thank Herr Rexrodt for that generous compliment.

Unfortunately, the Labour party is rather less objective: its beguiling, but dishonest, argument is that, instead of paying money to the unemployed we should spend it paying them to work. Obviously, that idea is superficially attractive, but it does not work. It cannot create real jobs. If there were such a simple socialist answer, France and Spain would have full employment today; instead, their unemployment figures are far higher than ours.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Is my right hon. Friend aware that no Labour Government have ever left office

[Mr. Roger Knapman]

with a smaller number of unemployed people than when they came to office? Would he not be more inclined to take advice from the Opposition if there were such an Administration, or is that most unlikely?

Mr. Portillo: I can reassure my hon. Friend on that point. There never will be such an Administration. Were there to be, I imagine—I know something of the Opposition's so-called policies—that they would again drive up unemployment because such policies have always done so when applied elsewhere in the world.

The idea of spending one's way out of unemployment has always attracted the Labour party. At Employment Question Time on Tuesday, the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) urged us to allow local authorities to push up the level of public borrowing. During the Budget statement, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor reached that excellent passage in his speech in which he looked forward to very much reduced levels of public spending borrowing requirement in future years, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) immediately said,"We will soon get those up."

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): It would be informative if the right hon. Gentleman could give us some of his personal views on these matters. Does he agree that taxpayers' money should be given to employers to take people off the register of long-term unemployed?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is a shade too quick, as that is in the next paragraph or two.

Mr. Byers: Answer now.

Mr. Portillo: In the next paragraph or two—that is not long to wait.

If it were so easy, why did unemployment double when Labour was in power? It was because, as at least the left-wing Members of the Labour party admit—I pay tribute to their honesty—higher public spending requires higher taxes or borrowing, higher interest rates and probably higher inflation, all of which destroy jobs. New public sector jobs would be created at the expense of jobs lost in the private sector. As the private sector tends to be more efficient, high productivity jobs would be replaced by lower productivity jobs. Indeed, that seems to be a central part of Labour economic policy.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—the deputy leader of the Labour party, no less—urged that public services be run inefficiently to create jobs. Such a policy would destroy jobs. The economy would suffer as the wealth-creating sector would bear the burden of public sector inefficiency and the economy would be less able to generate new jobs. The net effect is that unemployment would rise.

One cannot increase demand in the economy by increasing public spending. One can do so by providing the conditions for sustained economic recovery, which is what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has done.

Job subsidies can play a part in helping some people, such as those who have been out of work for a long time, to compete in the labour market, but that is not a cost-free option. Usually, one is paying employers to take on people when they could have taken on extra people anyway. One merely encourages them to take on subsidised workers in the place of the unsubsidised. Companies who get subsidised workers get an advantage over those who do not, which damages job prospects in competitor firms.

Let us be honest. One cannot spend one's way out of unemployment. Subsidies have to be paid for by someone else's taxes and, unless the economy is growing, subsidising one person's job is likely to lead to someone else having to wait longer to find work.

Mr. Jenkin: Is not the really important feature of this Government the fact that we have achieved the three-card trick in the social security uprating? We have reduced the overall burden of social security, continued to target help on those who most need it and had money available to help people back to work, to get rid of some of the poverty traps. All that the Social Justice Commission advocates is higher public expenditure, which would damage the economy in the long run.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, although I prefer to think of it as the triple crown rather than a three-card trick.

Despite the Opposition's dishonesty on that issue, they are ever-mindful of Conservative successes at general elections and like to pretend that their policies are similar to ours, but while we build the economic foundations for job creation, they are in the demolition business. Their job demolition policy number one is a minimum wage. Attempts to increase wages through legislation do not work. We know from those countries that have a national minimum wage what happens and we know that the young are the worst affected, as they are prevented from beginning work.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, being uncharacteristically coy at the time, admitted that a minimum wage would cause a "shakeout". In plain speaking that means job losses and jobs destroyed. For the victims, avoiding the hard words would not soften the blow.

A minimum wage would bring the Labour party's trade union friends scurrying out of the woodwork to tell us that pay differentials had to be restored. It would make the cost of employing people more expensive at every level. The better-paid would gain the most and the low-paid the least. As those pay rises would not be justified by higher output, jobs would be lost. Those who would suffer most would be those who were thrown out of work and, even more, those who are already out of work, with the lowest level of skills.

The minimum wage is a ban on job creation. It forbids companies to create jobs for those who would like to work and have something to contribute to a company, but not enough to justify being paid the minimum wage. Labour's espousal of that policy is deeply cynical. As the words of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East demonstrate, the Opposition know that it would destroy jobs. It is a sell-out to the unions—a despicable deal to boost the wages of those who have jobs by smashing the chances of those who do not.

Labour's job demolition policy number two is the social chapter, which Opposition Members try to pretend would not cost jobs. It has cost jobs in Germany. Black and Decker is closing its manufacturing unit at Limburg, and moving production to the United Kingdom. The hon.

Member for Peckham ought to ask them why, but I shall save her the trouble. They moved because costs there were too high. In the words of one of the Limburg workers,

"industry is flexible . . . the social chapter is not".

Where have Black and Decker moved those jobs to? They have moved the jobs to Spennymoor, county Durham in the constituency of Sedgefield—the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition, who would sign up to the social chapter tomorrow if he were given the chance. Let the Labour party tell the people of Spennymoor—the extra 300 people who have a permanent job, the shopkeepers in whose shops the workers will spend their money and the house builders who will build homes for the workers—exactly how they would be better off with the social chapter and without jobs. Labour's rhetoric is full of promises about full employment, but the reality is that its policies destroy jobs—a cruel deception from a party more interested in appearing to care than in actually helping people.

Let us have honest answers from the hon. Member for Peckham in her new position. I will ask her five straight questions, but I am sure that I shall not get one straight answer. At what level would she set a minimum wage? How many jobs would be destroyed by the minimum wage that she would introduce? Would she include young people in a minimum wage? If so, we can look forward to 35 per cent. youth unemployment in this country. What would she do to reduce unemployment that the Government have not done? What does she mean by full employment—500,000 people unemployed, 1 million, 1.5 million? I suggest that the House should award points to the hon. Lady for her answers, and that we should mark her answers on the basis of three categories: candour, economic coherence and arithmetical accuracy.

Mr. Henderson: Will the right hon. Gentleman be the judge?

Mr. Portillo: I shall certainly be on the panel.

The route to more jobs and fewer people out of work is clear: it consists of sound economic policies based on permanently low inflation, a deregulated and flexible labour market and help for those who need it most, such as young people and the long-term unemployed. Those policies are in place today, and they are working. Output is growing by about 4 per cent., inflation is steady at 2 per cent., unit wage costs are falling—enabling British business to compete in world markets—and exports are up by 10 per cent. We have achieved export-led growth. Britain's recovery is generating growth with jobs, in stark contrast to the jobless growth which has been a feature in Europe over the past three decades.

Britain has 70 per cent. people in work, one of the highest proportions in Europe and well above Germany, France and Italy. Across Europe, some Governments have chosen Labour's route of high spending, subsidies, adherence to the social chapter and a minimum wage. Those countries today have high unemployment. In Britain we have pursued educational improvements, sound public finances and targeting help at special groups, and our unemployment is falling. The Budget continues those consistent policies, and makes sustained growth possible and probable. I therefore look forward to a sustained fall in the number of our people out of work.

5.33 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The Budget should have addressed the central employment issues that are facing this country. Some 2.5 million people are without work, and those who are in work feel insecure about falling living standards. It should have dealt with investment in skills and industry and with the lack of investment in the economic infrastructure, but it failed to do so.

The Government are out of touch and are failing to recognise and address the central concerns of employers and employees. They wonder why there is no "feel-good factor", but it is obvious to everyone else. People feel not good but fearful, insecure and worse off.

The true position was spelt out clearly two weeks ago and was in sharp contrast to the rosy picture painted by the Secretary of State for Employment. While the Government trumpet the recovery, people do not think that the recession has ended and they still fear unemployment. People still feel powerless and insecure about jobs, housing and the health service, and they have no vision of where the Tory party is heading. Tax increases mean that real take-home pay is falling.

Before the Secretary of State disagrees, and says that I am "talking Britain down", I must ask whether he agrees with the views that I have just expressed, because they are not my views but those of the Tory deputy chairman, John Maples, who was reporting the view of the British people—a view that the Secretary of State does not want to hear.

Cabinet Ministers say publicly—as the right hon. Gentleman has just done—that everything is rosy, but their own deputy chairman tells them privately that Labour has been right all along. It has been right about the fear of unemployment, about insecurity and about falling living standards.

Mr. Jenkin: Before the hon. Lady reminds me of my election address, as Opposition Front Bench Members usually do, I remind her that I stood on a platform of urging lower taxation, which, in due course, I am sure we will achieve. Does she agree with the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who told the House recently that the recession has ended?

Ms Harman: We hope that the recession has ended, and there are signs that growth is picking up, but what we and the people of this country are concerned about is that yet another recession will be just around the corner as the Government pursue boom-and-bust policies.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would quote his election address. He well remembers that he promised his constituents that the Government would cut taxes, whereas in fact their taxes have gone up by the equivalent of 7p in the pound. Since this is a debate about employment and unemployment, I remind him that unemployment in his constituency has risen by 156 per cent. in the past five years. Those are the Government's own figures.

Mr. MacShane: If we are out of the recession, why does page 17 of the Red Book forecast lower growth and higher inflation for next year? Every other Finance

[Mr. MacShane]

Ministry in Europe is forecasting increased growth for 1995-1996, yet the Red Book says that our growth will decrease.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is right, and the Government's uncertainty about the future of the economy is evidenced by their need to put up interest rates. Interestingly, the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) did not know about the increase in unemployment in his own constituency.

With the benefit of the Conservative party deputy chairman's insight, how have the Government responded? The Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced what he describes as a "Budget for jobs". Unemployment is no longer to be "a price worth paying". How can anyone believe in the Government's determination to lead a crusade against unemployment when it is to be led by the Secretary of State for Employment? He does not believe in Government action to get unemployed people back to work, because he believes that everything should be left to the market. He made that quite clear when he said that any action by Government undermines personal responsibility.

The right hon. Gentleman, more than anyone else, is the heir to the Thatcherite legacy. The Chancellor wants to bury Thatcherism, but the Employment Secretary continues to praise it. That is why this so-called Budget for jobs is a sham. How can it achieve its aim when the Employment Secretary does not even believe in the principle that the Government have a responsibility for the unemployed?

The Budget has been billed as the Budget for jobs, but it will cut the budget of the Department of Employment by 14 per cent. over the next three years. It has been boasted that the Budget will help unemployed people, but it will cut help with mortgage payments for people who become unemployed. The Budget purports to recognise the particular difficulties faced by those who have been unemployed for a long time, but, at the same time, the training budget for the unemployed will be cut.

If the Government were serious about tackling unemployment, they could take immediate action, because we have 350,000 unemployed building workers, 128,000 homeless families and many council houses in need of improvement. The £5 billion held in capital receipts lies idle, however, in local authority accounts. A Labour Budget would have phased in the release of those capital receipts so that local authorities could put building workers back to work to build houses for the homeless. Everyone recognises that that would be common sense—everyone except the Government.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): If the Opposition pursued such a policy, Labour councils would have to increase their council tax rates. Surely that is typical of the Opposition, who are always talking about raising taxes.

Ms Harman: I am glad of that intervention, because I hope that the hon. Gentleman, at least, will stand by his constituents when we vote against the extension of VAT to fuel bills. I believe, however, that he missed the point about capital receipts, which are being held by councils as a result of the sale of council housing. That money could be used to put building workers back into work, but Tory dogma of the 1980s dictated that it was not the role of local or central Government to invest in housing.

Have the Government buried Thatcherism in their Budget for jobs? Far from it, because, instead of releasing capital receipts, they have cut 25 per cent. from the funds for investment in social housing and have imposed harsher rules for those on housing benefit.

The so-called Budget for jobs has two defining characteristics of the old Thatcherite dogma—the refusal to take action to put people back into work and benefit cuts, which make life even harder for the victims of the Government's failure.

Mr. Portillo: Is the hon. Lady aware that, if a council is debt-free, it is free to spend its receipts? Does she not realise that the reason why councils are not free to spend their receipts when they have debts is that the money is set aside and stands alongside their current debts? Such councils do not choose to pay off those debts directly because they get a higher rate of interest on the money in the bank, the original debts having been taken out years ago at a lower rate of interest. The hon. Lady must realise that, if councils are debt-free, they may spend the capital receipts, but, if not, what she proposes represents an increase in borrowing. That is why the Governmeat think that she and her party are irresponsible.

Ms Harman: The problem for the Employment Secretary is that the Government recognised that it could be acceptable to allow councils to spend their capital receipts and they allowed councils to have an 18-month holiday to spend. If they accepted that principle, albeit for a short time, why were they not prepared to phase in the release of all capital receipts? The right hon. Gentleman's argument simply does not hold water in the light of the Government's previous decision, which they deemed acceptable, to allow councils to spend their receipts.

Although the Government's rhetoric on the long-term unemployed has changed, it is not matched by action. The Chancellor admitted that the Government had to intervene in order—I quote him approvingly—to

"encourage employers to look more favourably on people who have been out of work for some time"—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol.250, c.1090.]

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right: long-term unemployment is a tragedy and a waste. It breaks up families, tears communities apart and holds our economy back.

Many employers are reluctant to take on people who have been out of work for years, and the Government's new proposals are inadequate. Although the Conservatives say that they have recognised the problem of the long-term unemployed, the presence of the Secretary of State for Employment prevents them from tackling it.

What a contrast there is between the Government's central proposal to help those who have been unemployed for two years and the Labour party's plans. A Labour Budget would provide a £75 a week tax rebate for employers, which is designed to end long-term unemployment. The Chancellor's central proposal is based on a national insurance rebate that, according to the Government's figures, which were repeated today, would offer an employer just £6 a week to take on someone who has been out of work for two years or more. British business has already said that the Government's proposals

are not enough and will not work; the Institute of Personnel Management and the Institute of Directors have already made that clear.

Our scheme is ambitious. It would put the 300,000 people who become long-term unemployed each year back to work. We have costed our scheme, and our figures have been examined by the Institute of Fiscal Studies. I accept that it would cost money in the first year—about £100 million net—but by the second year public money would be saved because we would not have to pay to keep people unemployed. We would also save money by not having to pay income support and housing benefit. The Government have never understood that lesson. They are prepared to see the unemployment bill to the public purse go up and remain high.

I challenge the Employment Secretary to tell us why the Government do not accept our proposal. I suggest that the reason is the same as the one that will prevent any effective Government action on unemployment while that right hon. Gentleman stays in office—that he does not believe that it is the job of the Government to help. He has said in his speeches that action by Government confiscates personal responsibility.

The Chancellor has proposed a complex array of other measures. In truth, a snowstorm of small proposals may blind people on Budget day, but they are not enough to make a difference.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The hon. Lady is the first Opposition spokesman—

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Get to the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman would like to see me with a prop, I am happy to move to the Dispatch Box. I have been in the House for a long time and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I can speak without that prop, but I am not proposing to do so for a very long time in the future.

As the hon. Lady is the first Opposition spokesman to cost any Labour proposal, does she accept that when she talks about a net cost she is presumably making great assumptions about the savings and benefits that will reduce the gross cost to that net cost? We have costed our policy honestly, without anticipating behavioural consequences. I do not know the gross cost of her proposal, but it must be far bigger than the cost she quoted to the House. Perhaps she will give its true cost.

My proposal is meant to reduce the cost on employers for the first year when they take on an unemployed person. Her proposal sounds like an expensive competitor to mine, but how is it logical to combine her proposal with a minimum wage, which would increase the cost of moving people from benefit into employment? Why cannot the Opposition get rid of that inherent and ridiculous contradiction in their policies to reduce unemployment?

Ms Harman: It is interesting to note that, when I criticised the proposal to put the long-term unemployed back to work, the person who jumped to his feet to defend it was not the Employment Secretary, who clearly has mixed feelings about it, but the Chancellor. We have done our costings and they have been examined by the Institute of Fiscal Studies. We say that there would be a net cost, taking into account the expenditure on the £75 tax break and the savings in income support and housing benefit.

The point about the scheme is not that it is complicated, not that it is not straightforward and obvious and not that it is not affordable; the point about the scheme is that a Labour Government would implement it, whereas the Tories, racked by division, are not prepared to take serious action on unemployment.

The Chancellor made several small proposals. With much fanfare, he announced that he will pilot workstart, but that has been piloted before. First, it was piloted in the March 1993 Budget. It was piloted again in the March 1994 Budget. Now it is to be piloted yet again. The scheme has three pilots, and still no take-off.

The Government have also proposed a pilot of jobmatch, a scheme that offers a job subsidy for part-time workers. That, too, has already been piloted. If it was successful, why has it not been tried on a larger scale? The answer is that pilot projects are used by the Conservatives as an excuse for inaction.

Real action to combat unemployment needs an Employment Secretary who believes that Government must act to help the unemployed; it needs an Employment Secretary who is prepared to argue with the Treasury for programmes that make good economic sense; and it needs an Employment Secretary who believes in the Department of Employment. In short, it needs a different Employment Secretary.

The Government are tentative about measures to help the unemployed, but they do not bother with pilots of measures that hit the unemployed. Help with mortgage interest payments is to be cut—no pilots there. For some people, that will mean that the loss of their job means the loss of their home. Unemployment benefit is to be cut. Two hundred and fifty thousand unemployed people will be worse off because of the new jobseekers allowance.

We see the old Thatcherite Conservative party, unable to shake off the habit of punishing the unemployed for the Government's economic mistakes. The Chancellor says that he wants to attack unemployment, but the Employment Secretary is obviously much happier when he is attacking unemployed people.

The Employment Secretary does not believe that his Department has a role in training, either. Many unemployed people, especially long-term unemployed people, lack the skills they need to obtain a job. The Government's own figures show that unemployment continues to rise among the unskilled. The unskilled and the unemployed need training.

The Confederation of British Industry emphasised that businesses, too, want the Government to take a strong lead on training. The Government's own survey shows that a growing number of companies are complaining that skills shortages prevent them from expanding.

This year, the Government are already spending 40 per cent. less on training every unemployed person than Labour did in 1979, when there was nothing like the demand for technological skills that there is today.

Against that background, only a madman or a demagogue would cut the training budget—and that is where the Employment Secretary comes in. He will cut training for work, the major adult training programme, by one quarter in the next two years. The number of places on the scheme is to be cut by 40,000. He thinks—he said

[Ms Harman]

it again clearly in the debate, and he said it this morning—that if businesses want trained people, they will train them, and if businesses are not prepared to train people, it is because businesses do not want them, so why should the Government do it?

The Employment Secretary believes that training is not the job of Government. He seeks to justify cuts on the grounds that the scheme needs to be better targeted—he said that again today. Of course help must be targeted effectively and money must be well spent. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I ask the Employment Secretary two questions. First, if training for work is as inefficient as the Employment Secretary says, whose fault is it? It must be the fault of the Government, which introduced the scheme as recently as last year.

Secondly, if he is worried about efficiency, why was the money not diverted instead to other training schemes? We know that it was not because the overall employment budget was also cut, which means that other training programmes will face cuts in their budgets too. The Employment Secretary's claims about efficiency are a cover for his dogmatic determination to slash the training budget.

Everyone who recognises the central importance of training for unemployed people, for people in work who want to upgrade their skills, for companies, and for our economy, will be dismayed that the Employment Secretary does not believe in his own Department's role in training. If he will not stand up for training in Government, who will?

As recently as a few weeks ago, the Employment Secretary professed his belief in a high-wage, high-skill economy. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Yet he has cut his own training budget. The truth is that he is not committed to a high-skill economy and we have had countless briefings—presumably, and helpfully, from his own Department—in advance of the cut.

David Wastell in the *Sunday Telegraph* explains the reasons behind the Employment Secretary's decision to cut the training budget. It was partly based on being impressed

"by research in the United States, which found unemployed people who were given extensive training became less willing to take low skilled jobs."

The Employment Secretary protests his new-found belief in high skills and high wages, but he remains wedded to his vision of low skills and low wages. He believes that the only future for whole swathes of British people is in low-skill, low-wage jobs, and that is why he opposes a minimum wage. His claim to be worried about the job effects of a minimum wage is bogus.

The very essence, the hallmark, of the Government is indifference to mass unemployment. Most of the recent research on the effects of the minimum wage, as my hon. Friends have said, suggests that it does not cost jobs—quite the opposite. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food admitted, in its analysis of the effects of the wages council in agriculture, that it did not have adverse effects on employment.

The Employment Secretary opposes the minimum wage because of dogma, not economic analysis. It is the same dogma that said in 1975, "You cannot have an Equal Pay Act; you cannot pay women the same rate as men. If you do, you would harm women's prospects in the Labour party"—*[Laughter.]* "It would harm women's opportunities in the labour market, and at one stroke they would all be driven home." The Equal Pay Act 1970 did not have that effect, and more women are now in the labour market than before.

The Employment Secretary does not offer a high-skill, high-investment, high productivity vision for Britain. He offers people the choice: no job or low pay, but topped up increasingly by the public purse.

The Employment Secretary does not believe either in Government ensuring that there is training for people in work. That is important. Today's unskilled and low-skilled people in work will be tomorrow's unemployed people. That is not simply the result of the decline of old industries. The demand for people with low or no skills declines relentlessly. Those workers feel insecure because they know that they are vulnerable.

Even when employers do invest in training—the Secretary of State quoted the figures—they concentrate on their white collar workers and neglect low-skilled workers. The CBI highlighted that issue in its Budget submission.

The Government should have recognised that the voluntary approach to employer training has failed. Labour would have used the Budget to ensure that employers make a fair contribution to the training of their own work force.

The Government's failure to act on training is obviously more of the Employment Secretary's handiwork. We should not be surprised that there is no effort to help people in work obtain the skills that they need, for the Employment Secretary is actually refusing £60 million that the European Commission offered to help retrain workers in declining industries. The reason is—I quote from the *Financial Times*—that he believes it to be "part of a French-inspired"—

need I continue?—

"Commission effort to build up an industrial policy by subterfuge."

There we have it. When the right hon. Gentleman is offered the chance to help those who are threatened by unemployment, he falls back on the dogma that adequate training for those who are in work is not the business of the Government and the dogma of anti-Europeanism. His posturing on Europe damages employers, employees and the economy. Proposals that would help Britain are rejected because they come from Europe. His stance on Europe is not about winning for Britain in Europe but about political positioning in the faction-riven Tory party.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady alludes to objective 3 and objective 4 funding. The United Kingdom has not lost any money because of our stance of arranging to take objective 3 and not objective 4 funding. I do not want to dent the hon. Lady's argument, but I must tell her that all the decisions in that matter were taken before I became Secretary of State.

Ms Harman: The Commission seemed to take a different view, and it still says that £60 million could be available under objective 4. That is not being taken up because of the right hon. Gentleman's dogma.

British business will wait in vain for the Secretary of State to establish a European agenda that helps business because that will not happen. His European arguments are not about business or jobs but solely about the divisions

at the heart of the Tory party. The Secretary of State has proved himself to be the enemy of any real Budget for jobs. He is the enemy of training, of measures to put people back to work, of the unemployed and of his own Department. He is the enemy within.

In the past few weeks, there have been momentous events in the Tory political calendar. There was the Queen's Speech, the European Communities (Finance) Bill and the Budget, and they all led to the most important event in the Tory calendar—the right hon. Gentleman's celebration of 10 years as a Member of Parliament. It is to be held at Alexandra palace tomorrow night. At last he is to have what he always wanted—his very own party.

But some of the guests have refused to join in the fun. The right hon. Gentleman must be asking himself, "Where are the glitterati of the Tory right wing?" Will Lord Tebbit be there? No, he will not. He had the date in his diary but he now discovers that he has a more pressing engagement. Lord Parkinson, too, has suddenly found another pressing engagement. Most hurtful of all, Lady Thatcher will not be there, because she too regrets that she has a prior engagement with a group of American business men. We in the Opposition are asking ourselves whether she could be declining the company of one favourite son to pursue the interests of the other.

The Secretary of State's party will, in every sense, reflect his style and substance, because it will be an occasion for balloons and fireworks. There will be a film about the life and times of Michael Portillo, and it will be set to music. Those who are present will be able once again to relive those glorious golden moments in his glittering career of service to the British people. It will feature his term as a social services Minister when he withdrew benefits from 16 and 17-year-olds and introduced the social fund.

It will feature the right hon. Gentleman's time in the Department of the Environment, which was memorably marked by his assertion that the poll tax was a vote-winner for the Tory party. It will also detail his tenure as Chief Secretary to the Treasury where, since the election, he spoke about his instinct for tax cuts while the Government introduced the biggest tax rises in history. In his current office he is cutting training and reducing help for the unemployed.

The Budget fails to tackle unemployment, it does not address insecurity at work, it fails to stop falling living standards and presses ahead with VAT on fuel—the unfairest tax of all. On Tuesday, the House will have the chance to reopen the issue of VAT on fuel, and in the vote Conservative Members will have a choice between honouring their election promises to constituents or siding with the Government. They all know the anger that their constituents feel about VAT on fuel. They should stand up for those constituents and vote with Labour.

In case they somehow feel moved by the Chancellor's claim that he is providing extra compensation, I must tell them that that is yet another fraud. The compensation scheme is a sham and Conservative Members cannot use it as an excuse for abandoning their constituents' interests. At the conclusion of the Budget debate they must join Labour in voting against the second stage of VAT on fuel.

As I have said, the Budget is a fraud. It is not a Budget for jobs, for economic prosperity or for fairness. It is the Budget of an exhausted regime, which is ideologically bankrupt and politically divided. That is why we shall vote against it on Tuesday.

6.5 pm

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment on his powerful speech, which was one of the best expositions of its kind that I have ever heard. It is not easy to create a climate in which employers can provide more jobs, and perhaps the most difficult task for policy makers is to engage in the hard and clear thinking that is needed. My right hon. Friend did think clearly and firmly, and that is in stark contrast to the thinking of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), much of whose thinking has been around for a long time.

In about 1985, local authorities raised the issue of capital receipts being released, and it was clearly explained to me at that time that one must consider local authority borrowing. I beg the hon. Lady or someone in her team to find out the figures for local authority borrowing. The arguments have been well addressed and what the hon. Lady advocates is on other occasions claimed not to be Labour party policy. She advocates an increase in public borrowing because that would be the result of releasing local government capital receipts.

I have not been able to speak as a Back Bencher for about 10 years, although I am glad to say that this is not a maiden speech. An ex-Minister's first speech from the Back Benches is perhaps best described as akin to a bridegroom's speech at his second marriage after a first marriage which has been immensely happy but which, sadly, came to an end because of bereavement. I shall deliver an unashamed constituency speech, because that is what my constituents deserve after 10 long years.

Morecambe needs help. It has difficulties, but we are successfully fighting them and I hope that we shall win the battle for Morecambe's economic regeneration. Indirectly, I wish to speak about the creation of jobs in Morecambe, but I shall also cover some aspects of regional and industrial policy that are raised by concerned constituents after any Budget.

Morecambe receives Government assistance in various areas, but it does not receive any of the large sums that go to other areas in the north-west. My constituency is not in an assisted area, and is ineligible for assistance from any European Union structural fund. Earlier this year we fought hard to get objective 2 status under Interreg 2 funds, but we failed. Areas in the north-west that have industries in direct competition with my constituency often receive very substantial amounts of state and European aid under those headings.

I fear that I must speak about the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, which is in direct competition with Heysham port in my constituency. In February this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) asked the Secretary of State for Transport what help the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company had received from the European Community and the Government over the past four years. He was told that, between 1990 and 1994, European regional development fund sums that the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company was entitled to claim amounted to more than £6 million.

Such facts and figures are distressing and unfair. Heysham, a small harbour trading across the Irish sea, is just a short distance away from and in direct competition with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. To rub salt in Heysham's wounds, we failed to get objective 2

[Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd]

status, but Merseyside achieved objective 1 status in July and will receive some £630 million over the next five years—some of which, it is anticipated, will go to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. Heysham has received and will receive nothing under any of those headings.

There is clearly no level playing field, but despite those disadvantages Heysham is very successful.

Ms Eagle: Surely the hon. Gentleman agrees that the deplorable, high and persistent levels of unemployment in the Merseyside area meet objective 1 criteria. Surely he is not suggesting that the real deprivation in that area should be dismissed because of a competition problem between two port authorities.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Lady should listen carefully to what I am saying. Indeed, if she reads my speech tomorrow, she will realise that I am not advocating anything that will disappoint her. I am simply pointing out the manifest unfairness in the nature of the funding when two commercial enterprises are in direct competition.

Heysham port was acquired by Sea Containers in 1984, when the company purchased the Sealink interests of British Rail. It is a thriving small port, and over the past 10 years, more than £8 million has been invested in its infrastructure. In the mid-1980s, it benefited from the fact that it was not registered under the dock labour scheme.

The division of Sea Containers that handles the ferries and ports operation is the world's leading fast ferry operator and the United Kingdom's third major ferry company. It handles more than 8 million passengers and 1.6 million vehicles a year. It pioneered the introduction of high-speed ferries in 1990 and has revolutionised ferry travel with fast and top-quality customer service. Over the past six years, Heysham's tonnage throughput has doubled.

I mentioned earlier that Heysham was never a registered port under the dock labour scheme.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Can the hon. Gentleman attribute to any Government policy the fact that in his constituency unemployment has increased by 26 per cent. during the past five years?

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: I will not cross swords with the hon. Lady on that point, because I am developing a wholly different point.

The port of Liverpool suffered considerably from the fact that it was burdened by the absurd provisions of the dock labour scheme—something created out of the lunacies imposed upon the nation by Labour Governments before 1979. Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to think about that. It is all history, but I mention in passing that employers at the port of Liverpool received more than £7.5 million from the Department of Transport to assist with dock labour severance payments.

I do not object to the fact that Liverpool is now unshackled; I am most pleased that it is so. However, I hope that the Government will reconsider their industrial policies during this Session to determine whether the manifest unfairnesses that I have described can be eliminated or relieved. It cannot be right that one industry in one area of the north-west has such a tremendous advantage over another industry located nearby, which is a direct competitor.

The port of Liverpool certainly does not need all that assistance to generate jobs in Liverpool. It is expanding its interests rapidly, and earlier this year it acquired the Medway port and shipping interests. Such takeover bids for interests miles outside the assisted area and at the other end of the country are being facilitated by receipts of large sums of European and national Government grant.

We all know that at the end of the day the Treasury is the Government. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will listen to my comments and, in his discussions with his colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry, will bear in mind the inequities that result from our method of dispensing national and European assistance.

6.17 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The Chancellor of the Exchequer said the other day that this was the Budget of the great prize of sustainable growth, and he referred to the wise use of the recovery from recession. Last year, he referred to the recovery under way. In 1993, his predecessor commended to us his Budget for sustained recovery; in 1992, he referred to an unparalleled growth in the living standards of the British people; and in 1991 he promised recovery from recession. We have had all those promises of recovery, yet the Red Book shows that next year's economic growth will be lower than this year's.

For the city that I represent, the Chancellor's words are cruel and hollow. During the past few months, the formerly relatively prosperous city of Norwich has been struck by economic catastrophe. Far from recovery, it has fallen into a trough of recession, the like of which we have never seen before. Our major employers have been struck by economic conditions that have led them to terminate the employment of literally thousands of workers. Norwich Union, our great insurance company, has, after years of growth, declared 1,200 redundancies over the next few years—an unprecedented experience for that company.

Nestlé-Rowntree proposes to close its factory in Norwich, which has been there for more than 100 years, over the next two years, with the loss of 900 irreplaceable jobs. Those are deadly blows to the city's economy. For Nestlé-Rowntree, it involves the closure of a very successful and profitable company. Norwich people who have worked there over generations heard the news with disbelief.

Anglia Television has made scores of people redundant. Colman's, a name synonymous with Norwich industry, is now up for sale, and nobody knows the future for that major employer. British Gas has announced the closure of its headquarters in Norwich, with the loss of 200 jobs. British Telecom has declared 130 redundancies with the closure of its telephone operators' office in the city.

During the past few weeks, we must have heard the announcement of more than 2,500 job losses in a city which, according to the House of Commons Library statistics section, in October 1994 had an unemployment rate of 12.5 per cent., with no less than a 17.9 per cent. male unemployment rate—a 70 per cent. increase since 1989. It is as if, having suffered not only the recession of the early 1980s and the late 1980s, Norwich has a new and exceptionally deep recession of its own.

What struck me most about the Chancellor's Budget speech was the throwaway line at the very end announcing £24 billion off public expenditure during the next three years. That will lead to enormous public service redundancies. The best estimate is that 250,000 public service jobs will be lost, 100,000 of which will be in the civil service.

There will be heavy public service redundancies in Norwich—we can see them coming already—in the city council, in the county council and in Government Departments located there, including large local offices and national offices, such as Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. I fear that hundreds more will be added to the dole queue. The loss of the spending power of 2,000 or 3,000 new unemployed will lead to the loss of perhaps another 1,000 jobs in the economy.

Then we have the macro-economic effect of last year's Budget added to this year's Budget—a tax increase of £7 billion, which will again reduce economic growth and further dent the Chancellor's recovery. I should like to know what development assistance can be given to areas such as Norwich, which are suddenly plunged into recession in that way. We cannot wait for the boom that is to be engineered for the next election. Too many of my constituents will be tossed on to the scrap heap long before then.

I gather that housing is likely to be particularly hard hit be cuts in public expenditure and that homelessness will increase. The city that I represent was once exceptionally well housed, with a massive council house building programme now long since gone. If the Chancellor had wanted to promote recovery, he could have allowed the city council to use some of the receipts from the 6,000 council houses that have already been sold, in order to build new ones in a city that now has substantial and thoroughly miserable housing stress.

Nothing was done in the Budget to redress the problem noted by the previous Financial Secretary to the Treasury, now the Secretary of State for National Heritage, described as socialist by Lord Hanson, that the tax system holds back industrial investment by encouraging companies to pay out excessive dividends. The Budget will not encourage or induce companies in my constituency to invest in training or in new plant and equipment.

As to the social consequences of the Budget, the personal tax measures will make 84 per cent. of households worse off from April by an average of £2.40 a week, taking together the announcements for 1995 made in this Budget and the previous one. Immediately, the poorest will be the worst hit, particularly by the increase in VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent.

The increase in assistance for pensioners is nothing like compensation for the increase in the cost of fuel. As a result of that and other measures, such as cuts in public services on which the retired depend disproportionately, their living standards will fall. At the same time, they see the salaries of directors and top executives, particularly those in privatised utilities, rocketing upwards. Fairness in taxation and economic matters means a great deal to the British people, and what the Government are doing is palpably unfair.

The Budget for jobs' measures are too small to have any great effect on unemployment, yet there is work to be done everywhere in Britain. Our schools need to be repaired and refitted, and we need better railways and urban transit systems, new hospitals and thousands of new houses.

What should have been done? Surely the way to reinforce a recovery is through public investment, particularly in infrastructure—in the hospital that Norwich needs and has needed for the past 20 years—and in public transport. Instead, we get a 12 per cent. reduction in public capital spending during the next three years, the equivalent of £3.6 billion in cuts, with the best calculation being the loss of 160,000 jobs across the economy.

The Budget is an irrelevance, and nowhere is it more irrelevant than in my constituency.

6.23 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My contribution, I hope, will be fairly brief, it will be pertinent and, in parts, it will be critical of the Government. I did not get much encouragement from the Budget until the last paragraph of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's speech, just before the conclusion, where he says:

"Taking into account the tax and public spending measures, I now expect to be able to reduce borrowing from £30 billion to £21½ billion in 1995-96, from the previously forecast £21 billion to £13 billion in 1996-97, and from £12 billion to £5 billion the year after that."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1103.]

My right hon. and learned Friend is to be congratulated on that because it clearly holds out immense hope and potential for the future. But at the same time, my right hon. and learned Friend has a duty to the country and the electorate at large, particularly, because we are talking about unemployment today, to the 2.5 million people who find themselves out of work.

Of course, I warmly welcome the measures, modest though they are in real terms, to assist the long-term unemployed, and the various schemes that my right hon. and learned Friend put forward to help them get back to work and, as it were, to cover the transition between unemployment and a return to work which, often for those on low incomes and the unskilled, is difficult because they lose more benefit than they receive in wages. Therefore, the transitional arrangements announced by my right hon. and learned Friend are welcome.

So too—we must put the measures in context and in perspective—is the modest assistance to employers to take on the long-term unemployed as employees. I welcome those measures, but we do not want to over-emphasise them or overstate the benefit that they will have. We have already heard from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) that the employers do not count them for a great deal and do not believe that they will be particularly effective. I only express the hope from the Conservative Benches that they will be more effective than perhaps employers believe at this time, particularly the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry.

But I must confess to my colleagues on the Treasury Bench that there was little to celebrate in the Budget delivered by the Chancellor. My right hon. and learned Friend missed a golden opportunity to improve the perception of the Government in the minds of the electorate, although I accept that he hopes to have much greater room for manoeuvre by the next Budget, which will be nearer to the date of the next general election.

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

However, I must put down a marker to my right hon. and hon. Friends. I fear that the British electorate are now a little more sophisticated and cynical than many politicians appreciate. They will see through the antics of any tax-cutting Chancellor who gives away money for short-term electoral advantage close to a general election.

My right hon. and learned Friend had the chance, which he took, not to act imprudently or to buy favours, but rather to present the Government as having learnt from the lessons of the past. But has he listened to the British people? Has he learnt to respond to their wishes? How, from his Budget, will he meet the concerns of the people who write to Members in all parts of the House about the problems that they are facing today?

I shall tackle straight on the main issue of the Budget, which will be called the Budget of VAT on domestic heat and light. The decision to proceed, bull-headed, with the imposition of the second tranche of VAT on domestic fuel bills will be widely resented, and will reopen wounds that had been festering already for about 18 months. By the time all the admittedly modestly generous compensatory arrangements are added up, I simply do not believe that the revenue generated by that tax increase on a vital essential of life can possibly be justified, given the opposition that it has created.

My view, as a Conservative Member of Parliament, is that VAT on domestic fuel is fundamentally iniquitous as a tax on an essential part of life. To the elderly, the young and those with young families, heat and light are essential. The tax will hit hardest low-income families—not only pensioners, but the disabled and those who are in work but struggling to make ends meet on a limited income. They are not covered by any of the compensation packages that my right hon. and learned Friend announced this year or last year.

VAT on domestic fuel is widely perceived as unfair by a number of Conservative Members. I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench that no amount of compensation will eradicate the perception that the Government acted unjustly and unreasonably, and failed to respond to clearly expressed opposition from the public. Many of them wrote to me, not only my constituents, saying that they would gladly have borne an increase in income tax as a means-tested alternative to an across-the-board measure. When Ministers ask how I would raise the money another way, that is the answer I give. I should have preferred the money to be provided from direct taxation, which is means-tested and therefore paid in accordance with people's ability to pay.

People do not have any choice whether to heat their homes in winter, because, if they do not, they die. Many elderly people need rather more light than younger people. Elderly people also leave lights on at night, particularly if they live alone, for security and peace of mind. Many will feel that they can no longer do so because of higher bills.

The Budget missed an opportunity to give a real boost to manufacturing industry. Despite my repeated lobbying, my right hon. and learned Friend failed to give manufacturers the kick-start they still need, with the introduction of 100 per cent. capital allowances to encourage investment in the new plant and products that would enable this nation to remain a major player in an increasingly competitive international market.

Capital allowances would encourage investment, stimulate employment and provide particular help to small and medium businesses. They will provide employment in the months and years ahead, not big businesses. The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) said that large companies in the service or manufacturing sector are shedding labour even at a time when unemployment has dropped by just under half a million. The Confederation of British Industry, the Engineering Employers Federation, and chambers of commerce and industry all believe that a 100 per cent. capital allowance would be immensely beneficial. It is a shame that that opportunity was missed.

Some people describe the film industry as a service industry, and others describe it as a manufacturing industry. I wish that my right hon. and hon. Friends would accept that if the film industry was granted 100 per cent. production cost write-offs in the first year, Britain would attract massive investment in that industry, bringing thousands of jobs. We should look at other countries within the European Union. Only recently, we lost a massive influx of film production, with all the jobs that that would have brought with it, to the Republic of Ireland because of the package which that country offers to encourage film production.

Mr. MacShane: As a result of the Budget, the grant to the British Film Institute has been cut by £600,000 in real terms. That will have a serious impact on one of the major institutions supporting the indigenous film industry.

Mr. Winterton: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern and disappointment. I know well just how hard Mr. Sydney Samuelson of the British Film Commission works for this country's film industry. He is a tireless man, with a pedigree of knowledge that is second to none. If everyone was as committed to the industry as he and his family have been for several generations, this country would be more prosperous, and would have a sounder and larger economy.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South mentioned also the infrastructure. It is unfortunate that cuts have been made in our roads programme, because that will destroy jobs in the construction and civil engineering sectors. If we sought to improve our infrastructure, jobs could quickly be provided. Another result of cutting road construction will be an increase in transport costs borne by manufacturers, who will not then be as competitive. My right hon. and learned Friend's continuing obsession with inflation lies at the heart of that and a number of other problems.

Cutting public spending and raising interest rates to force inflation down is not the only answer to finding satisfactory economic solutions. Taking that action costs jobs and has only a limited impact on the public sector borrowing requirement. I share the view of the hon. Member for Norwich, South that the country needs a well targeted boost for economic growth and infrastructure expenditure. That would create more jobs and wealth, from which the Government would enjoy a greater tax take.

There needs to be an understanding also that high inflation was historically rooted in social and economic conditions that no longer exist. Inflation is not the danger that the Governor of the Bank of England likes to pretend. Recently, in a television programme on which I appeared with a Labour Member, I said that the person whom I

should most like to see on the unemployment register was Mr. Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England. His obsession with increasing interest rates when there is no real inflation in the economy is a danger to our economic recovery.

The economy's problems result from matters over which we have no control, such as the cost of imported raw materials—the prices of which we do not dictate. Given the recovery of our economy, exporters of such materials will seek to improve their profitability by increasing prices, and those increased costs will be passed on to consumers.

In our own manufacturing sector, there is little room for more squeezing and tightening. If there is more cost-squeezing, any further chances for our manufacturing base will disappear.

My hon. Friend the Paymaster General was kind enough to see me and colleagues before the Budget, when I put some of those points to him directly and forcefully. I did not mince my words, and I am not doing so now. I do not believe that one should mince one's words in this place.

The current economic recovery is export-led, and the Government should be congratulated on that. If there are price rises in the system, they relate to imported raw materials over which we have no control—and on which interest rate rises have no effect. May I tell my hon. Friend the Minister: please counsel Eddie George to stop talking about any further interest rate rises? If one wants to kill off the economy and the improvements in it, increase interest rates again. But if one does that, one will have a lot to answer for, and the chances of the Conservatives winning the next general election will be nil.

I make a plea. Let us have no more talk about rises in interest rates; manufacturing industry wants them like it wants a hole in the head. But having said that, I commend my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on the reduction in the Export Credits Guarantee Department insurance premiums. They should never have been as high as they were. I welcome the reduction, as I also welcome the additional resources to do business with important developing countries. I think that an additional £300 million is being provided. I warmly welcome that.

The Budget was a little dull. It missed a number of golden opportunities to show the electorate that the Government were listening. They should have pegged VAT on domestic heat and light at 8 per cent. I give due notice that next Tuesday I shall most certainly support the enabling amendment to provide the opportunity for a vote on that subject. I hope that my hon. Friends who have the courage of their own convictions—I am looking at my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie)—and who sincerely believe that the tax is pernicious and wrong and should not be raised from 8 per cent., will do likewise. We are not voting for Labour in doing that. We are voting from our own conviction and principle, believing that what the Government are doing is wrong.

The golden opportunity to help and give a kick-start to manufacturing industry was also missed. It was, perhaps, as my hon. Friend the Minister would say, a Budget that is "Steady as you go; we are recovering."

Let me finish, as I have on one or two other occasions, with an optimistic comment for the Government. Of course inflation is at a 27-year low. Wonderful. Of course unemployment is coming down, but it is not coming down enough. Yes, we have substantial economic growth—4 per cent. Super. It is higher, I believe, than in any other country in the European Community, and the Government can take proper and full credit for that.

But I ask my hon. Friends to listen to the grass roots of the Conservative party. Listen to the people outside. Listen to small and medium-sized businesses. If they had done that, the Budget could have had a number of real rabbits to come out of the hat, and we could look to the future rather more optimistically than we can now.

6.42 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): In the Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had a window of opportunity to announce measures to attack the root cause of this country's economic decline—mass, long-term unemployment, fuelled by persistent, low skills in our work force. The gap between the low skills of our work force and the high skills of other western nations is continuing to widen, and the hill that we must climb to achieve sustainable growth in our economy is getting higher and higher.

Throughout the country, traditional industries, in manufacturing and engineering, have suffered decades of decline. In my constituency of Eastleigh—a community created from employment in heavy engineering—some 25,000 people were employed in its factories, workshops and railway yards until recent times. It was a community that, generation after generation, had applied its skills and earned its living in manufacturing industry, creating the wealth that underpinned our economic strength.

Today, fewer than 5,000 people work in what remains of Eastleigh's manufacturing industry. A third of unemployed people in Eastleigh have been unemployed for more than a year—a pattern that, as hon. Members will know, is repeated in towns and cities throughout the country. The lack of investment in modern technology and in creating a highly skilled work force has meant that our industry has been unable to remain competitive in the global market place. As company after company has closed, men and women who have given years of good value to their employers, building up skills, experience and loyalty, have been thrown out of work in their hundreds and thousands. Many of those people are redundant for the very first time in their lives, with no prospect of finding a worthwhile job and no opportunity to retrain to develop new, high-level skills.

For those who are over 50, the future is bleak indeed. Many are self-motivated, eager to build on their existing skills and to study and acquire recognised qualifications as a new route to a new and worthwhile career.

Ms Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the statistics on that very point—in 1979, 11 per cent. of men aged over 50 were unemployed, whereas the figure now, I believe, is 55 per cent.—demonstrate a really serious social issue in our society, which needs to be dealt with, and quickly?

Mr. Chidgey: I agree, and I shall continue on the same point.

A motivated, eager person over 50 who is trying to pursue third-level education and training at a college or university in order to begin a new, worthwhile career will find that no help is available towards his living costs.

[Mr. Chidgey]

People over 50 do not qualify for a student loan. The Government have decreed that a student loan is not a worthwhile investment.

For thousands of young people, the prospects have been equally bleak. The training for work schemes available to them have not been designed to develop high skills, leading to productive employment. The initiatives are aimed at providing the minimum skills necessary to get a job—not training that will lead to worthwhile careers, but minimalist training to get any old job, just as long as it leads to one fewer being on the unemployment statistics. The Government's training programmes aim to provide the least, when they should aim to provide the most.

Given those circumstances, it is hardly surprising that nearly 1 million people in this country have been out of work for more than a year—some 40 per cent. of the unemployed total. Despite some 18 months of apparent economic recovery, the number of long-term unemployed has hardly fallen at all. The Government's training for work schemes are not succeeding in reducing long-term unemployment. Fewer than one third of those who have been out of work between one and two years and who enter a scheme end up with a stable job.

Of those out of work for more than two years, fewer than one in five find and remain in work. Fewer than half of all scheme entrants complete their agreed training. Only just over a half of those who complete a training for work scheme end up with a qualification or even a credit towards one.

There is a desperate need to create high-quality training programmes for the unemployed and to create additional intensive schemes targeted at the long-term unemployed. Long-term unemployment is a major barrier to re-employment. For those who have been out of work for more than two years, the chances of getting back into work rapidly approach zero. At the same time, the average cost to the Exchequer of each unemployed person is £9,000 per year, or more. The cost of supporting people who are unemployed for six months or longer is currently running at £11 billion per year in benefits alone.

In his speech to the House at the beginning of the Budget debate, the Chancellor recognised the crisis of the long-term unemployed. He spoke of the dangers of creating an underclass, excluded from economic activity—sentiments that I am sure we all share. He has seen the window of opportunity in the economy of getting people off benefit and back to work.

The Secretary of State for Employment, too, has spoken of his overriding objectives of encouraging job creation and getting more people into work. In his reply to me earlier in the week, he said:

"I share the hon. Gentleman's dissatisfaction with the present level of training for work. If we are going to spend that much money from taxpayers' sources on training for work, we should be able to ensure that more people get jobs."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1066-7.]

The right hon. Gentleman is right: getting people off benefit and support from the state and into productive work—thus creating tax revenue—is not so much a free lunch for the economy as a veritable banquet.

For that reason, I welcome the Chancellor's initiatives in cutting national insurance contribution rates for the low-paid, offering an NIC holiday to employers who take on the long-term unemployed and proposing benefit reforms. I also welcome the expansion of workstart and other such schemes. But why so little? With existing training for work schemes failing to make any impact on long-term unemployment, and with long-term unemployment costing the Exchequer £11 billion a year in benefit alone, why does the Secretary of State for Employment propose to provide only £680 million for schemes to target a major failure in our economy?

It seems to me that the Secretary of State's objectives of encouraging job creation and returning more people to work have been crushed by a Chancellor who is working to a different agenda—an agenda the prime concern of which is to hoard tax revenues to provide giveaway tax cuts before the next general election. That becomes blatantly clear when we examine the detail of the employment proposals. The benefit reforms are far too modest. Tinkering with the system is not the way to improve work incentives; the pilot scheme that is now being recommended—which is equivalent to the Liberal Democrat proposal for a low-income benefit—should be adopted as a national programme.

Why does the adoption of an employer's NIC holiday apply only to those who have been unemployed for more than two years before being taken on? Why will the unemployed have to work for a further 18 months, until April 1996, before they can benefit from the scheme? Again, they are being given too little too late.

The Budget proposed to extend the community action programme, providing a modest 40,000 opportunities for each of the next three years. Why so few opportunities? The proposals for a citizens service in our alternative Budget created opportunities for up to a quarter of a million people, to use the skills of the unemployed and provide training for the young.

With the total of those who have been unemployed for more than a year still nearly 1 million, the Workstart pilot scheme is to be marginally expanded, with yet another pilot scheme that will provide incentives for just 5,000 people who have been unemployed for more than two years. Even that inadequate scheme will run for only one year, from April 1995.

The Budget presented a major opportunity to grasp the initiative, and to introduce a working benefits scheme in line with our proposals. Under our scheme, social security benefits paid to people who had been unemployed for more than six months would be converted to vouchers payable to employers to subsidise training. The value of the vouchers would fall steadily in each week of employment, avoiding an open-ended commitment; the cost to the state would be negligible, and always less than the total cost of benefit and tax revenue forgone. To benefit from the scheme, employers would have to pay wages at least equal to the value of the vouchers. They would be eligible only if the new employees were genuine additions to the work force.

A crucial difference between the working benefits scheme and Workstart is that employers would be required to provide extended quality training for new employees. By re-establishing working habits and acquiring new skills, long-term unemployed people would become capable, productive members of the work force. Instead of providing a bonus for the employer, the scheme would provide an investment in the employee—an investment in skills and "employability".

The Budget has not only failed to grasp the initiative by providing training schemes that would help significantly to return the long-term unemployed to work but has cut existing training funds for training and enterprise councils. The need for high-quality training is now crucial if we are to rebuild our skills base, but instead of securing support for their schemes TECs will now have to lower the quality of the training that they provide.

While there is little of substance in the Budget to provide improved training for the unemployed, job creation opportunities have been slashed. By cutting public-sector capital expenditure—that was mentioned earlier—the Budget puts at risk thousands of jobs in the construction industry, which has already been severely damaged by the recession. The proposed £400 million cuts in the roads programme should have been transferred to investment in the public transport system—particularly rail—to provide modern, efficient networks and ease the burdens on business. That, too, has already been mentioned. Reliance on private finance for public infrastructure has failed in the past, and there is no reason to believe that it will succeed in the future.

For the unemployed, the unskilled and those trying to retrain to improve their qualifications and secure a worth-while job, this Budget offers little. There are no plans to invest in our infrastructure and the railways to create jobs; no plans to invest in education or quality training to improve our skills base; and no plans to invest in modernising industry to give our manufacturing firms a competitive edge. In fact, the only plan to emerge from the Budget is the Government's attempt at self-preservation.

6.55 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Every politician needs a bit of good luck. Certainly good fortune has shone on the Chancellor over the past 12 months, with the economy performing better than at any time in living memory. Who would have thought two and a half years ago, when we were swept out of the exchange rate mechanism and the pound fell, that we would now have the lowest inflation for 25 years? Who would have thought that we would have an export-led recovery, and that—as growth was secured—we would not suck in imports that would worsen the balance of trade? In fact, our trade deficit is falling dramatically, and will halve in the next year. That, combined with low interest rates and unemployment falling more rapidly than it is anywhere else in the western world, was certainly a good basis for the Budget.

The Chancellor's greatest achievement this year, however, has been his success in bringing the budget deficit under control. As recently as 1993-94, that deficit was rising at a rate of £1 billion a week, and was expected to peak at £50 billion a year—an appalling figure. This year—as my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) pointed out—the Chancellor has got it down to £21.5 billion, and within three years it will be nil: we will have a balanced budget. As my hon. Friend said, that is a wonderful achievement.

The achievement, however, has not been devoid of pain. Initially, the Government were not prepared to grasp the nettle sufficiently to deal with public spending; the country has had to accept some swingeing tax increases, the last of which will be implemented this year. Last year, thankfully, the Chancellor began to put pressure on spending Ministers by not allowing them to spend the contingency reserve; this year he has reduced the planned public sector borrowing requirement by no less than £8.5 billion, of which £6.9 billion has come from the control total.

If any hon. Members have gained the impression that the Chancellor has become "Ken, the mad axeman of spending", let me reassure them. The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) is entirely wrong: the real cuts in the control total next year amount to only 0.8 per cent. in real terms, which is more than covered by the £3.5 billion reduction.

Whatever anyone says, overall there is no cut in Departments' volume of expenditure in real terms. Indeed, in priority areas the Chancellor has increased expenditure, with an extra real-terms increase of 1 per cent. in education spending, an extra £1.3 billion in health service spending and an extra £150 million to be spent on law and order.

How has "Ken the magician" done it? He has secured most of the savings from lower inflation, which is undoubtedly the Government's major achievement. In the past, when a control total was included in an estimate of inflation, and inflation subsequently turned out to be lower, Departments have rubbed their hands and spent more. I pay tribute not only to the Chancellor but to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury: for this year, most of that windfall has been clawed back and has helped to reduce the PSBR.

I am delighted that the Chancellor has listened to those of us who have said, for some years now, that the Government should follow the example of the private sector. During the recession, every firm in the country had to cut its overheads to survive. We have said that we should follow the example of the privatised industries which, once they were privatised, rapidly got rid of the enormous overmanning. We have made it clear that we consider that there is a great deal of overmanning in the public sector. I was delighted when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said that he intended to freeze the cash spent on running costs for four years. That will be equivalent to a real-terms reduction of 10 per cent.

Despite all the accusations from the Opposition that we are the party that is always cutting public expenditure, we are still a high-spending Government. General Government expenditure, excluding privatisation, is still 42.5 per cent. of GDP. If the Opposition were in office, it would be about 50 per cent. of GDP. The current level is still too high and on present plans it will be the turn of the century before we get it back to the 1988-89 level.

As a result of my right hon. and learned Friend's successful management of the economy I suggest that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench have only one major task left and that is to reduce the overall burden of taxation back to or below the level it was at the last election. That will be no easy task, because tax and national insurance have risen from 33.75 per cent. of GDP in 1993-94 to, according to page 84 of the Red Book, 37.25 per cent. in 1996-97.

I should like to give my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench the benefit of some ideas about where they might make some cuts next year. I think that they will have to intensify the pressure on public spending over the next 18 months if they are to deliver the tax cuts that we expect.

[Mr. John Townend]

I want to look at one or two areas that, for some surprising reason, seem to have been sacrosanct. First, we are now spending £2.36 billion on overseas aid. Most people accept that a great deal of overseas aid is wasted. The west has poured billions of pounds into Africa for over 40 years, but has not solved any of the problems. We all know about the amount going into Swiss bank accounts, the money that is wasted and the amount spent on arms.

I have some sympathy with the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield. Now that we are imposing the second tranche of VAT on fuel, my pensioners say to me, "If the Government are so hard-up that they have to tax fuel, how can they afford to give so much away to foreigners, particularly when so much of it is wasted?" I think that they have a point, and we could well cut half a billion from that budget next year.

I shall loyally support my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the Lobby on the VAT vote, and I urge all my colleagues to do the same, whatever their views. We have made the decision, and if we had to go back on it at this stage—I hesitate to say this in the House—it could adversely affect the financial markets. If the markets took it badly, it could force up interest rates and that is the last thing that we would want. However, having given 44 per cent. of the tax back in relief, for which we do not receive any credit, I believe that it would have been wiser to put VAT on newspapers instead of on fuel. I think that we will pay a heavy political price for that tax.

We should also look at the arts budget. This year, the National Heritage Department budget tops £1 billion for the first time. In view of the amount that will be received from the national lottery which is to be spent on arts and sport, perhaps we should look at that next year.

The biggest spender is the social security budget, which goes up inexorably year after year. It is now £73 billion—28.5 per cent. of our total spending. We spend more on social security than we do on health, education and defence combined. That is why I am delighted to welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals to try to get the long-term unemployed back into work. They are first-class proposals. However, I was not convinced by the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment about the reasons why we have to wait until 1996 for the national insurance holiday. I should have thought that, if it was a good scheme, the Departments could act a little more quickly.

We must intensify our attempts to stamp out fraud. There is a great deal of fraud and we all know about the people in the black economy, earning money in the real world and still claiming benefits. If it will help to have a national identity card, let us get on and deal with it.

I welcome the help for small businesses, in particular the venture capital trust and the transitional rate relief of £600 million with regard to the business rating revaluation. I hope that the proposals on venture capital will deal with an omission in the market. At present, most venture capital wishes to have a guaranteed exit after seven or eight years either by the outright sale of the company or by a flotation. Many of our most successful businesses are in their third or fourth generation and those involved do not want to sell them. However, they are often short of capital, and we should look at new sources.

We should also look at excise duties and cross-border shopping. I declare an interest, since, as everybody in the House knows, 100 per cent. of my working life has been spent in the drinks business. Therefore, I am speaking with a knowledge of the industry. I am pleased that my business is in the north of England rather than on the south coast. I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that the problem is growing. It will not go away, but will get worse every year. The Treasury has underestimated the effect on the Revenue. There was a change in the method of assessing duty on beer last year and we should have been looking for a considerable increase in beer duty when we did away with the waste allowance for brewers.

We must take into account the results of this cross-border trade—not only the personal buying, but the bootlegging and smuggling, which is getting worse. There are signs that criminal elements are becoming involved and we all know what happened in America when criminal elements became involved during prohibition. It is not only the loss of revenue from the excise duty that is costing us money. There is the loss of VAT, the effect of corporation tax on the profits of the companies involved, the loss of jobs for the people in the businesses closing down. It is said that the amount of beer coming in is equivalent to the production of four provincial-sized breweries.

I was delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said that he now accepts the problem, but his solution was not to reduce duty but

"to work with our European partners to bring duties more in line."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol.250, c.1096.]

Does my right hon. and learned Friend really think that the French will co-operate and put up duties on alcohol, particularly on wine, which they consider to be an agricultural product, in order to stop British shoppers pouring over the channel to Calais, putting money into the pockets of French shopkeepers and, more importantly, putting VAT in the pockets of the French Government?

The only solution to the problem is to cut our duties progressively. I accept that financial constraints prevented us from having a major cut this year, but I would have liked to have seen a start. We must move progressively over a number of years until the differential is no more than 50 per cent. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend listens to what I have said, and that we will see some action next year.

This is a safe but unspectacular Budget in which the Chancellor has, quite rightly, given overwhelming priority to fiscal rectitude and reducing the budget deficit. I applaud that warmly. This year he has achieved more than anyone expected. I hope that the Budget will give us the platform to continue the economic recovery so that we will be able to fulfil our final pledge to bring taxes down at the next election. The help to small businesses and to the long-term unemployed is welcome. With steady Eddie at the Bank of England and careful Kenneth at the Treasury, we can sleep soundly at night, knowing that the country's finances are in safe hands.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I remind the House that there is a 10-minute limit on speeches between now and 9 o'clock.

7.9 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) down that line, but I noted that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) gave an honest and passionate speech in which he highlighted the essential need of the young and elderly for heat and light.

I should like to discuss another need in life: housing. I am of the firm opinion, as are local authority representatives and construction industry workers with whom I have discussed the Budget, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has missed a golden opportunity to meet the housing needs of the citizens of this country and to blend those needs into economic growth and regeneration, especially of inner-city areas.

The need and demand for affordable rented housing is shown in the figure that various organisations have bandied about for a long time. They say that 100,000 new homes are required every year to meet housing needs, to give real choice and to achieve stability in housing.

The pool of affordable rented housing is diminishing day by day. As every hon. Member knows from attending advice bureaux and surgeries, housing is the issue in the vast majority of constituency cases. I am becoming despondent that I have no answers, and I experience sheer frustration when people seek my help.

According to the Chartered Institute of Housing, since 1981, the social rented sector has shrunk by more than 1 million homes and, under the right-to-buy scheme, council houses are being bought twice as fast as houses are being built by housing associations. The new build by local councils is so insignificant that it has no effect on ever-growing waiting lists. In most authorities, new build is non-existent. The institute argues that the Government's housing and economic policies must be brought into line or both will fail.

Action must be taken to increase the supply and to keep down the cost of rented housing. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has failed miserably in the autumn Budget. What will be the cost of that failure to boost house building, repair and renewal? The cost will be that more and more people will languish on housing waiting lists, more homeless people will be on the streets and more houses will fall into disrepair. That is happening while 500,000 construction workers remain on the dole when they could be employed in the building, repair and improvement of houses.

The construction sector has always acted as a barometer, indicating the economy's strength. In housing, the needs indicator should be the measure by which resource requirements are measured. Research emanating from the Housing Corporation clearly demonstrates that the Government are under-investing in social rented houses.

When I was a local councillor, local authorities were the main providers of low-cost, affordable housing until the Government, with their distaste, almost bordering on hatred, for local councils sought to introduce a new system. Housing associations were no longer to have a complementary role in supporting local authority housing. They were, however, given the prime role of providing housing financed by the Housing Corporation.

Housing associations' building programmes are suffering the same fate as those of local authorities. The Government have cut the Housing Corporation's finance to the tune of about £300 million since its inception, and it is £6 million down from last year's autumn Budget. That has meant that there is more reliance on the private money market. The outcome of that is a cut in building starts, high interest rates, rent rises, staff sackings and offers of inferior-quality housing. Those are the alternatives that face housing associations.

For local authorities like mine in Manchester, the basic credit approval was reduced by 35 per cent. in 1994-95, which has already severely limited the city council's ability to invest in mainstream programmes outside targeted initiatives, such as estate action schemes and city challenge. Manchester's good performance in securing estate action schemes has enabled the authority to maintain a programme of improvement, reorganisation and remodelling of poorly designed estates. The discontinuation of the estate action programme will be a severe blow to housing authorities such as Manchester.

The single regeneration budget will not provide sufficient levels of support for investment in public housing in the years to come. With mainstream funding, Manchester's estate action investment will amount to £29.5 million in 1995-96. A city officer told me that, by 1998, it will have plummeted to zero. Local authorities will face severe difficulty in presenting any coherent investment programmes. The single regeneration budget will not be an adequate replacement. It is estimated that it will provide only 20 per cent. of investment by 1998. The move away from estate action is a significant blow in housing terms. In that context, any significant reduction in capital allocations will have a serious impact on the planned programmes of housing activity.

In Manchester, the private sector renovation programmes have fallen into disarray. Housing associations have not had the finance to rehabilitate older terraced housing stock, repossessions and absentee landlords. We have the worst private sector housing stock conditions in the north-west of England. In some private property areas, tenants have vacated housing that could not be rescued. They left because of vandalism and break-ins, and they liken their area to streets in Beirut. One husband and wife that I know cannot go out together because one has to keep guard on their house. Sometimes when they go shopping, they call in the neighbours to act as sentries.

Programmes to tackle derelict housing rely on a special capital grant for 60 per cent. of the costs and on support from housing investment programmes. Any reduction in either of those two elements will cause irretrievable damage to the programme to rid Manchester of an ever-increasing cancer in its midst.

It should be noted that, in Manchester, more than five times as many empty houses exist in the private sector than in the public sector. Many of those homes belong to housing associations. The city council is attempting to set up a partnership with housing associations, private landlords and lending institutions to put together the largest empty property initiative in the country, but Government co-operation is essential. The Budget has failed to provide that co-operation.

Because of the limited time, I cannot expose the many failures involving housing in Manchester that have arisen since I was a councillor there. To maximise the potential for investment, Manchester is working in a partnership which, if supported by central Government, may enable the city council to generate investment in housing estates,

[Mr. Robert Litherland]

which need fundamental and basic improvements. Manchester city council has worked closely with the Government and made every effort to collaborate, and it should receive recognition for the part that it has played. Regrettably, however, in the climate of continuing restrictions on public spending, the outcome will be longer waiting lists, estates and all the private sector houses falling into dereliction—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.19 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I was proud to be a Minister in Her Majesty's Government, and especially pleased to have had responsibility for economic development, as well as the environment, in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt in my mind that there is more cause for real hope in the Province today than there has been for a whole generation.

The Northern Ireland economy weathered the recession well, and should benefit substantially from peace. Trade, tourism and inward investment will all be gainers, and I welcome the details on the inward investment conference that the Secretary of State announced earlier today. However, unemployment in the Province remains the highest in the United Kingdom, at about 13 per cent., although the differential has narrowed significantly in recent years.

Long-term unemployment is a particular problem in the Province, as in many other parts of the United Kingdom. About half the people out of work are long-term unemployed, so I welcome all the measures in the Budget designed to help such people. Some hon. Members have criticised those measures as inadequate, but I think it right that schemes should start as pilot schemes and then, if they are shown to work effectively and to offer value for money, we can build on them later on the basis of experience.

The British economy is in remarkably good shape. We have low inflation, rising output, falling unemployment and rapid export growth. Perhaps it is the rapid export growth—8 per cent. this year, and 7.5 per cent. forecast for next year—that comes as the greatest surprise to some commentators. A shrinking balance of payments deficit when the economy is growing rapidly is not something that most people would have forecast. Instead, they would have forecast rapidly increasing consumer expenditure, sucking in extra imports.

That welcome change has come about partly because of the competitiveness resulting from the devaluation of sterling in 1992, but also because of the more general measures adopted by the Government to increase the competitiveness of the United Kingdom economy. That is what the debate is really about. Jobs will be created only if the economy is more competitive.

I was interested to read about the 1994 World Competitiveness Report, details of which were published recently by the Confederation of British Industry. That report, which was compiled by the World Economic Forum and the International Institute for Management, shows that in terms of domestic economic strength, the United Kingdom moved up between 1993 and 1994 from 19th to 12th in the rankings for competitiveness within the OECD countries.

The United Kingdom ranked sixth in terms of Government policies conducive to competitiveness. According to the CBI, the report says:

"We are considered to have a relatively low level of state interference in business, distortion of competition, direction of investment, or pricing policies. Also, fiscal policies treat enterprises in an equitable manner and we have relatively flexible labour markets."

We need to build on those achievements if we are to create more jobs. A minimum wage cannot be the answer. The answer must be for the Government to get off the backs of businesses and make it easier for them to create jobs. I welcome all the measures in the Budget that seek to do that.

Given that we now have an economy in such good shape, the big question now is how to sustain the recovery. I think that the Budget judgment is about right. We must continue to adopt a tight monetary and fiscal stance, so long as the economy is growing rapidly, as it is now, at 4 per cent. Even next year it is forecast to grow at 3.25 per cent., which appears to be above its trend rate.

We often tend to exaggerate the influence that the Government can have over the economy as a whole, but there can be no argument about the fact that public finances constitute an area in which the Government have a clear responsibility. I welcome the fact that we have public finances under control. Table 6A.1, on page 131 of the Red Book, shows that public expenditure is now falling as a proportion of gross domestic product. However, we still have a long way to go before we return to the levels of 1988-89.

I should like to think that we might set ourselves the target of what was achieved only 30 years ago in 1964, when public spending represented only 36 or 37 per cent. of GDP. At least we should aim to bring public spending below 40 per cent. of GDP and then keep it there.

Another interesting chart in the Red Book is chart 6.6, on page 115, which shows the trend in direct running costs of Departments. The measures that the Chancellor has announced—to cut the direct running costs of the civil service by 10 per cent. in real terms—are tough, but they represent the right approach. I am sure that it is right to try to protect services while cutting the cost of administering them.

That will result in a radical review of the way in which many Departments conduct themselves. The Treasury has given a lead by reducing its number of senior civil servants, and that example could usefully be followed elsewhere in Whitehall. Under the proposed arrangement, it will not be an option to go in for salami slicing, cutting bits here and bits there. Departments will have to carry out fundamental reviews of their operations. They will have to set up more executive agencies to deliver their services, while maintaining a slim administration.

I was interested to hear that although the Chancellor had felt able to increase spending on health and on the police service, which I welcome, he had cut the roads programme. I have mixed feelings about that, because clearly the United Kingdom needs a substantial roads programme, although the programme has already been substantially increased in the past few years. I ask the Minister of State whether he thinks that, in view of the reductions, the Government will still go ahead with the M25 link roads or the proposal to widen the M4 through Slough to 12 lanes, six in each direction. I do not believe

that we need those developments, and I hope that, as a result of the cuts, they will be either deferred or abandoned altogether.

Two years ago, when the public sector borrowing requirement was approaching £50 billion, who would have thought that today we would have had such firm control over public finances? The fact that next year the PSBR is to fall to £21.5 billion is most welcome. Soon we shall comply with the Maastricht conditions on total borrowing, which is forecast to peak at 49.25 per cent. of gross domestic product, compared with the 60 per cent. reference level specified by the Maastricht treaty.

That is the principal achievement of the Budget. We now have sound public finances on which to build in the future. That has meant that there was no great scope for tax cuts or tax reform in the Budget, but I welcome the measures to encourage investment in small businesses, especially the measures to improve the attraction of venture capital trusts and the enterprise investment scheme. I believe that those will be successful in encouraging risk equity investment into new technology and manufacturing.

I also welcome the fact that more small businesses will be able to pay their PAYE and national insurance contributions to the Revenue quarterly rather than monthly. That will achieve a useful reduction in the burden on business.

As I have said, there was not much scope for tax reform, but I should have liked to see more tax simplification. I suspect that we shall have another highly complex Finance Bill, following last year's massive Bill, and I am pleased to hear that Lord Howe is now chairing a committee to consider how we can try to simplify our tax regime. I hope that, when the committee makes its recommendations to reform the law, the Treasury will consider them seriously. If we consider the income and corporation taxes Acts as a whole, there can be no doubt that the legislation is far too complex.

There is not much time left. I should like to mention one omission from the Budget. I should have liked to see some help for charities along the lines proposed by the Charities Tax Reform Group. Charities are carrying an extra burden of VAT. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will be able to consider that in the future. Subject to that, I welcome the Budget, because it establishes sound public finances.

7.29 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): This is the first time that the Budget speech has been available on Internet, but the people who read it will have been disappointed. I checked what else the Government were doing on Internet, hoping to get hold of some information which might be of some use in this evening's debate.

I looked at the page on the worldwide web, which is put out by the Department of Trade and Industry and it turned out to be a large file. It took several minutes to download, and while I was waiting I wondered what on earth the information could be. Would it be useful information that would help my constituents, such as a list of which banks were actively promoting the loans guarantee scheme or details of the job seeker's allowance—something of real use?

When the information arrived, it was extremely disappointing. It turned out to be a colour picture of the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor). Nothing daunted, I surfed a little further on this wave of information and downloaded another large file. When that turned out to be a colour picture of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), I am afraid that I just gave up.

That illustrates the attitude of the Government extremely well. On a facility with the capability of providing useful information, we found pictures of Ministers and copies of their speeches. It was more like an extended election address.The Government are driven in one direction only—to try to con the British public into giving the Conservatives a fifth term. They will be disappointed, I am sure. It is obvious that all the penny pinching and cuts this year are to allow the Chancellor to put in place the bribe package before the next election. But the British people will not be conned.

The British people have realised that the Tories cannot be trusted with tax. They will remember their local Conservative candidates saying before the last election, "There is no need to extend VAT," "There are no plans to raise VAT," and, even more dishonestly, "We are the party of low taxation." What a joke. Can anyone believe anything said by a Tory candidate at the next election when the Tories have raised taxes by the equivalent of 7p in the pound? It is obvious that the elderly and the poor are being made to pay for the Government's dishonesty. They are paying for the Government's ineptitude and the encouragement for fat cats to become even fatter.

While we see around us the stress and pain of poor housing, unemployment, low pay and inadequate pensions, the chief executive of British Gas basks in the luxury brought by a £500,000 a year salary. He then has the cheek to put up gas prices, adding to the agony of VAT on fuel, and then to offer discounts to those sufficiently well-heeled to be able to pay by direct debit. One of my constituents who normally pays his bill by direct debit is so outraged by the iniquity of this that he has written to me to say that he intends to cancel his direct debit forthwith and to do everything possible to ensure that British Gas gets as little of his money as possible this winter, even if it means living in freezing conditions.

It is now clear that the people of Britain are fed up with Tory injustice, tired of Tory sleaze and want a better, brighter, fairer future, which the Tory Government are incapable of providing.

My constituency has a large private rented housing sector. I wish to talk a little about that and about the effects of the cuts in housing benefit announced earlier this week by the Chancellor. I have to declare an interest because part of my house in Cambridge is let—much below the market rent, I have to say. More than 3,000 tenants in the private rented sector in Cambridge receive housing benefit, and market rents in Cambridge are high. A basic bedsit averages about £45 a week and a two-bedroom flat about £108 a week. In many cases, rents are as high as in London.

The use of private rented accommodation is feasible only if it is either poor quality and therefore cheap, or if the tenant earns a high salary. Most tenants receive housing benefit, of course. That is what makes it possible for them to use the private rented sector. I learned from my council housing department today that the rent allowance threshold in Cambridge is likely to be about £71 a week. Many tenants in the city will receive housing

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

benefit for property that is more expensive than that. I wonder what will happen to those tenants when their housing benefit is reduced to finance the Government's election bribe. Some will get into debt, some will fall into arrears, landlords will serve eviction orders and some tenants will be thrown on to the street.

The reduction in housing benefit is an admission that the Housing Act 1988 has failed. That Act deregulated rents and permitted landlords to charge whatever they thought they could get. Opposition Members warned the Government of the day that that would have a disastrous effect on the provision of private rented accommodation, and so it has. The number of properties in that sector has fallen dramatically as a percentage of the total provision, and homelessness has rocketed as a result.

The Conservative Government pledged to make Britain the best housed nation in Europe. They pledged to protect tenants from high rents by means of housing benefit. All those pledges are now revealed to be as empty and dishonest as the promises to cut taxes at the last general election. There is good evidence that the people of Britain are seeing through the Conservative Government. One of my constituents was reported in my local evening paper the *Cambridge Evening News* as saying:

"I wish the Government would think more about the general well-being of people. I don't like living in a society where you see people having to beg on the street and hear of old people dying of hypothermia. It is so depressing thinking that everyone has to be out for themselves all the time and that if you fall down no one is going to care."

There is another item of expenditure which badly affects many people throughout the country and I was sorry not to see it dealt with in the Budget. I refer to the cash available for community care. The Secretary of State for Health is already aware of the enormous difficulties created by the underestimate of spending by social services departments in implementing Government policy—estimates, I have to say, which were forced down by the Government.

We have heard recently about social services departments which have already spent their cash allocations for the whole year. My authority in Cambridgeshire has a projected overspend of more than £1 million and has taken drastic action to reduce spending. When the Secretary of State for Health received a delegation from my Labour colleagues in Cambridgeshire county council recently, she waved aside the protests and simply told them to get their act together. That has aroused resentment and deep anger. Dedicated carers who rely on help for their elderly and disabled relatives are in despair. Hours of care have been cut, respite care is disappearing and we shall see more family breakdowns and more stress-induced illness in people who already carry an intolerable burden.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) repeated the message of the Labour Front Bench and called this the "VAT Budget". Yes, it is the VAT Budget, and that is how it will be known. It is not just that, however, as there are another seven tax increases still to come as a result of the tax increases announced last year. This is the Budget that failed to redress the evils of last year's Budget. This is not a Budget for people, but a Budget for a failing Tory Government to prepare the way for tax bribes nearer the general election.

7.39 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): May I commence by complimenting my right hon. Friends and colleagues on the production of what is, in the main, an excellent Budget? It is prudent, realistic and practical and based on the long-term interests of our nation. It is good for business, the long-term unemployed and those taxpayers at the bottom of the income tax scale. Without a doubt, it creates optimism for the future, but it is not perfect—few Budgets ever are.

I would have liked to have concentrated more on the Budget's positive aspects, but given the 10-minute rule I feel that I must concentrate on the imperfection, which is the introduction of full-scale value added tax on domestic fuel. We will suffer a lot of pain because the tax comes in five doses: a statement of intent in March 1993; approval in November last year; implementation in April; more pain at present; and implementation next year. The introduction of VAT on fuel is a bad move.

The measure is bad on several counts, including temperature gradients, and it does nothing for people in the north of Scotland. On that basis, it is unfair. It hits the elderly and the vulnerable and it certainly hits families with mortgages and young children. It also hits the lower to middle-income groups, who always seem to suffer from tax changes.

The use of domestic fuel is a matter not of choice, but of necessity. That is the factor underlying my disappointment that we have gone ahead with the second phase rise.

I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) in March 1993, saying that I would support the 8 per cent. tranche, given the financial circumstances that the country then faced during an exceptionally long and continuing world recession. I underlined, however, that my support would not be extended to the 17.5 per cent. lift. I made that point last year, when I went into the Lobby to support the introduction of VAT at 8 per cent.

I accept that good provision has been made for pensioners and people on income support. Every time reference is made to his stated expectations of the appropriate compensation and what the Government actually provided, evidence of discomfort crosses the face of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

I welcome the moves on energy insulation and draught proofing, as well as the improvements in the cold weather allowances that were announced. I can point to constituents—pensioners in single-fuel houses—who are better off with the 70p addition, which compensated for the 8 per cent. lift. That knowledge is based on an examination of their fuel bills. On that basis, however, I still suggest that VAT on domestic fuel is a bad tax. In principle, it is bad when Governments are obliged to give with one hand and take back with the other.

I have had a sombre thought. Let us remember the community charge. I, for one, mourn its passing. People on social security were compensated for the 20 per cent. of the charge that they had to pay, but that was soon forgotten. The generous payments that are being made to pensioners and those on income support now will also soon be forgotten. They will be there in April, but then it will be summer and fuel bills will be low. By next winter, extra payments to help with VAT will have been

forgotten. People will see the 17.5 per cent. VAT on their fuel bills and will not switch on their fires and heating systems. That fills me with concern.

Another aspect is the considerable amount of hype when my right hon. and hon. Friends have pointed out that past reductions in fuel costs, following privatisation of the energy industry, probably compensate for the additional costs resulting from the imposition of VAT. I was involved in the electricity supply industry in the run-up to privatisation. I was not terribly popular among my colleagues because I advocated privatisation. I pointed out to them the benefits that would follow for the consumer. I advocated privatisation because I thought that there would be benefits, but now those are being taken back by the Inland Revenue. I cannot support that and I will not support it when we go into the Lobby on Tuesday night.

Having said that, I have spent some considerable time in the Chamber during the debate and have listened to Opposition Members' comments. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) condemned the Government's tax takes in recent times. He stands against every element of public expenditure reduction. He has even pledged to increase public expenditure. Even the most elementary primary school arithmetic suggests that his sums do not add up. I could not possibly go into the Lobby with someone advocating those policies.

I also listened to hon. Members on the Liberal Benches who mentioned a carbon tax. Let us think back to the difficulties we had with coal only 18 months ago, when people suggested that we should do everything that we could to preserve the coal industry. A carbon tax is a tax on coal. It is a tax on fuel, the same as VAT, but more selective. Who in their right mind could go into the Lobby with individuals who advocate such a tax?

Yesterday, the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) spoke for 40 minutes, yet he did not turn up for the winding-up speeches. He said:

"I personally look forward to the day when there is no mortgage tax relief, because I believe that it should be replaced by a housing benefit for everyone. Those in the private and public sectors should gain some support for the principle of having a roof over people's heads."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1281.]

How can such a person advocate tax cuts and yet be prepared to put in place new taxes and levels of expenditure that are uncosted and totally unnecessary?

I will have no truck with Opposition Members on tax-related matters and I certainly will not be in the Lobby with them on Tuesday evening. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about VAT?"] I will not be in the Government Lobby or in the Opposition Lobby because, in the words of one Opposition Member—I think that it was the hon. Member for Garscadden—many Members will be "less than honest" if they consider the issue of raising taxes and go into the latter Lobby on Tuesday night.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) suggested that he was a "chief rebel" on the Back Benches. I have no intention of becoming a rebel. I was elected as a Conservative Member of Parliament and I will support all Conservative manifesto pledges. I do not believe that the increase in VAT was a manifesto pledge. At the last election, I argued against such taxes and feel that I cannot go the whole hog and support the Government on that issue.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor asked hon. Members who stood against the tax to come up with alternative solutions. There could be an immediate £600 million saving from the £1.5 billion VAT requirement with the removal of the requirement for plus payments.

Another option which I would suggest would be to bring the tax on wine into line with those on beer and spirits, and people in the distilling and brewing trades would certainly welcome that. We could have slowed down on our stated objectives regarding the PSBR, and there are other aspects which could also have been brought in.

I go along with my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who said that one level of VAT which could have been introduced was VAT on national newspapers of 8 per cent. That perhaps would have been acceptable, given—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.49 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The speech of the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) was of some interest, in that we saw him struggle with his conscience and finish up with a very boring goalless draw. He said that he would, in the end, do nothing in connection with VAT. Perhaps he will not need to be here for the debate which is to deal with it.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) referred to the situation in Northern Ireland, where he was previously a Minister. There are points from the Budget about Northern Ireland which need to be referred to. There is a great possibility of a peace dividend arising in Northern Ireland, and we must be sure that that dividend goes to Northern Ireland itself so that the problems about which the hon. Gentleman talked, including high unemployment and social deprivation, are dealt with.

I recognise that, within the public spending provisions, the adjustments downward for Northern Ireland are marginal compared with other areas. I hope that that suggests that expenditure is liable to be roughly maintained, and that that is something which will continue in the future.

Another matter regarding Northern Ireland is that hon. Members who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland—whatever their political complexion—will vote against VAT on domestic fuel. Some will not be doing that because of any great political conviction or analysis, which may not be very different from some of the views of the Conservative party. They will be doing it because of the overwhelming feeling which exists in Protestant and Catholic working-class communities throughout Northern Ireland. People live in bad conditions of high unemployment and deprivation, and hon. Members representing those people must respond to the pressure that is being put on them. When the vote takes place in the House, I hope that the Government will be obliged to respond to that pressure.

A major characteristic of the Budget which was praised by the hon. Member for Bridlington—and which I would want to attack strongly—is public spending cuts, and the economic and social impact which those cuts will have. There will be a £24 billion cut in the planned projections during the next three years, and the cut from 44 per cent. to 41 per cent. of national output will be covered by public spending provisions.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

The hon. Member for Bridlington commented on things to attack, such as overseas development. That seemed to me to be disgraceful. Some things must be done about the overseas development budget regarding the aid-trade provision, and especially the trade-arms arrangements, which exist. In overseas development, Britain falls way behind the figures which we should be aiming for, and that budget, for which hon. Members have no form of responsibility, should not be attacked in developments in the future. The overseas development budget should be increased.

The public spending cuts are in the contingency reserve, as are the provisions for local government, transport, housing and education. Scotland is added to that, but, according to the Red Book, Scotland is reflected within those other areas. How we can have such a massive reduction in the contingency reserves is of great interest, because it means that we are not prepared to move and adjust as circumstances become difficult in the future.

The major area that is attacked in the list is local government. Earlier today, we heard the statement on local government finance for England and provisions in connection with the standard spending assessment. The House may remember that, when the poll tax was initially floated and propaganda about it was simplistically put over on television in Conservative party broadcasts, we were told that 50 per cent. of moneys in different areas would come from the rate support grant, while the remainder would be divided between money raised by the poll tax—now the council tax—and money raised by the national business rate. Nothing like that exists at the moment.

In my area—North-East Derbyshire—the rate support grant is 27.5 per cent., down from the projected 50 per cent. figure. That means that the difference must be picked up considerably elsewhere, and it will be picked up considerably by the national business rate. There is supposed to be concern among Government Members about burdens on industry, but the burden of the national business rate needs careful examination. There is also a tremendous burden which comes in terms of council tax payments.

North-East Derbyshire is by no means an area of easy employment or of a massive development of middle-class culture and provisions. It includes areas such as Clay Cross, Holmewood, Barrow Hill and Renishaw, which have very high levels of unemployment, but the council finishes up—in terms of money which it gets per head of population or per council tax payer—way down at the bottom of the list of grants provided. In fact, two years before last year's adjustment in the methodology of the SSA, North-East Derbyshire was ranked at 295 out of 296 councils in England and Wales. There can be no justification for that.

The only council beneath us was East Dorset, which is a well-heeled area in comparison with North-East Derbyshire. We know what was wrong with the methodology, including some things which were wrong in terms of the ages and social mix. A slight improvement took place last year, and North-East Derbyshire moved up from 295 to 275—it felt like the relief of Mafeking—although no money came back for the money that had been lost in the past. The council was still in a disastrous position when compared with many others.

There are massive problems in local government finance, which requires redistribution. Until the figures are analysed, we cannot be sure whether the new provision changes the position of North-East Derbyshire. As there is to be no change in the methodology of SSAs—apart from the police, which is outside the control of the district council—it looks as if we will finish up very much in the same position.

The fiddle essentially operates in terms of the enhanced population figure which is to used calculate grants, and which is then multiplied into every other grant that councils can get. In North-East Derbyshire, the enhanced population is in fact a reduced population, because its daytime population is much smaller than the population who live there and who need services and provisions. People who are lucky enough to have jobs go to Sheffield and Chesterfield. When the pits were there, people used to go to Markham and Bolsover in neighbouring areas and, because of this, our area faces massive problems.

The points which I have illustrated merely in terms of local government could be added to if we talked about other areas which have been cut from the projected figures. Education is to be cut. How on earth will we ever get a society in which people have potential and the skills they need to take upon themselves the opportunities and jobs which should grow in the hi-tech economy if we are scraping around in connection with educational provision?

If I had more time, I would mention the other expenditure headings. I wanted to mention the other side of the coin to public spending, public finance. The details contained on page 11 of the Red Book reveal where the resources come from to meet the declining commitments of the Government. One of the interesting comparisons is that between the sums raised by income tax, VAT and excise duty. For the first time, the money raised through VAT and excise duties is greater than that raised through income tax. That reveals the unjust and unfair nature of our society.

7.59 pm

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I will not pursue the arguments of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), but I too have great reservations about the way in which local government finance is calculated.

Although many aspects of this year's Budget deserve applause, it should be judged by other criteria besides its effects upon the economy. As I am not an economist, accountant or merchant banker, it is the social and political background against which the Budget has been presented which is of the greatest interest to me.

The further progress towards economic recovery is welcome. The Chancellor, apart from putting a further dent in consumer confidence, particularly in the housing market, has done what he can to ensure that that recovery continues. The diversion of resources to help the long-term unemployed into jobs and out of long-term dependency on state benefits must make sense. The introduction of transitional relief, which will help many businesses that face rate increases as a result of the latest revaluation, is of considerable help. I must strike a discordant note from the Conservative Benches, however, by saying that, frankly, a number of other aspects of the Budget lead me to understand that many in the country are not as enthusiastic about it as some of my parliamentary colleagues are.

I can understand people who say that, if our economic recovery is so marked and the forecasts for the future are as good as is claimed, why is it that they, too, cannot share in that national recovery. After all, they are the ones who have suffered most in the past couple of years.

Let me make it clear that I am not asking for any massive tax handouts, or even for tax cuts. If we are doing so well after the tax increases imposed at last year's levels of taxation, why is it so necessary to impose further tax increases in 1995 and 1996? Is it absolutely necessary to turn the screw of direct taxation even further this April? That is the question that my constituents ask. No one is claiming that there is a feel-good factor. If it ever is produced, it will probably be due to the fact that the economy is overheating, so we will have to put the brakes on it again. People are entitled, however, to ask, at long last, whether we cannot have a not-feel-so-bad factor.

There is little in the Budget to encourage most people to believe that the next 12 months will be any easier for them than the preceding ones. I do not believe in massive handouts, but my party, which prides itself on being the party of the family and home ownership, could have avoided further reductions in the value of the married man's allowance and in mortgage relief. In the latter case, that new policy, which will reduce the help to those who become unemployed and who have a mortgage, will hurt a number of people. If we expect them to pay for extra insurance, surely we could have left them some of their tax relief so that they could afford to take out that insurance.

Last year, I withheld my vote on VAT on fuel until I was assured that a package of help would be available to pensioners and those on income support. When that was provided, I promised to support the Government. I shall keep my word next Tuesday. I am conscious, however, of the many people who are just above the income support level, who would find it much easier to bear the full 17.5 per cent. VAT rate if their tax allowances were not cut in April.

One of the most disturbing features of the past year has been the activities of the over-greedy directors, particularly those of former public utilities, such as the water companies and British Gas. Many people, particularly supporters of the Conservative party, are absolutely sick and tired of having to put up with annual pay increases of 2 or 3 per cent. when all that the Government seem to be able to do is wring their hands when some companies pay their directors enormously more.

I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor lost an opportunity in the Budget at least to put down a marker that the Government would act if such payments continued. Those pay increases give the wrong message to the vast majority of people. I have yet to see that queue of American or foreign companies which is supposedly waiting to recruit those directors at such highly inflated salaries. We should have imposed a higher rate of tax on those high salaries or done something to the share option schemes, which have enabled many directors to become millionaires in a short time.

Another element of the Budget is its part in the continuing and disappointing attack on the road user. Despite the report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, it is clear that petrol duty would have to be increased massively to make much difference to car ownership. The extra duty is merely extra income for the Treasury. That duty will not deter people from using their cars, but will just make it more expensive for most people to get to work, to take their children to school and to make other essential journeys.

It is equally important to consider the effect of that increased duty on the road haulage industry. Its costs will go up by 1.5 per cent. as a result, while its overall profit levels have dropped to just 3 per cent. The only consequence of that increased duty is that its cost will be fed straight through into industrial costs, which will be paid for by the consumer.

This year's increase in duty comes on top of last year's increase, which made our duty on DERV the highest in the European Union. As a result of Budget changes, we also have the highest rate of vehicle excise duty for the heaviest lorries. I must point out to my right hon. and learned Friend that our industry depends upon road transport to get its goods into markets. Other countries in the Union have realised that and have adjusted some of their tax rates accordingly.

The further burdens on the road user and the cuts in the road building programme are not helpful towards the more efficient running of our economy. Even if we succeeded in applying all the recommendations contained in the report by the royal commission, traffic levels would still increased massively, as would road congestion; the cost of travelling by road would go through the roof.

This afternoon's statement on local government finance is another area where an opportunity has been lost. I do not want to talk too much about that now, because I hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during our debates on that subject later in the year. Suffice it to say that I believe that my county will be adversely affected. I give due warning that at the moment I can see no way in which I could go through the Lobby in support of the grant when it comes before the House for approval later in the Session.

Looking at the Budget as a whole, I have a feeling that an opportunity has been lost, because although the economy is recovering and we have been told that the news is good, the evidence provided by Opposition Members and in the columns in the newspapers suggests that the Government's confidence and happiness is certainly not being shared by our fellow citizens.

I will vote for the Budget resolutions because I believe that the Government have acted correctly in concentrating on economic considerations. I will not do so with a great feeling of happiness or satisfaction. I detect that my reaction to the Budget is shared by many people. After coming out of a deep and distressing recession, we need something to lift our spirits. The people who support our party need their spirits lifted; dare I say it, there are moments when I need my own lifted, in the present circumstances.

I very much regret that the Chancellor was unable to provide the type of help that we would like. I end on this note: there is a danger that, if we continue effectively to hurt people by taxation that is too high, with a promise of jam tomorrow, first we are not sure—one never can be sure—that the jam will arrive, and, secondly, I do not believe that people will necessarily agree that it is better for teachers to be made redundant in 1995 than to have a slightly bigger tax cut in 1996 or 1997.

My hon. Friends must address themselves to that issue. I hope that they have got it right, but, if they have got it wrong, the results will be disastrous.

8.9 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Many of us in the House have seen Budgets come and go. The Chancellor of the day makes his speech to wild cries of "Hear, hear" amid the waving of Order Papers, but, once the small print has been read, what a different story it all becomes.

Give this Budget a month, and the only thing that people will remember is the disgraceful increase in VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent. I attended a public meeting in my constituency last evening, and everyone wanted to ask about that increase on fuel. It will cause many problems for the Government, and rightly so.

The Government have not listened. They have shown no sympathy, no understanding of the opinions of the general public. However, all hon. Members know, on whatever side of the House we sit, how difficult it will be for people if we have a hard winter. We know what the needs will be of the elderly and disabled and of those with young children, who need to keep their homes warm.

I have to tell the Minister that the supposed extra payment is already being laughed at. Help the Aged has already said:

"The compensation does not make up for the VAT rise. Old people often find themselves choosing between eating and heating."

What an appalling indictment of a Government who have been in power for 15 years that, according to an organisation represented by Members on both sides of the House, elderly people must choose between keeping warm or keeping fed.

At the meeting that I attended last evening—a public meeting, not a party meeting—the utter contempt for the Government and their policies was quickly and clearly shown. The Government will pay dearly for their action on VAT, as they will soon learn at the forthcoming Dudley, West by-election.

Throughout the country, housing is a major problem, be it in large cities, smaller towns or rural areas. Alongside unemployment it is the No. 1 issue but, as other hon. Members have said, nothing in the Budget encourages a house-building programme. No one can dispute the need for it. No one can say, "Yes, we would like to do it, but where will we get the money?" We know that billions of pounds are being held by local authorities throughout the country, as a result of the sale of council properties, which could be used in such a programme; and we all know—whatever may be the supposed rules that govern the spending of that money—that, if the Government wanted it to be spent on that aspect, those rules could be changed in a matter of days. Every single one of us knows that, and we know how widely supported such a change of policy would be.

Hon. Members, whatever party we belong to, receive report after report from housing associations and from groups involved with housing, which clearly outline the need for major house-building and major house improvements throughout the country. Why do the Government ignore those reports? I ask the Minister: how many properties will be built this year by local authorities or housing associations and how many by private developers? What will the yearly figures be for housing construction?

We all know that the housing construction sector of the United Kingdom should be playing a major overall role in the economic life of the country, and the number of workers that it could employ, who now have to be paid benefit because of their false unemployment. Vast sums could be saved. Many sectors that supply materials have an automatic spin-off in creating other jobs that would take people out of the unemployment problems that, sadly, confront so many people throughout the country.

As the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry), said, the Budget and the Government have ignored many of the key issues that they had an opportunity to tackle. They could and should have been tackled but, sadly, they were not. Against the background of what the Budget could have done, but did not do, and what, sadly, it did do—the disgraceful increase of VAT to 17.5 per cent.—no wonder the Government are so scared of facing the electorate.

8.16 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): This morning, when I looked at my mail, I found a Budget commentary from the Trustee Savings bank. It summed up its opinion of the Budget as follows:

"On reflection, this was probably a good Budget and entirely appropriate for the current economic circumstances. It should create a climate of stability which is necessary for long-term sustainable recovery."

I entirely agree with those sentiments, and I very much welcome the Budget as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The background is truly remarkable. We have low inflation, we have manufacturing growth and productivity at record levels and of course we have an export boom. However, in the past few weeks, in what has been something of a feeding frenzy by the media, everything has been concentrated on the negative. Unless, in the Budget, something fresh and exciting in their terms was produced, they tended to dismiss it.

I shall therefore examine what is happening in the real world, in my constituency. My constituency is still substantially agriculture-based. It is one of the prime cereal-producing areas of the country. When I went to the Royal Smithfield show a few days ago, the transformation in that sector was obvious for all to see. Skill and innovation in agricultural machinery is making that entire sector of the British economy dynamic. Britain exports more tractors, for example, than any other country in the European Union.

In Newmarket, the bloodstock industry is in very considerable recovery. It is one of the main employers in East Anglia. Prices of bloodstock are increasing and employment is returning to that vital part of the employment picture in my constituency.

Small family businesses are the lifeblood of west Suffolk. We are witnessing considerable improvement and optimism, as manifested in the fact that there are many new shops in the towns of Newmarket and Bury St. Edmunds—the main two towns in my constituency. Over the past 18 months, unemployment in my constituency has fallen by a third, and in Bury St. Edmunds it is under 5 per cent.

Budgets address great macro-economic cycles and look at the big picture. But of course economics is about real people and employment and decent living standards. Such conditions are manifestly coming to pass in my constituency. I applaud the aim at the heart of the Budget, which is to continue to reduce debt. That is being done in a way that makes us unique among our European competitors.

An extraordinary feature of the economic recovery and one of its main elements is the exceptional export performance. The Budget reinforces what is essentially an export-led recovery. Low corporate taxation and the low social cost of employment give Britain a unique competitive position compared with the rest of Europe. We are a trading nation par excellence, and we export more per capita than even the Japanese.

Every time since the war that Britain has had an economic recovery as powerful as the current one, there has been a balance of payments crisis, but this time precisely the reverse is the case. Like a record that is stuck in a groove, the Opposition launch totally misplaced attacks on manufacturing industry. It is true that some old industries have disappeared, but new ones are developing and many of them are based on high technology. Britain is in a virtuous circle brought about by low interest rates, moderate wage settlements and cost control. All that has been helped by the Budget.

In the past three months, export volumes have risen by nearly 3 per cent. This year, exports to the Pacific rim countries and Latin America have gone up by a third. It is significant that much of that export success and employment is being created by the former nationalised industries. Those industries, which were once such a huge drain on the British taxpayer, are now at the forefront of teaching the rest of the world how to privatise and are role models of how to operate. People from many countries visit Britain to see those privatised companies whose export success is extremely noteworthy. While Labour continues to thrash around looking at and debating clause 4, we are getting on with an export drive that is based on new technologies developed in Britain.

In the past, recoveries have been based on a soufflé-like property boom. That is no more, because the current recovery is based on exports and investment, and everything flows from that. Britain is a world leader in industries such as telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. The business-friendly environment that the Budget has projected opens further export possibilities, and business success and employment will flow from that. By cutting the PSBR, the Budget ensures that interest rates will remain low. Sound money and stable finances are the routes to business success and continuing employment.

I welcome the additional boost to exports provided by the cut of some 10 per cent. in the export credits guarantee insurance scheme. That is a logical extension of our trade promotion efforts. In countries such as India and South Africa, where we have strong and historic commercial ties, the cut will give our business men the chance to create welcome export opportunities. I hope that, instead of what has gone on so remorselessly in the past, our balance of payments in future will be permanently in the black, and will be based on the competitiveness that the Budget will effectively help to bring about.

I am privileged to be the vice-chairman of the Small Business Bureau. For many years, we have tried to put ideas to the Chancellor about how to improve the lot of small businesses. Therefore, I wholeheartedly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals to raise the VAT registration threshold, the transitional business rates relief scheme and quarterly VAT payments.

Another helpful feature is the review of procedures for insolvent companies. Every hon. Member knows of constituents who have had their businesses taken away from them during the recession, perhaps by the too quick action of the banks. The Budget proposes a 28-day period during which banks, creditors and business men can sit down together to try to work out a scheme to ensure that small businesses under threat can survive. That will prove to be one of the most significant and constructive innovations in the Budget.

I spoke about our propensity in the past to go for bricks and mortar. I welcome the fact that next year the tax concession on mortgage relief will be reduced to 15 per cent. I hope that that concession will eventually be phased out. I should like to fly a kite for the future. In his reforms, Lord Lawson of Blaby introduced a capital gains tax rate of 40 per cent. In an era of low inflation, that needs to be looked at again. Although indexation has proved helpful, Britain is now in a different inflation scenario. I hope that capital gains tax will be phased out and that people in private companies will not have to pay any capital gains tax on their shares in unquoted stock.

The Budget is a watershed. Every Chancellor is tempted to court short-term popularity. There have been a number of important policy innovations—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

8.26 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Much has been made by the Government and Conservative Members of Britain's improving economy. The Chancellor wallows in self-congratulation about that, but no credit whatever is due to the Government for our present situation. It came about because of the utter destruction on 16 September 1992 of the Government's centrepiece of economic policy. On that date, the pound was forced out of the ERM and there was an enforced and humiliating devaluation.

It is even more annoying that the Government persist in claiming credit for our economy when we realise that they spent approximately £15 billion of our contingency reserves in an afternoon to try to avoid the situation that preceded the recovery.

There are two Conservative parties in the House, and we are debating two Budgets. This is not the package of broadly neutral measures that has been reported in the newspapers, because the Budget contains the second tranche of tax increases, of which the increase in VAT on fuel from 8 to 17.5 per cent. is but one example. Those measures were put in place by the last Budget, and over the past two years taxation has increased by 7p in the pound. That increase has been made by a Government whose election pledge was to cut taxes. We shall keep reminding them of that.

The Secretary of State for Employment cuts an interesting figure at the Dispatch Box. I am sorry that he is not in his place. We all know that he has leadership ambitions. I recently looked at a book in which Oliver Cromwell described leadership. He wrote:

"None climbs so high as he who knows not whither he is going."

That is bad news for the right hon. Gentleman, who has made it all too clear whither he thinks he should be going. He has probably planned it on the back of an envelope in the same way as his rival, the President of the Board of Trade.

We all know that the only job-creation scheme in which the right hon. Gentleman is interested is one that will put him into No. 10. He glories in being the darling of the Thatcherites. We are told that he is the heir apparent and

[Ms Angela Eagle]

that stalking horses are having to wait in the stables until next year when he has a little more experience. We look forward to seeing what happens when the time comes.

I was intrigued with the Cabinet reshuffle that landed the right hon. Gentleman with his current responsibilities. To put him in charge of a spending Department is rather like putting the wolf in charge of grandmother's community care programme. We know that it will devour the poor woman before Little Red Riding Hood even has the chance to rescue her. The expenditure plans outlined in the Red Book for the right hon. Gentleman's Department show us how true that is. He tells us that he can deliver better help for the unemployed and better training with reduced resources.

The right hon. Gentleman has enthusiastically taken an axe to his own Department because he does not believe in government. So anti-interventionist is he that, had he been present at the creation, he would have instructed God not to disturb the chaos. I expect that one day he will tell us that he was indeed present at the creation, and I look forward to that announcement.

We are left with a Secretary of State for Employment who is happy to hand over half of his Department's responsibilities to the Secretary of State for Social Security and to deny that the Government have any responsibility for the remainder. He will have to be careful or he will talk himself out of a job. I have to tell him that millions of his fellow citizens who are unemployed would enjoy that joke at his expense. They certainly do not expect any meaningful support from him.

We must look in detail at the measures in the Budget to help the unemployed. After all, that was one of the three priorities that the Chancellor set out. The proposals are pathetically inadequate. The package of work incentives will cost £680 million, but the incentive to employers to take on the long-term unemployed will cost only £45 million—and it does not start until April 1996.

Extended workstart pilots, the third tranche of pilots in this scheme, will cost a mere £8 million. Set against either the £25 billion annual cost of keeping the unemployed on the dole or the £10 billion extra gross domestic product growth that we have had this year, such minuscule resources show not priority, but the cruel neglect and indifference that has always characterised the Government's attitude to unemployment and those who become the victims of it. Why wait until 1996 to start those schemes? Why not extend them to those who have been unemployed for a year rather than two years? Why not have more generous subsidies?

On the one side there are to be cuts in capital spending that could lose up to 250,000 jobs from both the civil service and the public sector, but on the other there is a raft of supply side tinkering at the edges to compensate. It is not good enough to say that that characterises a Budget for jobs.

Particularly worrying is the aspect of the Budget that caps housing benefit and puts new restrictions on home owners who become unemployed. Both those cuts are extremely cruel and will lead to people in my constituency being made homeless, to increased indebtedness and to increased repossessions. We are storing up a position of difficulty, misery and insecurity in our economy that does not reflect the changes in the labour market, where we want to move to more flexible jobs and a more flexible attitude. How can we do that when we are threatening the unemployed with losing their homes as well as their jobs? It is draconian, inhuman and cruel, and the policy will have to be re-examined.

There has been much talk about the lack of the feel-good factor. The Maples memorandum contained some interesting titbits for us and some advice for the Government. Did the Chancellor follow that advice in his Budget? The memorandum punctured the virtual reality world that is inhabited by the Cabinet and most of the Tory party. It talked of

"a feeling of powerlessness and insecurity about jobs, housing and the NHS."

Did the Chancellor do anything about that? No, instead he increased job insecurity and the fear of people losing their homes if they lose their jobs.

The memorandum said:

"The reality is that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest who are getting poorer."

Again, that is true, but what did the Chancellor do about it? He did very little. There has been no taxation of executive share options to deal with the obscenely huge pay increases that the chairmen of public utilities are paying themselves. There has been no postponement of the second rise in VAT from 8 to 17.5 per cent. Both of those measures were suggested in the Maples memorandum but ignored by the Chancellor.

The memorandum also said:

"Few people think we are out of recession."

That is true, yet this Budget cuts living standards by £2.40 a week through tax increases. It said, "Privatisation is unpopular". The Government have speeded up the sale of Railtrack so that they can store up tax cuts.

The Budget is far more about jostling for the Tory party leadership and saving up money for pre-election bribes than about tackling the real and serious problems in our economy.

8.35 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): This is a cynical Budget from a highly cynical Chancellor. Instead of robbing the Peter of public services to pay the Paul of future election tax cut bribes, it would have been better had he launched a national debate on public revenue and public expenditure. Our taxation system is very much out of kilter with modern economies. We have had the absurd sight of the Chancellor making three major speeches in as many days, and I expect that we will not see him again for another six or seven months—unless, of course, he succeeds in his ambition to move sideways from No. 11 Downing street.

Ideas need to be raised in a Budget debate beyond the individual proposals that will be debated strenuously in the Finance Bill Committee. With Gosplan dead, the Treasury remains the most centralised finance and planning Ministry in the world. Perhaps it was suited to running an empire in the days of a sterling area protected from any other trade, but it is not suited to running a modern European economy. That is especially true when the briefing that it gives the Chancellor is so wholly inaccurate.

The Chancellor was in remarkably Panglossian mode on Tuesday—all is well in the best of all possible worlds, he smugly implied. He boasted that our growth was the

highest in the world, while at the same time announcing on page 17 of the Red Book that growth would actually decline next year. He is right to do so, because the mantras about British growth are about to turn into dirges. Gross domestic product growth figures for the latest three months show that it has been stronger in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Austria, just to name European Union countries.

The *Financial Times* informed us today that Australia, now benefiting from its 12th year under a Labour Government, has an annual growth of 6.4 per cent., so Britain is the record breaker neither on growth nor on unemployment, which is lower in West Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Austria. It is higher in France and Italy, both of which are under right-wing Governments, and in Spain, where Mr. Gonzalez proudly proclaims himself a Thatcherist.

In one area the United Kingdom does outstrip Europe—in wages and earnings, which have risen in the past 12 months at a higher rate than in all our competitor countries of a roughly equivalent size. The Chancellor has a policy for pay—to him that hath much shall be given; to him that hath less shall be taken away. Although the rate of pay rises outstrips our European competitors—leading to, as was suggested in the Red Book, a rising level of inflation next year and the interest rate rise the Chancellor will have to impose in consequence—the actual take-home pay of British workers remains among the lowest in advanced countries.

That was acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Social Security who, in a lecture some two weeks ago, said:

"probably the single most significant social change affecting the UK . . . is not the ageing of the population. Nor the breakdown of the family. Nor the increasing proportion of women at work. Rather, it is a phenomenon which is still largely unrecognised: the growing dispersion of earnings power."

That is extraordinary language from a Minister who has loyally backed measure after measure to increase the earnings gap.

Again today, as in Employment questions on Tuesday, the Secretary of State for Employment said that the UK has the highest take-home pay in Europe—higher than France, Italy and Denmark. I gather that parliamentary convention does not allow one to refer to lies, whoppers or "Portillo porkies" so, to remain within the rules, I shall describe that as a statistical inexactitude. Who does the Secretary of State think that he is kidding? It is certainly not other Government agencies which place adverts around Europe offering Britain as a low-wage country. The time has come to nail this untruth—not a killer fact, but a killer fib.

Here are the facts from that well-known repository of socialist information, the Union Bank of Switzerland. Its 1994 survey of prices and earnings around the globe shows net hourly wages in London to be £4.70, in Copenhagen, £7.80, in Paris, £5.60, in Milan, £4.80 and in Taipei, £8.20.

It is necessary to nail the lie that Britain is on its way to becoming a high-pay nation. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Employment for the tables that he placed in the Library this week in response to a question of mine. In particular, they show how badly my constituents in Rotherham and in South Yorkshire generally suffer.

According to those tables, one third of all men in full-time work in Yorkshire and Humberside earn no more than £208 a week, which is below the European level of a decent living wage. Unbelievably, nearly 10 per cent. earn only £150 a week—not enough to pay for a case of champagne at the Alexandra palace gathering of Europhobes, right-wing nutters and *Sunday Telegraph* leader writers called to celebrate the 10 years in Parliament of the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), the Secretary of State for unemployment. Those are gross, not take-home, earnings.

The situation is even worse for part-time workers. The tables placed in the Library this week show that four out of five part-time employees in South Yorkshire earn £5.50 an hour or less. More than one third earn £3.50 or less an hour, giving them take-home pay of about one tenth the going rate for a Tory parliamentary question.

This is the low-wage, poverty Britain that has been created as a matter of deliberate policy by the new two-nation Conservative party. More than 100 years ago, Benjamin Disraeli legislated for the 56-hour week. Two or three weeks ago in the last Session I heard the Minister for Energy and Industry boasting about visiting a factory where people worked 60 hours a week. One of the reasons for that is the massive cut in training and skills investment, not one bit of which has been put right in the Budget. Training has been cut in real terms by 35 per cent. in the past four years, leading, within what is a mini-boom, to inevitable skills shortages and skills bottlenecks.

In January 1994, the CBI reported that the lack of skilled labour affected only 5 per cent. of its firms. By October this year, nearly three times as many firms were reporting skills shortages. The firms reporting the biggest concerns about the shortage of skilled labour were those employing up to 500 employees—the crucial family firms which have been ignored in the Government's hostility to effective regional and industrial policy that could support such companies. That lack of regional policy means that since 1985 less than 7 per cent. of inward investment in Britain has gone to Yorkshire compared with 30 per cent. that has gone to the south-east and the west midlands, home of Tory Members of Parliament and the marginals that they must win.

The Budget lacks any real help for industry and rejects most of the proposals put forward by the CBI, which is why Howard Davies, the director general, is unhappy about it. It rejects everything put forward by the TUC. Again, it is a Budget for the rich drawn up at the Ritz. It does not address the need to overcome the two-nation Britain in which we live in order to forge again a one-nation country with effective regions with a share of resources and with the ability to grow together.

8.45 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): The Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced his Budget by stating that he intended to pursue three priorities. He wished to promote sustainable growth, strengthen the economy in the long term and prevent the emergence of a deprived underclass. One of the many indictments of the Chancellor's proposals is that much of his Budget runs completely counter to his stated objectives.

When historians reflect on the Chancellor's record, they will see that he has simply followed in the footsteps of his predecessors. Once again, we see political expediency

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

put before the public interest. A Budget that should have been about nurturing the fortunes of the British economy was in fact about reviving the fortunes of the Conservative party.

The Budget does little to encourage sustained growth. It seeks instead to encourage a pre-election consumer boom with 5p off income tax in a year's time—pure, traditional, orthodox Tory boom and bust economics; boom in the hope that they can con the voters and then bust for the rest of us when the election is over. But this time it is one con too far and it is doomed to fail.

The British people will not forget the dismal record of broken promises and broken confidences that are now the hallmark of the Conservative party. The Budget will be remembered not just for the broken promises but for its failure to grasp the opportunities available to us—an opportunity lost to build sustained growth and strengthen the economy.

As we finally come out of the long years of recession, employers are already complaining about skill shortages. Britain lies 18th out of 23 in the world skills league. The Government's response is to slash still further the training budget. Of course we are interested in output, but we cannot achieve output without any input. That is short-sighted nonsense. How on earth can the Chancellor claim that this is a Budget for the long term when he is cutting the essential investment in skills and training for our future? We need increased investment in training the work force. The Chancellor is following the example set by his predecessors—total neglect of our training needs.

The Chancellor's rhetoric suggests that he has learnt from past errors. However, his actions tell a different story. Until the words and deeds match, the verdict of the British people will remain the same.

Government have a responsibility to create an environment in which enterprise can flourish. Yet one area facing massive cuts is the capital investment budget. Current levels of capital spending are already too low to keep pace with the need to maintain and renew our existing assets. I invite right hon. and hon. Members to look at the crumbling and decaying state of social housing, schools and transport in their own constituencies. Where is the investment just to conserve that which exists, let alone to build for the future?

I am told that a little extra money for capital spending on schools is hidden in the education budget, but even £100 million will make hardly a dent in the problem after 15 years of neglect. At current spending of about £1 billion on capital and education, it will take 60 years just to renew, maintain and repair those assets. The sum of £100 million is a drop in the ocean.

Capital investment would provide not only a modern, strong infrastructure but ensure jobs for the thousands of construction workers abandoned by the Government, who know that their plans for capital investment are grossly inadequate. That is why they set such store by reviving the private finance initiative. Although we require the resources of the whole community—public, private and voluntary—to deal with the problems and we want to encourage private investment for public good, experience of the PFI so far has not been good. Only £500 million has been raised, and even successful initiatives have been slow and costly.

The private sector is not the alternative state. The Government should not and cannot pass the buck for its responsibilities to the private sector. The public sector must lead the partnership and facilitate private investment. The Government are driven by dogma—for them, all that is public is bad, and all that is private is good. That dogma prevents the development of effective partnerships which could deliver essential capital investment in the infrastructure. If the Government were less dogmatic and more pragmatic, they would examine afresh definitions of the nature of capital investment, which should be counted against the PSBR. A positive approach is needed to ensure more capital investment in state schools.

Britain has the smallest social housing programme since the second world war, with £5 billion locked up in housing capital receipts. That money could be used to build more homes, repair existing properties and get thousands of building workers back to work. Those resources were unlocked last year, but not this year. The failure to act demonstrates the triumph of political dogma over common sense. The victims of that dogma are the homeless and the unemployed.

Cutting housing benefit is one of the Budget's most insidious aspects. The exploding cost of that benefit is the inevitable result of Government action in deregulating the private sector and forcing up council and housing association rents—a 79 per cent. increase in the past five years. The Chancellor intends to regulate by the back door, by capping housing benefit—a dishonest, inefficient and unfair mechanism. The homeless will again be made the scapegoats of Government failure.

Has the Chancellor met his stated priority of preventing the emergence of a deprived underclass? The Government's deliberate actions and policies led to the emergence of that underclass. Of course we welcome proposals to bring some long-term unemployed back to work, and we are delighted that the Chancellor has adopted ideas developed by Opposition Members—but that is too little, too late, to undo the effects of 16 years of deliberate Government policy.

Taking housing costs, taxes, benefits and wages together, the poorest 30 per cent. of the population have suffered a cut in real income of 2.5 per cent. since 1979, while the richest 10 per cent. have seen a rise in real income of 62 per cent. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, under Government tax plans of the last decade, the richest 10 per cent. of the population are £30 a week better off, while the poorest 10 per cent. are £3 a week worse off. That is why there is an underclass.

This year's Budget proposes cuts in housing and incapacity benefits, a job seeker's allowance, less good quality housing, a two-tier health service, and a lack of training and education services. It also reflects growing crime and fear of crime. Action is needed in the Budget to restore social cohesion and to undo the social divisions that the Government have created.

In 1972, the former Prime Minister promised a nursery place for every three and four-year-old. A generation later, the current Prime Minister pledged at this year's Tory party conference that there will be education for all four-year-olds—but there was no mention of that pledge in the Budget. It is not a question of more money, but of choices and of how money should be used. The Government are spending £780 million on consultants to privatise British Rail. That money could meet the cost of the proposals that the Prime Minister put to the

Conservative party conference. It could have been spent on our children, which would have strengthened the economy in the long term and prevented the emergence of an underclass.

The Chancellor has failed his own test. He has failed to meet the priorities that he set himself, and he will fail also with his real priority—that of saving this wretched, divided Government. The British people's first opportunity to give their verdict on the Budget will come in Dudley, West in a fortnight, and I have every confidence that Labour will win.

8.55 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on his excellent speech. We share the honour of having been born in the same town of Rutherglen. I admit to disagreeing with one of his comments about the Secretary of State for Employment. I happen to like *Sunday Telegraph* editorials. They do an excellent demolition job on the Government—the more so because they both come from the same camp.

The landfill tax is a small step by the Government to making sure that industry and local authorities face up to the fact that landfill is not the only answer to waste disposal. There is another side to that coin. Glasgow district council is proposing to implement a large landfill site just beyond my constituency, across the East Kilbride boundary. Part of the pressure on the council stems from cuts in Government support grants to local authorities in Scotland.

Although I welcome the landfill tax as a disincentive for local authorities to continue using landfill ad infinitum, they are pressured by lack of grants. I hope that Glasgow district council realises that with the landfill tax it will cost the public more in the long run to go ahead with such sites. In the light of the Budget, I shall be calling on Glasgow district council to withdraw its proposal for a landfill site at South Cathkin.

I resent the continual attack on the motorist and the attempts by the Conservative party to portray the Labour party as the enemy of the car and the car user. That is certainly not the case. I recall many of the points made by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry). It is not enough to have the continual increases on petrol, fuel, DERV and the road tax in isolation from other measures to make road traffic flow more smoothly and to prevent traffic jams and without alternative policies. It is clearly a tax-raising move by the Government.

The same applies to the arbitrary cutting off of the amount of money for road-building schemes. I am not particularly in favour of roads all over the place, but there is a reasonable case for considering them where they are necessary. In my constituency, again, a motorway has been planned and most of it has been built except the last section—the proposed M24 extension. If that section is not completed, Cambuslang and Rutherglen main streets will continue to suffer traffic jams, with all the safety and health risks inherent in them. If there is a sensible road plan, it is common sense to go ahead with it. I have no dogma one way or the other for or against roads, but common sense must come into it.

The same applies to the Government's attitude to rail travel. Although they are maintaining the level of support for the railways in the next financial year at £975 million, they intend to reduce it to £740 million. That will start a downward curve in support for the railways, not only for Scotland but for the whole west coast main line, which needs investment and Government support to ensure that railways operate as an incentive and alternative to road travel.

I regret that the Chancellor failed to address one of the most serious problems facing small businesses—the late payment of debt. Small businesses have lobbied long and hard. That problem is particularly hard for them to bear, yet the Government continue to ignore their pleas for help. I received a communication from the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms, Earl Ferrers, indicating that it would be too complicated to introduce a scheme to deal solely with small businesses and the problems that they face of late payment of debt. I take the point of view that, if there is a will, there is a way. If one were to contrast the sort of "giving up before you start" attitude to the Government's complicated measures to "encourage" people who are unemployed to seek work, one would see that the same ingenuity applied to the late payment of debt could achieve a solution.

I come now to the Secretary of State's comments about the lack of a social chapter in Britain being an incentive for companies to come into the United Kingdom. The Hoover company has a factory in Cambuslang in my constituency. An investment programme resulted in the transfer of work from a factory in France to the Cambuslang factory. I specifically asked for, and was given, public assurances from the company that the lack of a social chapter in Britain played absolutely no part in its decision to bring those extra jobs to Cambuslang. It was purely and simply because of the good industrial relations, the good investment record of the factory and the investment prospects in the west of Scotland—and, to be fair, the support from the Scottish Office. That shows that the lack of a social chapter did not encourage Hoover to bring those jobs to Cambuslang.

Although the Secretary of State for Employment is not here—I am sure that he will be told about or read about this—I will remind him of what he says about the Tory urge to cut taxes. I remember being on the Committee which considered the council tax, where the Secretary of State was piloting the Bill. One of his ideas, if I recall correctly, was about evaluators surveying properties to ensure that they had got the assessments right. He floated—that is the correct word—the idea of hot air balloons, which would float over the back gardens of the terraced houses so that the evaluators could see whether any improvements had been made. So the Secretary of State's credibility has quite a long way to go.

I make no apology for dealing now with VAT, because Labour Members have rightly mentioned it. Some hon. Members on the Conservative Benches have mentioned it, too. The Paymaster General said that we are the only country in Europe without some kind of similar tax. I think that he quoted Norway. To make such a comparison without taking into account the whole taxation and social security system in that country is invalid.

My constituency, which includes Cambuslang, Rutherglen and Toryglen, has a large elderly population. One council ward in particular, Bankhead, has a high proportion of elderly people, and also many mothers with young children, who will use electricity and gas more than the average. Those people will suffer as a result of the Government's insistence on imposing the full rate of VAT in April.

[Mr. Thomas McAvoy]

That, in my view, completely destroys the Government's pretence to be the party of low taxation. Over the past few years their record has been a disgrace, and they know it. They are shaking in their boots, and come the general election—indeed, come the by-election at Dudley, West—they will pay the price.

9.4 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I wish to discuss the cross-channel movement of alcohol. Let me declare an interest, as a sponsored member of the GMB union: I believe that many of its members' jobs are threatened by that trade, in breweries, clubs, pubs and other parts of the industry.

When the single market was introduced on 1 January 1993, it was acknowledged that various countries in the European Union could set their own levels of duty. It was also acknowledged by those who were involved in discussions at the time that it would consequently be possible to transfer certain commodities from one country to another when it was advantageous to do so. There is, indeed, a regular trade among the mainland European Union countries in a number of items: the Danish Government, for instance, were at one point concerned about some of the movement between Germany and Denmark, and took steps to bring their taxation regime more into line with Germany's.

In Britain, it has been recognised that there are dramatic differences between the duty paid on alcohol and cigarettes here and that paid in many other European Union countries. At the time of the discussions to which I referred, it was acknowledged that some seepage was inevitable and that people would take advantage of the lower duty levels in, for example, France. They would be able to shop in France and, when it was possible to transport the products that they bought, they would bring them back to the United Kingdom.

Cross-channel movement of alcohol now presents a serious problem, however. Now we are dealing not merely with Mr. and Mrs. Smith from Melton Mowbray, who go on a day bus trip to Calais and bring back a few cans of beer and a bottle of wine—although that possibly constitutes up to half the cross-channel traffic in alcohol on which duty is paid in France. That picture will no longer be typical; there has now been a move into organised smuggling, which will seriously threaten many business men whose livelihoods depend on their business.

In 1993, the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association appointed independent consultants—including private detectives, who followed the movement of some of the items. As a result, it made an estimate. I do not think that the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which examined the issue, disagreed with that estimate; I do not think that the Minister of State and his colleagues did, either. The estimate was that, in 1993, at least £1 billion-worth of alcohol was purchased in France and brought back to the United Kingdom. That means that our Treasury has lost £470 million in revenue—£315 million in loss of duty and £154 million in lost VAT.

My concern results from representations made to me by members of my union and others. About two weeks ago, I went to Calais to see for myself. That was quite enlightening. I wanted to know what effect was being produced in the north-east of England, the area that I represent. I had been told that a number of organised gangs in my area were involved in smuggling alcohol, and I went to Calais to see whether I could identify any of those gangs.

One of the colleagues who accompanied me asked how I would identify the gangs from the north-east. I said, "If I put on a Sunderland scarf, I shall quickly find out which are from Newcastle, and if I put on a Newcastle scarf, I shall quickly find out which are from Sunderland." In fact, that was not necessary: I could have put on a Manchester City scarf and found the gangs from Manchester, put on a Sheffield United scarf and found the ones from Sheffield or put on a Celtic or Rangers scarf and found the ones from Glasgow. The gangs come from all over the country. However, I found that there was a preponderance from London, the south-east and the north-east of England where a large amount of trafficking was taking place. It is a serious threat.

During the week before I went to Calais, in just one day private detectives identified 300 transit vans from the United Kingdom going on and off the boat. I was there for one morning a week last Monday and I saw dozens of vans queuing up at all the outlets.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith from Melton Mowbray go to a legitimate superstore in Calais and buy small amounts for their own consumption. The smuggling trade takes place in the back yards and peripheral industrial estates in Calais. There is usually a typical warehouse with the hamburger stall, the muddy forecourt, a fork-lift truck and all the pallets of beer. Most transit vans can take two pallets of beer. There are 96 cases in one pallet and 24 bottles in a case. So, the lads with one transit van have over 2,000 pints of beer in the back. If one approaches them to ask whether it is for their personal consumption, they say, "Why aye, man. It's for us."

No doubt some of my good friends in the city of Newcastle could consume 2,000 pints of beer in a fairly short time. Some hon. Members may even be able to help them without too much difficulty. However, the average people involved in smuggling are not bringing back what is effectively contraband for their own use; they are bringing it back to sell it. In doing so, they are threatening the jobs of many people involved in the manufacturing and distribution of beer, and they must be threatening six northern breweries. A further threat that has not been identified so far is that from mail order roll-on/roll-off smuggling of alcohol.

I wish to draw the House's attention to the details of a legal arrangement involving the importation of cigarettes from Belgium. In Belgium, the duty on cigarettes is much lower than in most other European countries, and it is substantially lower than in Britain. A new company trying to break into the cigarette market is called the Enlightened Tobacco Company. The House will be pleased to know that its product is not called Anchor, Senior Service or Weights, but is called Death.

The Enlightened Tobacco Company has tried to break into the United Kingdom cigarette market, but the distributors have said that, if that product is put on the shelves, all the other tobacco companies will take theirs off. So the corner shop is effectively prevented from buying from the normal distributors. The Enlightened Tobacco Company has said, "We can get round this. We can get the cigarettes for your corner shop in Belgium."

Article 6 of the single market agreement says that duty becomes chargeable at

"the time of release for consumption".

The corner shop retailer appoints the agent of the Enlightened Tobacco Company to purchase the tobacco and the duty becomes payable when the tobacco is released for consumption—that is, when it is given to the agent. So duty is paid under Belgian law, not British law. Also, the retailer does not have to go to Belgium to collect the tobacco, because the agent delivers it anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Imagine if that were to be extended to alcohol. If it is legal for cigarettes, it is legal for alcohol and there may be court cases about that in the future. In Calais I spoke to a number of lads driving vans who had already cottoned on to that. They would not even have to risk hiring the van or buying the petrol. They would simply act as a distributor in whatever part of the United Kingdom they came from. They would appoint someone else to be their agent in France, who would buy the alcohol and pay the low French duty—one seventh of the level in the United Kingdom. They would then sell it to the corner shop.

It would not end at the corner shop. It would be a bit like dial-a-pint. One would not even have to go to the corner shop. One would be able to find a distributor's telephone number from the telephone directory or on the newsagent's window. A few cases of beer, with French duty placed on it, would then arrive at the doorstep. One would not have to go to an off-sales outlet to buy takeaway beer.

That would constitute a major threat to the British brewing industry. The transport of £1 billion of alcohol from France to Britain is equivalent to 15 per cent. of the legal takeaway trade in Britain. It is already making a dent in the business of many breweries that supply off-sales outlets throughout the United Kingdom. If that scam is allowed, it will lead to the destruction of a number of breweries, and provincial breweries in north-east England will be particularly vulnerable to the threat.

Action must to be taken now. The problem will not go away. In his speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was right to acknowledge that there is a problem. He has not, however, taken action that will be effective. Freezing duties on alcohol is, to some extent, a concession to brewers and to the workers who make the beer, but it will not protect their business or their jobs. It makes only a marginal difference to the gap between alcohol duties in France and those in the UK.

We must face up to the problem. Step one should be to set up an official inquiry so that it is not only hon. Members who explain their experiences or the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which I believe did not visit Calais—it certainly did not make an official visit—that makes statements. The brewers and trade unions that represent brewery workers say that there is a problem. I think—in fact, I know—that there is a problem. I hope that the Government will recognise that and set up an inquiry.

The problem will not be easily resolved. It was not clever this week to reduce the number of customs officers involved in attempting to track down illegal trade, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledged to the House that a major problem existed. We must tighten our customs procedures. I want far more undercover activity by customs officers chasing the vans. Illegal trade involves not only small transit vans, but large articulated lorries. One can get a lot more than two pallets of beer on a large artic.

In the northern economic region of England, there have been only two prosecutions since January 1993, and only one of them has been successful. That is not satisfactory. The prosecution level should be higher. I do not claim that that will be easy. It is difficult to find the people who are reselling the alcohol. Under current law, it is not illegal if one does not find them reselling the alcohol.

Some of the comments that I am about to make might not be popular with certain Labour Members.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Ah.

Mr. Henderson: My comments will certainly not be popular with Conservative Members.

As the European economies become more convergent, we should not ignore the fact that duties are substantially different from one European country to another. We must start to think about how to close the gap to take away the incentive for smuggling.

We should not be talking about reducing tobacco duties, but insisting that other European countries increase their tobacco duties so that they are more in line with ours. Britain needs to take unilateral action on beer duties as an example to other European countries and to protect our industry. Over a period, we need to consider how we can properly introduce moves towards greater harmonisation of some of our taxes, including VAT and duty.

There is a major problem, which will not go away. In the past 10 years, it has got worse because, while other European countries have frozen indirect taxes in real terms, Britain has increased them. The problem is much worse than it would have been if the single market had been introduced in 1981 instead of 1993. But there is a problem, and we have to face it. I hope that the Minister of State will at least acknowledge the fact that there is a case for a proper formal inquiry, with representation from the different parts of the industry and others, which could provide a basis for firm action in next year's Budget. I do not believe that the action taken this year is sufficiently strong to tackle the issue.

9.19 pm

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): The House is grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) for his eloquent and detailed illustration of the problems being experienced with the substantial traffic of alcohol into Britain, and the threat that that poses to the brewing industry. The issue is complex, and I hope that the Minister will agree that we need to investigate the situation and to establish a consensus—dare I use that word?—on how to proceed.

This has been an interesting and excellent debate. We have heard substantial disagreement among Conservative Members, and at one stage I thought that some of them were practising making speeches from the Opposition Benches—something that I hope that they will be able to do very soon.

Output has risen and unemployment is lower, but that is the end of the good news. The economy is still weak—2.5 million people are out of work, investment is low, the public services are under stress. The Chancellor set

[Ms Dawn Primarolo]

himself three priorities for the Budget—sustainable growth, job creation and strengthening the economy in the long term. Those are welcome priorities, and represent a marked change from the monetarist rhetoric of the 1980s. However, the Budget fails to measure up to the Chancellor's aims, especially on jobs. The measures to create jobs and to give long-term strength to the economy fall far short of what is needed.

The Government's support for training will be cut, as the Department of Employment's three-year virtual cash freeze continues. The national insurance holiday to encourage employers to take on the long-term unemployed will be held back for 18 months. Any new jobs created will be more than offset by public capital spending cuts, which will lead to the loss of thousands of jobs across the economy in the next three years. The four-year freeze on cash spending for Departments could lead to further job losses.

The 1994 Budget is bad news for living standards and for jobs in Britain. Any minor cuts in tax this year are also more than offset by the extra taxes announced in last year's Budget and confirmed in this Budget, especially the rise in VAT.

With cuts in public spending jeopardising jobs in the public and private sectors alike, British workers feel less secure. The prospect of tax cuts in two years' time, if they materialise at all, is cold comfort now. There will be no feel-good factor from the Budget. Higher growth rates in 1994 and 1995 should not obscure the fact that many people will face the immediate consequences of cuts in the public sector and in investment. Benefit changes and special employment measures will have to wait.

Nothing in the Chancellor's statement deals with the long-term need to increase investment in the infrastructure and in quality training, or with the urgent problem of excessive dividend payments. Instead, resources are being cut in all sectors and help for industry is conspicuous by its paucity.

The Chancellor announced that his package of work incentives would cost £680 million, although it is not clear whether that represents a per annum cost—I am sure that it does not. However, the incentive to employers to take on the long-term unemployed will cost only £45 million, less than 7 per cent. of the total, and even that is not due to start until April 1996.

The workstart pilots are to be extended, but at a cost of £8 million. When set against the £10 billion improvement in the GDP this year and the £8.5 billion improvement in the PSBR in the next financial year, those sums are trivial, given the scale of the problem that they need to attack. Moreover, the figures show that there was no need to go ahead with the increase in VAT. The Government are taxing people now in the hope that they will be able to give some money back at a later stage and be congratulated for the exercise.

Workers in companies in the skilled sector, such as British Aerospace, who have recently been told that they are to lose their jobs, found little comfort in any of the Government's schemes for the future. They are highly skilled workers soon to be unemployed. They do not want three-week work trials or fiddle schemes. Ninety-five per cent. of the most highly skilled work force are in aerospace industries and they are losing their jobs. The Government do nothing except offer gimmicks and schemes which do not materialise into real jobs. That is against a background in which the Confederation of British Industry has identified a lower level of skills in Britain than in our main competitor countries and persistent trade deficits in manufactured goods. In the CBI manufacturing bulletin of November 1994, skill levels were identified as the likely significant contributor to the United Kingdom's low productivity. That is continuing.

Changing patterns of employment mean that as well as a strategy to keep people in work, we need a strategy to get people back to work. During the Government's reign we have seen a growth in insecurity in the labour market. Most of the new jobs created in Britain between 1993 and 1994 were white collar, insecure jobs. Many were low-paid. Drawing on unpublished figures from the Department of Employment's labour force survey, a new Trades Union Congress report shows that, in the same period, 130,000 new temporary jobs were created, while permanent jobs declined by 26,000. Many of the new jobs are in low-paid industries such as the hotel and catering industry. The situation requires a response which recognises that job security and full employment go together.

The Chancellor said that his second priority for the Budget was job creation, particularly for the long-term unemployed. He said:

"We must combine greater prosperity for the majority of our people with measures to prevent the emergence of a deprived underclass, excluded from the opportunity to work and dependent on welfare."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1079.]

Where has the Chancellor been? What does he mean by "prevent the emergence" of an underclass? Has he not discovered the people who are caught in the unbreakable circle of high rent, poverty, benefits and work?

The Government have not discovered a way to break into the interlocking system of personal disaster—a system that relies on housing benefit for its survival. Quite the contrary, they intend to kick away housing benefit. That will plunge that section of our community into isolation and despair. The Budget is long on schemes for April 1996 and short on jobs. It marks a decisive shift in favour of the creation of low-paid employment. Many will find themselves even less able to escape reliance on benefit. Measures designed to encourage employers to take on the unemployed are less likely to result in new jobs than to result in a general lowering of pay in existing jobs. There is more encouragement to follow the low-wage, low-skill strategy than ever before in Britain.

Every economic measure has a different effect on men and on women because of women's different marital status, entitlement to benefits and lower earnings. The Government claim to have understood the changes in the labour market and to be designing policies that will tackle them, but they have not. Women are over-represented among the low-paid and have to bear a disproportionate burden of previous budgets.

The gap between women's and men's earnings is gradually closing, but the divide between people at the top and people at the bottom of the earnings scale remains as wide as ever. Despite the narrowing of the pay gap, women have a long time to wait before they can celebrate real equality. At the present rate of progress, it will take another 33 years for the gap between men's and women's earnings to close completely, and there are potentially worrying signs that the pace of change has noticeably

slowed in the past two years. That is not only important for women but crucial in understanding the changing nature of work and of household budgets and in understanding how to tackle that change in making strides to create work.

Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that the average male contribution to household budgets fell from 75 per cent. in the early 1980s to 60 per cent. by 1991. Families headed by a single male breadwinner are now outnumbered nearly three to one by homes where both parents work.

Women work to provide financial security for their families, but the Government have not understood the implications for women's ability to work of the proposals in the Budget. Any increase in living standards that has occurred among dual-earner households has not been matched among one-parent families. The full-time employment rate in the latter households fell to 37 per cent.

In the Budget, measures to help people back to work were concentrated on three policies—relief during the transitional period from benefits to paid work, help for the long-term unemployed and help when moving from part-time to full-time work. Those measures are welcome, although we must recognise that they are very poor and will not assist many people to move out of the poverty trap. The second and third measures, however, do not deal with the problems that many unemployed women face, especially those with caring responsibilities.

Let us consider the proposals for helping the long-term unemployed.

Ms Hodge: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Budget contains no proposals to increase the supply of day care provision for parents who require that to enable them both to work, or to increase any assistance within the taxation system to help with child care?

Ms Primarolo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. As she pointed out in her contribution to the debate, the Government's promises to create nursery places and assist working parents have not materialised. Although child care is identified as one of the major barriers to women taking up full or part-time employment, the Government still refuse to deal with it. Indeed, in their proposals for the long-term unemployed, they have not taken on board the argument about child care and care responsibilities.

To qualify for the schemes, a person must have been continuously registered as unemployed for two years, but many women with children cannot register. The rules require them to show that they are available for work and they must demonstrate that they already have in place adequate child care—an impossibility for most mothers. That clearly demonstrates the Government's hypocrisy in claiming to represent all our community, saying that there have been changes in employment patterns, recognising the contribution that women could and should be able to make to employment, but making no changes in their legislation to assist. That is echoed when we look at the proposals for assisting individuals who are moving from part-time to full-time work. Several measures are designed to help people in full-time work, but no such assistance is given to those in part-time work.

It is known that most women need part-time work because they feel that that allows them to balance their care responsibilities. The greatest barrier for mothers who want to work is the lack of affordable care for children and for the elderly, and the Government refuse to address that when they consider how to assist people into paid work. They consider how they can assist men and women without children into the labour market, but women with children are unacceptable.

The Budget has not helped the low-paid individually, and it has done nothing to attack the over-reliance in our economy on low-skilled, low-wage labour. As a result, women will continue to suffer. Their potential will remain unused in the economy, and that will brings poverty wages.

Little has been done to compensate for the increased tax burden on the low-paid from freezing their allowances and increasing national insurance contributions in 1993. Improving women's opportunities to get out of the low-wage ghetto has not been helped by encouraging employers to take on more low-paid workers.

Labour's policy for a national insurance holiday for employers taking on the long-term unemployed has been stolen by the Tories, but with the proviso that their policy does not include adequate wage levels and a provision for training. In the absence of those features, there is no encouragement to shift the character of the UK labour market away from a low-wage, low-skill economy to a high-wage, high-skill economy. That is necessary both for our future economic security and for reducing the size of the low-paid sector in which women are disproportionately concentrated.

If more women were Members of this House, those are the issues which would be debated on both sides of the House, and that would ensure that women had fair game in the House. It has been noticeable that, so far in the Budget debate, contributions from Conservative women Members have been absent.

There has been no closing of the poverty trap. Benefit penalties on earnings which act as a disincentive to take up work have been marginally reformed, but those reforms are not radical enough to have any effect on the majority of women lone parents who want to work, but cannot afford it. Mothers earn on average 22 per cent. less than women without children. The average lifetime income for women has reduced by £11,000, while the average for men has increased by the same amount.

The conditions under which the Beveridge welfare state were created half a century ago no longer exist. Beveridge's assumption that women would not work outside the home and that the nuclear family would exist are no longer the norm. Mothers deserve incentives to return to work, rather than having shattered their hopes that they can afford to work and still care for their children. The Government are in a position to provide those incentives with policies aimed at the elimination of the crucial problems which face women.

Jobs and pay segregation stem from inadequate maternity benefits and a fear that women will take time off to look after their children. There is a lack of adequate child care and wage security, and encouraging employers to address those issues is an important step to eliminating the inequality and low pay which faces women in our society.

[Ms Primarolo]

The challenge to the Government is to pursue policies that speed up job creation by offering more skilled and attractive jobs, while enabling the unskilled and the non-employed to update their skills and to get paid work. After the Budget, the Conservative Government will continue to be held in almost universal contempt and treated with almost universal derision.

The Government have produced a fix-it Budget, to rake money in now in order to give it back, perhaps, in the vain hope that that will assist them to cling on to power. The Budget is an attempt to try to fix it for the Government rather than to fix it for the country. We shall ensure that the Government are fixed at the next general election—fixed to the Opposition Benches—and thrown out of power.

9.39 pm

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): Despite the somewhat unpleasant sting in the tail of the speech of the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), I congratulate her on what I think is her debut performance from the Opposition Treasury Bench, on which I hope she will spend many years successfully deliberating and contributing on Treasury matters.

The hon. Lady made a considered and thoughtful speech and I acknowledge what she said about the rights and opportunities of women. I shared some of her sentiments, although not all of her premises and certainly not many of her conclusions. The hon. Lady's speech was thoughtful, however, and I welcome her contribution to what has undoubtedly been a lively and forthright debate on the Budget.

I do not think the same can be said of the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who is by no means a debutante at Treasury debates. On numerous occasions she has appeared opposite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, when she has been consistently intellectually mauled or politically trounced by him across the Dispatch Box. I am afraid that today was no exception.

As I observed how the hon. Lady became more bitter as her speech progressed, I tried to work out why. It certainly could not have been in reaction to the unassailable reasonableness and effectiveness of my right hon. Friend's arguments. I came to the conclusion that it was because she had not been invited to my right hon. Friend's party to celebrate his 10 years as a Member of Parliament. Perhaps no one gave the hon. Lady a party on her 10th anniversary, I do not know. I feel sorry for the hon. Lady, and I hope that she will not be a Cinderella on future occasions.

I should like to follow the convention and courtesy displayed yesterday by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General and acknowledge briefly the speeches that have been made today. I assure all hon. Members who contributed to this useful debate that their comments will be carefully considered, even though we cannot obviously agree with all of them.

The debate started with a speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd), who spoke of the unfair competition between Heysham and Liverpool and asked about the European grants that are available for competing cities and installations.

Ms Eagle: Where is he?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend explained to me why he could not be here for the winding-up speeches.

Although European Community grants are considered carefully on the basis regional gross national product and regional employment, Heysham is covered by the European social fund. We will bear in mind my hon. Friend's comments and the wider issues that he raised.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), who also kindly informed me that he could not be here for the conclusion of the debate, condemned the Budget as irrelevant. I obviously do not agree with that. I come from the great city of Norwich and I was concerned and interested to hear his reports of unemployment and his concern about the future level of economic and industrial activity in Norwich. I firmly assert that prospects for Norwich and other cities will be well served by the Budget judgment of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. The economic recovery is reflected in Norwich, as it is elsewhere, and therein lies the best prospects for sustained employment.

My hon. Friends the Members for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Ayr (Mr.Gallie), along with the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), raised the important and controversial issue of VAT on fuel and power. Even though they made their positions clear, I hope that they are not non-negotiable but subject to influence. We acknowledge that the tax is not popular—no tax is—but it is an essential part of the arithmetic in making the books balance and redressing the state of public finances. As I shall tell the House later, the bottom line, objective and issue of principal concern must be the amount that we borrow to finance our public expenditure. That would be an issue, whichever party happened to be in government, and the present Government have the difficult but important principal task of measuring up to it.

Through a tax that will raise a considerable amount of money in gross and net terms, we have sought to contribute to meeting that challenge. The tax will raise slightly less than £3 billion in a full year. However, a substantial package of compensation, targeted to assist the people in most need, will reduce it to about £1.6 billion. A considerable programme of help for pensioners and other people on the lowest means, and help reflecting cold weather or exceptional circumstances, has been built on by my right hon. and learned friend the Chancellor in the Budget.

We cannot afford to run away from the problem of deficit redress, and of the need to tackle that, which will not be met by taxes which will raise fairly minor sums against the amount involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield said clearly that he would favour an income tax supplement as an alternative. I hear what he says, but that would directly reverse our trends and intentions on direct taxation.

Other people have not come clean about whether they would favour greater borrowing, other reductions in the expenditure programme, or alternative taxes. It behoves those who seek not to go ahead with or to condemn the second stage of VAT to confront the consequences. I say that not simply for the fiscal judgment, but for monetary

policy, because the connection between monetary and fiscal policy is direct and the markets will read clearly and carefully our determination to face up to our responsibilities in government.

Mr. Gallie: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Nelson: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will try to give way later, but I am anxious to make a little progress.

The hon. Members for Tooting and for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) mentioned the important issue of housing in their constituencies. Housing problems are a subject of direct concern to all hon. Members in our surgeries and our mailbags. Although changes have been announced and proposed in the programmes for housing and in local authority support announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, it is worth noting some of the changes and improvements that are being made in that sector which will add considerably to the quantity of social lettings. We estimate that the combination of Housing Corporation, local authority and private finance will add about 185,000 new social lettings in the next three years.

In addition, there is help in the form of the revised real guidelines on rent setting, which will taper rent increases to a reduced extent; that will assist many people with their council housing costs. We are doubling the amount that is made available for the cash incentive scheme, to encourage people to move out of the public sector into the private sector and so release resources. The Housing Corporation will spend an extra £6 billion in the next three years, adding to the considerable achievement of not only meeting our manifesto target of 153,000 properties, but exceeding it by 26,000.

We shall spend about £30 million on an empties programme to ensure that we release, use and occupy more empty local authority properties. That will affect the quantity of new lettings and their price, at a time when properties are a good deal more affordable and rents much more comparable with the costs of purchasing. Those actions will give hope to many of the people whose interests were rightly represented today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield also mentioned in passing the problems of the film industry. I hear what he says. That is a matter not for this Budget, but perhaps for future ones. I am bound to observe that the film industry is a great success. Julia Roberts and Arnold Schwarzenegger are coming to this country. The amount being spent is exciting. The film industry is one of the great success stories—mainly, I have to say, because of the restrictive union policies in the United States, which have driven out employment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] That is undoubtedly true, and much of that money and employment is coming to the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend called for no rises in interest rates. It is not for me to speculate about future rates but I have mentioned the need for a responsible fiscal policy to keep them as low as possible.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) spoke about his constituency. As I represent a constituency not far from his, I am conscious of the problems that the recession has caused, especially in the south where such unemployment, particularly of professional executives, has not occurred before. But matters are improving in his constituency and mine. The hon. Gentleman sees the employment figure for this year in his local job centre and he knows the extent of the recovery in economic activity and new employment. Not only that, but there has been an increase in the number of people who find employment soon after becoming unemployed.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the need for a working benefit scheme, but I imagine that such a scheme would go well beyond the Chancellor's proposals. The hon. Gentleman suggested somewhat mischievously that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was not totally behind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. I can think of no more united and harmonious relationship of intellect and resources on these matters. *[Interruption.]* Surely that is incontrovertible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) welcomed the reductions in public expenditure as showing that we were cutting our cloth and economising. He referred to the Chancellor as a madman wielding an axe—Ken the magician or Ken the axeman. I took it that those were compliments.

Mr. John Townend: He is not Ken the axeman.

Mr. Nelson: He is Ken the magician. The extent to which my right hon. and learned Friend has cut expenditure and is delivering a substantial recovery in our economic fortunes beyond anything prophesied by the Opposition or outside economists is a considerable personal and political achievement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington and other hon. Members spoke about the aid budget, which has been increased a little this year. I received representations from the aid lobbies and from the Council of Churches, and again this year we decided to improve the aid budget in real terms. That is supported in all parts of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who made a colourful and interesting speech which I shall read and reflect upon, spoke about cross-border shopping. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North unveiled some interesting tricks about how that is done, and they will be of direct concern to my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

Considerable amounts of duty—some £4 billion on alcoholic beverages and £3 billion on tobacco—are involved, and in paying for the public services that we all cherish, we cannot afford to ignore such flows of funds. Total resources from those duties have risen since the implementation of the single market. For the second year running, the Chancellor has been able to freeze those, and that is a reflection of the fact that the disparity has been taken into account. I hope that that will have an impact. This will be a long-term issue and there are no easy resolutions in a single market which, although it confers benefits, presents difficulties because of different systems of indirect taxation on beverages and tobacco.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) spoke about housing and clearly spelled out the problems in his constituency. I have said a little about that. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on his achievements in the Northern Ireland Office where he was responsible for economic and other matters. He spoke about competitiveness and its key importance to British industry. That was the subject of a major White Paper and a Government action programme earlier this year. He

[Mr. Nelson]

asked about the M25 links and the widening at Slough in his constituency. He will know that all those road schemes are subject to reconsideration following the announcement on the roads programme.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) spoke about standard spending assessments in his constituency and their impact. I understand that his constituency's position in the league table has risen somewhat, but he made an impassioned plea—as we all do in our constituency capacity from time to time—for a better share of the allocation.

I take careful note of what the hon. Gentleman said about expenditure priorities. It will not surprise him to learn that we have different priorities, which were borne out by his comments on indirect and direct taxation. We have a popular mandate for moving the balance away from direct to indirect taxation. That is not easy, but the benefits will become increasingly apparent as the incentives of a lower burden of taxation on earnings and income result in reinvestment, the propensity to save and higher economic activity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) asked for his spirits to be raised. He wondered why it was necessary to raise taxes when the economy was doing so well. Obviously, it is good that the economy is doing well and it is regrettable that we have to raise taxes, but I must repeat that it is of central importance to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement and, over the years, get our debts back into balance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) accurately reflected the success of our policies in his constituency. He said quite a bit about exports and the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the extent to which that would fuel industry and trade abroad. He also welcomed the proposed changes on insolvency and made a plea about capital gains tax which we shall bear in mind for the future.

The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) spoke of the need for more generous subsidies and more jobs. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment said, we reject the case for throwing more money at those issues. The quality as well as the quantity of public finance is important. She referred, not for the first time, to the Maples memorandum. There were some ribald comments about that. John Maples was my predecessor as Economic Secretary. The moral must be to keep one's memos to oneself. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will be pleased to hear that it is not my habit to draft many memorandums.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said that it was a Budget for the rich and that training had been cut. We reject that, because we believe that our proposals, measured as they are, will sustain the recovery and will, as all forecasts—not just from the Treasury, but from outside bodies—suggest, lead to further reductions in the level of unemployment.

The hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) referred to capital investment, especially in education. I am sure that she would be the first to welcome the fact that another £60 million is being spent on schools' capital programmes.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) welcomed the landfill tax. He made a plea for the M74, which we shall take into account. He also said that he wanted action on late payment of debt, which is currently the subject of a Confederation of British Industry working party.

My right hon. and learned Friend's safe and sound Budget had the prime objective of keeping the economic recovery on track, but in so doing he was also able to find substantial resources for a small business programme and for ensuring that the long-term jobless are helped to get back into employment. *[Interruption.]* However, the central objective remains the necessity to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement. *[Interruption.]* I remind the House that the national debt stands at £285 billion, of which £238 billion is in gilts and about £51 billion in national savings. The interest costs on our borrowings amount to £22.6 billion a year— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. If hon. Members wish to intervene, they should do so in the time-honoured way and not by sedentary interventions.

Mr. Nelson: Interest costs amount to more than the whole of our defence programme, more than the whole of our education programme and more than the whole of our law and order programme. If we allow them to build up, we shall not just carry forward a heritage of borrowing—we shall be saddling ourselves with ever higher recurrent costs at the expense of other public expenditure priorities.

Eventually, if we again reach a point at which we can repay debt and ensure that we can maintain low interest rates, reducing the cost of bearing debt, that will be good. But there are other technical ways of trying to improve the market and the cost of our gilts. One is the announcement of the introduction of a repo market, the other is a debt management review which is currently going on. We are also considering the introduction of certain new types of bond. We do not want anything too bizarre, but certain exotic bonds might be on the menu as we look for ways of supplying the market to ensure that we do not have a scatter gun across the yield curve and that we finance our borrowing requirement at the least cost to the taxpayer.

It is in the business package, however, that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has done most for the economy, not just a substantial amount to assist those small businesses in the north of England who would otherwise be faced with substantial rate increases and some three quarters—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 5 December.

PRIVILEGES

Motion made, and Question put,

That Mr. Tony Benn be discharged from the Committee of Privileges.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Water Charges

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Before the House adjourns, I wish to discuss the differentials in water charges in the ward of Selsdon in my constituency.

Anyone who has taken an active interest in politics in the past 10 years will remember the famous Conservative party political broadcast from Hazelbourne road. On one side, the residents lived in Wandsworth and on the other the residents lived in Lambeth. The broadcast emphasised the difference in rates between the two sides of the street.

That information sought to give the electorate financial information to help them to decide how best to cast their vote—for a high-cost, low-service Labour-run authority or a low-cost, efficient, well-run Conservative-controlled authority: a clear choice.

Farley road in the ward of Selsdon has a similar problem, not with council tax levels but with water charges. A constituent of mine, Mrs. Kendall, has her water supplied by East Surrey water company. She was astonished to find that her neighbour in a similar property paid more than £100 less for his water than she did. The reason for that was, as in the rates example, that the services came from different suppliers. In this case, Mrs. Kendall's neighbour received cheaper water from Thames Water.

Mrs. Kendall and her neighbours on her side of the road had the geographical misfortune of having their water supplied by East Surrey water company. East Surrey is listed as being the third most expensive supplier of water in the country—the average bill, according to the Office of Water Services, being £151.

I am pleased to place on record the fact that I have no complaint against the quality of supply or the service of East Surrey, both of which are well up to standard. Indeed, East Surrey recently won a prize for the quality of its water. My complaint is that its charges are out of line, and that is what I wish to draw to the attention of the House.

The neighbours supplied by Thames Water, whose charges, when sewerage and water services are combined, are among the lowest of all water companies, face an average bill of £79 per annum, almost half that of East Surrey.

The problem is not restricted to Farley road—far from it. East Surrey supplies some 25,000 households in my constituency, representing 65,000 residents. They have been paying almost twice as much as their neighbours in the north of the borough for a similar supply. The area affected covers all the houses in the Coulsdon, East, Kenley, Sanderstead and Selsdon wards and most houses in Croham and Purley, together with a small area of Woodcote and the Coulsdon, West ward.

The borough of Croydon had a hard look at the matter, prompted by Dudley Mead, the excellent Conservative councillor for Selsdon. It proposed that all customers of East Surrey within the borough of Croydon should have their source of supply transferred en masse to Thames Water.

In the spirit of competition fostered by the Conservative Government over the past decade, telephone customers have a choice, as do gas users, and we will soon be able to choose our electricity supplier. The relevant legislation, the Water Industry Act 1991, as amended by the Competition and Service (Utilities Act) 1992, encourages the same.

At the council's request, Thames Water undertook a feasibility study, which confirmed that Thames would be interested in taking on the area in question. The company found that it would have to provide a water main connection in at least one location in the borough, and it proposed using existing pipework to households. The majority of residents who made their views known supported the change.

I received many letters from constituents requesting that Thames Water be encouraged to take over their supply. Mr. Ray Rowsell, chairman of Selsdon residents association said:

"We are very hopeful of obtaining a transfer because East Surrey's water charge levels cannot be justified."

This autumn, Croydon council and Thames Water put their proposals to the Director General of Ofwat, Mr. Ian Byatt. He did not make a ruling but gave his interpretation of current legislation: that Thames Water would be permitted to serve customers in the East Surrey supply area only if it constructed its own separate supply network or—and this is important—if Thames Water was appointed the supplier under the inset provisions of the 1991 Act. That Act would permit Thames Water to supply East Surrey if it were a green-field site, which it is not, if the host water company were to agree, and it does not, or if the individual customers concerned used more than a threshold of 250 megalitres of water a year: average family use is 0.15 megalitres.

The combined households of the area in question could transfer en masse. They consume a combined total of 3,000 megalitres—well above the legislative guideline figure. However, in Ofwat's view, each house is a separate entity and together the properties do not constitute a block that could transfer en masse. That is the nub of the argument.

Fortunately, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment can help, without new primary legislation being necessary, by amending the competition threshold in the spirit of competition policy that the Government are always keen to encourage.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): My hon. Friend understands that the matter is by no means simple. Were such a transfer to occur, my constituents served by East Surrey would see their water charges rise substantially. Although East Surrey is an efficient water company, it is largely rural—and that is why the cost is higher.

Mr. Ottaway: My hon. Friend makes his point well, and I will refer to it shortly.

It is required of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make an order, so that groups of individual customers can be considered as one large individual customer for the purposes of the 1991 Act, and possibly to lower the threshold of 250 megalitres a year to one that encompasses a street of customers. That would allow a suitably located street to transfer across a boundary to a more advantageously priced area.

[Mr. Ottaway]

Not surprisingly, East Surrey is not in favour of those proposals. Mr. Phil Holder, managing director of the company—for whom I have the highest regard—says:

"Whilst understanding the position of Croydon Council and sympathising with customers who pay more than their neighbours . . . we must emphasise that transfers of this type are not in the best interests of all our customers."

A spokesman added:

"We do not want to lose our customers."

That was a surprise.

East Surrey makes two key arguments. The first is that the pipework belongs to the company and is not available to Thames Water. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State ordered a boundary change for areas of responsibility, Thames could take over the existing East Surrey pipes, but would be obliged to reimburse East Surrey for its loss; Ofwat would set the compensation.

The second argument is that allowing transfer of the affected area, which represents a substantial part of East Surrey's business, could mean prices rising for other consumers outside the borough boundaries, as my hon. Friend said.

My response is that, for decades, urban areas have been subsidising rural areas. It is about time that rural areas paid a more realistic contribution to their water charges. That is not a penalty, but a removal of the subsidy. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) perhaps winced a little at that, and I suspect that his constituents would do the same, but I have an answer.

If that is unacceptable to the residents of east Surrey, the alternative would be for Thames Water to take over the entire East Surrey water area, and it has assured me today that that would result in significantly lower water charges for everybody in east Surrey. I am sure that that would be very popular. If my hon. Friend were to assist me in that, I am sure that he would be very popular.

One could have some sympathy with the users in the rural areas if it were not for the fact that East Surrey Water reported a profit increase last year of more than 45 per cent.—some £8.2 million on a turnover of only £25.5 million—and as such should be prepared to submit to competition. The case is not helped by the fact that, in 1991, two directors, who held almost half the shares, were paid a dividend of £1.17 million at a time when consumers faced an increase of 24 per cent. That prompted Ofwat, in a letter dated 12 July 1991, to express concern about the levels of prices, profits and dividends. Regrettably, it took no further action.

I am afraid that East Surrey Water merely wishing to restrict its customers from obtaining services elsewhere is simply not a good enough reason for preventing access to those households by Thames Water.

In summary, the people of Croydon, supported by their borough council, want a low-cost service and Thames Water is in a position and is willing to provide it. The only objection comes from another company, which, understandably, does not want to lose business, but which is, after all, competing in a market economy. The main argument is that the high cost is due to supplying those who live in rural areas. But Selsdon and the rest of my constituency is not a rural area. It is not even in Surrey. It is a London suburb and, as such, should be supplied by Thames Water.

I therefore ask my hon. Friend to consider whether the Government should consider loosening the regulator's guidelines, keeping within the Government's desire to increase competition in that industry, and whether the regulator's preliminary observation is within the spirit of the Water Act 1991, as amended.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I must thank my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who is also my neighbour, for bringing this issue to the attention of the House. It is a serious matter and it raises a number of interesting issues.

As my hon. Friend outlined, we have here two water companies with very different characteristics. Thames is a very large concern with responsibilities not only for water supply but for sewerage, although it is its water supply responsibilities with which we are concerned tonight. East Surrey is a much smaller company, which supplies only water.

The contrast could hardly be greater. Thames supplies water over an area of more than 8,000 sq km; East Surrey, 700. Thames supplies 7.3 million people with water; East Surrey just over 300,000. As we have heard, the average Thames Water charge is £83 while East Surrey's is £141. In respect of those charges, my hon. Friend may be interested to know that the charges of the other 10 water companies having a similar boundary to Thames range from £81 for Severn Trent to £152 for South East Water.

The limits on water charges that individual companies can make and which feed through to customers' bills are rigorously controlled under statute, which provides that they are set by the Director General of Ofwat. In setting those limits, the director general has a duty to protect the interests of customers, but he also has a duty to ensure that the companies can finance the improvements in services which the customers themselves expect to be undertaken, and meet their obligations regarding water quality.

In his recent periodical review of price limits, the director general has taken the view that water companies should be able to operate more efficiently and finance their functions at a lower cost of capital. In the light of that, he has imposed limits which are considerably more stringent than before.

That will still mean that charges will vary from company to company. But differences in charges cannot be used as an indicator that one company is more efficient than another. Indeed, taking the companies in question, Ofwat, as part of its periodical review, identified East Surrey as one of 10 companies "being more efficient". Thames, with 13 other companies, was identified as being of "average efficiency" in the way in which it handled its operating costs.

Inevitably, the level of charges imposed by a water company will depend on its particular circumstances. The larger customer base of Thames Water, for instance, and the proportion of its customers who are in relatively densely populated areas and can therefore be supplied less expensively, are factors in its lower charges. The company, however, also supplies more sparsely populated areas such as the Cotswolds. I am sure that my hon.

Friend will know of the large amount of capital construction that it undertakes each year, the new London ring main being an outstanding example.

East Surrey, in contrast, supplies a number of small towns and rural areas, which—as has been pointed out—tends to put up costs. But two of the main factors that increase charges are the company's greater need for capital expenditure on its network—its current system has an implied life of 100 years, compared with 800 years for Thames—and the fact that East Surrey is one of only two companies that soften the water before it goes into supply.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What about the profits—the large profits—the excessive profits?

Sir Paul Beresford: I have a funny feeling that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) wants to buy into the company because of the profits.

The characteristics of the raw water will also affect costs and treatment. For example, the relative hardness of the water will vary according to its source, and the services on offer from each company will vary. Softer water may save both domestic and industrial consumers considerable money, as it will—for example—have a less detrimental affect on heating systems. East Surrey has softened the water for many years. I understand that the issue of whether the practice should continue was taken up with customers and local authorities about 10 years ago, when the company was renewing two major treatment works. The consensus was that it should, and Croydon council was one of the local authorities that requested that it should continue.

I understand that, if water softening were abandoned and water of similar hardness to that supplied by Thames was put into the system, the cost of the water would be reduced significantly—perhaps to within 15 per cent. of the Thames price.

My hon. Friend asked whether the current legislation could be used to enable Thames to take over the supply of 20,000 homes currently supplied by East Surrey. The Competition and Service (Utilities) Act 1992 extended the circumstances in which the director general can, through what is known as an inset appointment, make another company the water and sewerage company for an undeveloped or greenfield site—that clearly does not apply in this instance—or a site where an existing large, company is already receiving water. My hon. Friend suggested that, rather than take the number of individual customers as 20,000, we should divide them into streets. The same point still applies, however: the individuals still exist.

I understand the problem. However, the opportunities arise only when there are differences in charges between companies, which do not necessarily indicate differences in efficiency. Any change—if we went along the lines suggested—would still be highlighted at the new boundaries between the companies. The likely effect of allowing customers to change supplier in the way suggested would be a further rise in the charges of customers remaining with the original company. We have already heard a legitimate protest from my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth).

The next obvious suggestion—which has already been made—is that it would make economic sense for one company to take over another. That is a sensible suggestion, but a quite different matter which would be for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned and their shareholders. They would have to take into account the advantages that they perceived, bearing in mind the fact that such takeovers would automatically be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, as Thames Water's assets exceed the £30 million limit set in the legislation.

That, however, would be a very different matter from what is currently proposed, which is in effect "cherry picking"—to the advantage of one company and the detriment of the other and its remaining customers. That point in particular needs careful consideration.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. It gives me the opportunity to explore it with him. I am sure that our discussion will concentrate the minds of both water companies on ways in which the problem could be tackled. It is a matter for them, but East Surrey may, in addition, want to look at the continuation of its water softening policy and Thames may wish to consider the commercial position.

The Government are continuing to look at ways of providing opportunities for direct competition where we can and we will take every opportunity to open up the industry to fair competition and to offer customers the choice which that allows. This debate has been an added spur to that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 2 December 1994

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Policing (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

9.34 am

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): Today's debate on the policing of London gives me an opportunity to give an account of the objectives and achievements of the Metropolitan police over the past 12 months. I shall account for my objectives and achievements as police authority for the Metropolitan police. The debate also gives me an opportunity to take a step back and to take a more general view of what policing in London means for the people of London and what it should mean in the future.

Capital cities, particularly the larger ones, present special policing problems. Crime rates are always likely to be higher. Public order will always be a particular challenge. London is, however, a good deal safer than most other capital cities. International comparisons show that the chance of being violently attacked in Rome is three times higher than it is in London. One is 10 times more likely to be a homicide victim in Washington than in London. International statistical comparisons are notoriously difficult to make. Different countries classify crime differently. Statistics are not the only indicator. Just this week, the *Evening Standard* published the results of a poll which showed that London was voted the safest and cleanest city in Europe by a panel of 500 international executives.

The safety of London is to a very large measure to the credit of the Metropolitan police. The Met, so much larger than any other force in the country, is essentially organised in the same way as the smallest rural force. It does not have an elite core of specialised anti-riot troops. The men and women who are its constables do not return to a barracks where they are isolated from the world and become institutionalised into accepting some militaristic ethos. They go home at night to their families in ordinary communities. Successive Governments have thought it right to keep London's policing on the same fundamental basis set up by Sir Robert Peel in 1829. I agree, although I shall outline later one change that I intend to make to strengthen the arrangements.

In most of my speech, I shall be accounting for the recent work of the Metropolitan police. Before I do so, I want to place firmly on the record my vision for the London of the future. I want to see an even safer city, where safer streets improve the quality of life in London. I want to retain a visible, predominantly unarmed and approachable police service, providing a reassuring presence across London. I want to see more reductions in crime, not just in the petty burglaries that so besmirch ordinary people's lives, but in the drug-related crime that brings so much misery, and in street robberies, which make elderly people afraid to walk down the streets in which they have lived all their lives. That means establishing a clear view of the relative importance of policing tasks, responding to public concerns.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I very much welcome the sentence in which my right hon. and learned Friend said that he wished there to be a more visible police presence on the streets. In parts of Ealing, people are pressing for that strongly. They appreciate the good support that neighbourhood watch, for example, gets from the police. There is, however, a nervousness.

I have already had telephone calls this morning from elderly people. They fear that attacks on their homes, in the form of burglaries, will lead them to the reaction for which Mr. Ted Newbery was taken through the courts yesterday. He was fined for attacking someone who burgled him. Some of my constituents do not understand that. Can my right hon. and learned Friend marry the importance of getting our police on to the streets—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. This is becoming a speech rather than an intervention.

Mr. Howard: I understand, of course, the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has expressed, speaking, as he characteristically does, for his constituents. Mr. Newbery was not fined; he was ordered to pay compensation by the High Court. My hon. Friend knows the constraints under which I have to operate in commenting on decisions by the High Court, especially when, as I understand it, it is at least possible that there may be an appeal. I understand the concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed on behalf of his constituents, and especially the importance that he and they attach to the visible presence of the police on the streets. That, I know, is something to which the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis also attaches great significance.

I want to see a city where there is an active partnership between the police and the public, one that really flourishes, and where individual members of London's public know that they can make a difference by volunteering to support their local police in whatever way best suits their local needs. I want all that. To achieve that, I want, above all, the mutual trust between Londoners and their police, the Metropolitan police, to continue and to deepen. That is the best way in which to attack crime and to force the criminal on to the defensive.

That is my vision for London. Let me refer now to my immediate vision for the Met. That is set out in the statement of priorities for 1994-95, which I announced to the House on 7 February. The priorities take full account of the Government's key objectives for policing. Those objectives form the core of the annual priorities document, which is part of the Metropolitan police corporate strategy. The corporate strategy is, effectively, the policing plan which, under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, must be produced for every force outside London. I approved the Met's document in February and sent a copy to every right hon. and hon. Member with a constituency interest.

[Mr. Howard]

I want to spend a little time reporting progress on the main objectives. I start with the final objective on the list of priorities in the Met's annual document:

"to improve policing performance and quality of service by restructuring the Metropolitan Police".

That is in many ways the most important of them all. The past year has been a time of great change and great progress for the Metropolitan police, as for other police forces. The police reforms being introduced elsewhere under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act are being applied in the Met as well.

The Commissioner, with my full support, has undertaken a thorough review of the Met's structure and organisation. The whole purpose of the exercise is to improve performance and quality of service. The aim is to achieve the most efficient and effective use of resources, to improve communication and decision making, and to remove unnecessary links in the chain. Through a reduction in the number of headquarters and central support posts, resources can be freed for operational duties at the front line. A number of important changes have already been made. The eight force areas have been reduced to five, each headed by an assistant commissioner. The rank of deputy assistant commissioner is being phased out and middle management slimmed down, with an expected saving of 450 posts at inspecting and superintending level through voluntary early retirement.

The Commissioner's restructuring review includes both headquarters functions and specialist units. Those units carry the Met's special national and international responsibilities. Naturally, there was concern about the future of some of those and I received many representations from right hon. and hon. Members about the future of the obscene publications branch. I am expecting the Commissioner's detailed proposals very shortly, but he has already assured me that the branch will continue much in its present form, and will continue to co-ordinate work against paedophiles at a national level.

The restructuring review has been intensive and far reaching. Inevitably, it has involved some uncomfortable questions and difficult decisions. It has presented the Met's officers with a considerable challenge. They are rising to that challenge and I am sure that benefits flowing from the exercise, which is now nearing completion, will be rapidly seen and widely acknowledged.

The first objective in the Met's priority list for 1994-95 was to deliver the standards defined in the Metropolitan police charter. The charter was launched in September 1993. It makes firm and public commitments to certain performance standards and targets for the force. Up to the year ending October 1994, all the targets had been achieved and, in several instances, exceeded.

The Met was able to reach the scene of more than 90 per cent. of all urgent incidents within 12 minutes, exceeding the charter standard. It answered 84 per cent. of 999 calls within 15 seconds, exceeding the charter standard. It attended immediately or very promptly to 83 per cent. of people calling at police stations, exceeding the charter standard, and it answered 89 per cent. of letters within 10 working days, exceeding the charter standard. Surveys of people requiring the services of the Met showed that 92 per cent. of crime victims and 94 per cent. of traffic accident victims were pleased with the service received, and 83 per cent. of people calling at police stations were pleased with the service that they received there.

Important as it is, public satisfaction cannot be the only yardstick to measure whether the police are doing their job. That is why two objectives, the second and third priorities in the Met's document, set specific and tough targets for dealing with crime, particularly burglary. Those are

"to increase the number of notifiable offences solved from around 150,000 to 190,000",

and

"to increase the detection rate for burglary to 15 per cent."

I am pleased to be able to report to the House that the Met looks set to meet both targets. Compared with the previous year, in 1993-94, reported crime fell by 5 per cent., to 895,894 recorded crimes, and the number of crimes solved increased by 6 per cent., to 159,993. The number solved in the half year from April to the end of September 1994 is 88,859—pretty much on target.

The Met's most notable success has been in tackling burglary. Operation Bumblebee, which had been successfully launched in north London in 1991, was extended across the whole of the Metropolitan police district in June 1993. Burglary is a priority because of its prevalence and because of the impact that it has on the lives of victims, the family and business. The figures for the first year of Operation Bumblebee are impressive. In the year to June 1994, burglaries fell by 14 per cent., and residential burglaries by 17 per cent., compared with the previous year. That means that there were 25,000 fewer victims of burglary in London last year than the year before. I regard that as a major contribution to the fight against crime.

I know that there has been some criticism of Operation Bumblebee. It has been suggested, for example, that it takes resources away from other crime problems. However, it was precisely because of complaints that the police were not giving enough priority to investigating burglary that Bumblebee was seen to be necessary. No one can seriously doubt that people want the police to act effectively against burglars, nor, indeed, does the evidence from independent research, commissioned from the London School of Economics and due to be published shortly, give any comfort to the armchair critics of the police who suggest that there has been some "displacement" of crime.

The armchair critics also say that Bumblebee is almost as much a media operation as a policing operation. To say that is to miss the point. The Met must publicise what it is doing in order to let burglars know that they will not be allowed to offend with impunity. The very substantial fall in the number of burglaries suggests that burglars are getting that message.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Everybody welcomes the improvements in clearing up burglaries and in that part of the police's work. However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that this year the Metropolitan police said that, to do its job properly, it needed 150 more officers. Does the Home Secretary accept that the Met needs 150 more officers and, if he does, why was he not able to approve that request?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is a trifle behind the times because the position is that the Commissioner,

in common with other chief constables under the new arrangements that we are putting in place for the police service across the country, will have the freedom to decide for himself how he can use most effectively the resources that are made available to him.

The settlement that I announced yesterday, together with certain other changes of which the Metropolitan police is able to take advantage, will ensure that the Commissioner, if he so chooses, will be able at least to maintain the number of police officers in London at its present level. It is for him to decide how he disposes of his resources. He has, of course, to satisfy a number of demands as well as those which can be identified simply by the number of police officers. However, it is for him to decide how to use those resources most effectively.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Since the Secretary of State has now turned to the issue of resources—

Mr. Howard: I shall turn to it in more detail later.

Mr. Straw: In that case, I shall make my intervention at that moment.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am, of course, coming to the question of resources in somewhat more detail later in my remarks. I was just responding to the intervention by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

I am not impressed by the criticism that the so-called secondary clear-ups—offenders owning up to other offences—should not count. Why not? After all, that is precisely the outcome one would expect from operations that target—and catch—professional burglars.

A further important objective for 1994-95, No. 5 in the Met's priorities document, was to improve performance against the criminal use of firearms. We cannot disregard the increase in the use of firearms against police officers. A firearm in the hand of a criminal is still relatively rare, but even one case is one case too many. Action against criminal use of firearms is a priority because of the potential harm to individuals and the impact on the safety of Londoners.

The Commissioner has responded in two ways. First, he launched a major publicity campaign, targeting the illegal possession and supply of weapons. Secondly, he increased the number of armed response vehicles from four to 12. I have also approved his request that their crews should be permitted to carry their sidearms openly and I have agreed that royalty and diplomatic protection officers on static duty may also do so when in shirt-sleeve order.

Those measures represent a balanced response to the firearms threat in London. They do not constitute, or even approach, routine arming of ordinary police officers. It is a fact that at the beginning of this year there were 631 fewer officers authorised for firearms than in 1991. The drop in the number of police officers in the Met qualified to carry firearms reflects the Commissioner's view that firearms capacity should be concentrated on a few specialist officers.

I referred earlier to my determination to make London an even safer city. I am equally determined to ensure, as far as I can, the safety of police officers as they face violence and threats. I do not think that anyone who holds my office could fail to be impressed by the dedication of police officers in placing their duty to uphold law and order above considerations of personal safety. That is a fact of their lives and a routine part of the job whether they patrol the streets or go to investigate a reported crime.

In the past year, I have had the melancholy duty of attending the funerals of two very brave officers who gave their lives in the battle against crime. Police Constable Patrick Dunne was shot dead after responding to a call to a domestic incident at a house in Clapham on 20 October 1993. Sergeant Derek Robertson was stabbed to death at the scene of a robbery at a sub-post office in Croydon on 9 February this year. No words are adequate to describe the debt of gratitude that we—all of us—owe them.

Sergeant Robertson and PC Dunne were far from being the only officers in the Metropolitan police to suffer from criminal violence this year. In 1993-94, 3,902 officers were injured as a result of being assaulted while on duty. That represents an increase of 15.8 per cent. over 1992-93. Firearms were involved in 41 assaults on police officers, compared with six in 1992-93, and in 23 of those assaults, firearms were actually discharged. Knives or other sharp instruments were used on 45 occasions compared with 49 in 1992-93. The police officers who suffered those attacks were prepared to put their own safety second to that of others. That makes it all the more important that everything possible should be done to protect them from the risks that they face.

The old-fashioned police truncheon has given good service; but with the greater risks that officers now face, we need to be sure that they have the best available equipment with which to defend themselves against attacks by criminals.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the police and the House will be grateful to him for the changes that he has made to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which now enable the police to search for knives in certain very limited and specific circumstances? That is a very substantial improvement and I hope that it will reduce the figure of 45 to which my right hon. and learned Friend has just referred.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The new power provided by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is important to protect the police in the context that we are discussing. It is also important to protect the public in a very real sense. The powers that the police previously had to search for knives and other weapons were inadequate and I know that they welcome the additional powers provided by the 1994 Act.

At the Commissioner's request, I have approved the use of a range of longer—22 in, 24 in and 26 in—batons. Scientific tests have shown that those batons have no more potential to cause injury than the traditional truncheon.

One absolutely vital piece of protective equipment on which a police officer relies is his personal radio. Because of the great importance that officers rightly attach to rapid and reliable communications, I have accepted the Commissioner's proposal that a new, more advanced UHF "trunked" radio system should be introduced. The new system will have many advantages over the old one, including better geographical coverage and greater adaptability and reliability. The contract for the new system was signed earlier this year, and it is expected to be fully operational across the Metropolitan police district by 1998.

[Mr. Howard]

So far, I have concentrated on the Met's objectives and its performance in the light of those objectives. Before I come to the important core functions of maintaining the Queen's peace and working in partnership, I want to say something about resources, in particular the level of central Government funding for the Metropolitan police.

For 1995-96, the Met will receive more money than it did the previous year. Over the period 1979 to 1994, expenditure on the Met increased by 60 per cent. in real terms. Next year, its allocation under the formula, plus the special provision which the Government judge necessary because of the Metropolitan police's unique national and capital city functions, will total £1,628.56 million, compared with £1,616.89 million in 1994-95.

I am also revising the existing system of Home Office controls on Metropolitan police expenditure as part of my programme of police reform. The Commissioner sought financial flexibilities to match those available to forces outside London. I welcomed his proposals. They are eminently sensible and I have acted on them by arranging for the Met to hold cash reserves—which means that there can be more funds available for policing London in 1995-96, on top of the existing £1.6 billion that it is getting under the settlement.

The quantum of the settlement, with those extra flexibilities and savings from the contracting out of court escort duties and from restructuring, will enable the Commissioner at least to maintain present numbers of police officers in London. I have not yet received his proposals on how he plans to spend his allocation, but I am confident that he will ensure that the level and quality of policing in the capital will remain the highest in the land. That is the challenge which the Commissioner faces. I am sure that he will rise to it.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I attended the Operation Bumblebee roadshow the other day, which the police took to my constituency. Several police officers told me that they would like a permanent site, which could then be manned by civilians. That would release police officers for duty as the operation is extremely expensive in terms of manpower and resources. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider that as part of the possibilities for improving resources in London?

Mr. Howard: I am sure that the Commissioner will want to consider that suggestion seriously. It is entirely an operational matter for him and it comes well within his remit to decide on the most effective disposition of his resources. It is certainly an interesting suggestion and I am sure that he will want to consider it.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State was good enough yesterday to send me details of the police grant for next year. However, he will accept that there were no comparisons with previous years.

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman clarify for me whether, in practice, additional real resources will go to the Metropolitan police against the background of two points? The first is an admission by the Home Office in a press notice on Budget day that there would be an overall 3 per cent. decline in real resources for all Home Office expenditure. The second point relates to an analysis prepared by statisticians in the Library, which confirms the figure that the Secretary of State has just given of £1,628 million of total funding for next year. However, it says that net expenditure for this year would be £32 million higher rather than lower. On every comparison—standard spending assessments, police grant and net spending—it looks as if there will be a real terms reduction in funding. Is that because it is impossible to compare the new system with the old one, or will there be a reduction?

Mr. Howard: I have not seen the statistical exercise to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but let me see whether I can help him. Overall funding for the police will increase over the country as a whole by 3 per cent. next year. That is in excess of the net additional pay bill that results from the pay settlement for next year. There can be no question, over the country as a whole, but that enough money will be made available to the service at least to maintain the existing number of police officers.

As for London, I gave the figures on a strictly comparable basis just a couple of moments ago. Those are the figures for the budget. In order properly to assess the financial position of the Metropolitan police for next year, we must take into account some additional factors. First, as I said, court escort duties will no longer be the responsibility of the Metropolitan police; they are being contracted out. The £7 million cost of court escort duties is not being removed from the Metropolitan police; it will remain in the budget for the Metropolitan police to use as the Commissioner thinks fit. That must be added in order properly to appreciate the increase in the budget to which I referred a moment ago. That is the first important qualification and extra factor to be taken into account.

Secondly, there is the ability to carry over reserves from one financial year to the next, which the Commissioner has asked for and which I have happily been able to agree to. Last year, there was an underspend on the budget of £11 million, and that had to be surrendered because flexibility did not exist. In future, up to 2 per cent.—that is, up to £35 million—a year will be kept. The Metropolitan police will have power to keep it and to use it for spending in the following year. That is a significant additional resource which will be available to the Metropolitan police.

Thirdly, there are the consequences and the savings of the substantial restructuring exercise that the Commissioner has undertaken. I have referred to the saving of 450 middle-ranking posts. That frees up substantial resources. They are not being removed from the budget; they will be available for the Commissioner to use as he thinks best. All those factors must be taken into account in making a reasonable, proper and fair assessment of the financial position of the Metropolitan police next year.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I apologise for not being present at the beginning of my right hon. and learned Friend's speech. Will he bear in mind the costs to the police of policing demonstrations on the streets of London and of the recent nonsense of motorway demonstrators trying to prevent lawful people from going about their business? Will my right hon. and learned Friend take action and introduce legislation to stop or reduce such occurrences and therefore save valuable police resources, so that they can be spent on matters that

they should be spent on, such as fighting crime and protecting innocent people, and not be wasted on policing demonstrations?

Mr. Howard: I shall refer to public order in a moment or two, so I hope that my hon. Friend will bear with me. He will know that, in respect of demonstrations that take place in association with trespass, the new offence of aggravated trespass, which the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 introduced, gives the police significant additional powers.

The extra money for the Metropolitan police, to which I have just referred, and indeed for the whole of the police service in England and Wales, shows yet again the Government's staunch commitment to supporting the police and to maintaining the Queen's peace.

Of course, maintaining the Queen's peace is a core function of the police. For the Met, more than any other force, that includes policing planned events in public places, including ceremonial and other high-risk occasions, and preparing contingency plans to deal with spontaneous disorder and major civil emergencies—precisely the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) makes.

The Met has had to face a number of public order challenges this year. In 1993, serious public disorder occurred on two occasions in Welling during protests against the presence there of the British National party's bookshop. On 8 May, 42 police officers and 13 members of the public were injured. On 16 October, 21 police officers and 42 members of the public were injured.

There were also demonstrations in opposition to the new Criminal Justice and Public Order Act while it was making its progress through this House and another place. On 24 July this year, the police succeeded in keeping the peace during a march from Hyde park to Trafalgar square. Despite a large crowd and some ugly scenes outside Downing street, on the whole the march was peaceful. Unfortunately, that was not the case with the march from the Embankment to Hyde park on 9 October. About 2,000 of the marchers refused to disperse at the end of the march and, disgracefully, attacked the police. At one stage, about 100 of that group broke away and attacked shops in Oxford street. There was further disorder on 20 October in the area around the House, when the police made 35 arrests, mostly for drunkenness and public order offences.

On all those occasions, the disorder was the work of a despicable minority intent on causing trouble and riding roughshod over the rights of everyone else, including those who came along to demonstrate peacefully. Their actions show more eloquently than words the wisdom of the House in supplying the police with the effective powers to which I referred in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I should give way first to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who attacked the police after those events. Indeed, I hope that he will take this opportunity to apologise for the remarks that he made then.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. I am surprised that it took him six weeks to get his underlings to reply to my letter asking for a public inquiry into the events surrounding the demonstration on 9 October and in which I told him that those who organised the march and rally were more than happy to co-operate with any inquiry. We had no wish to see any violence at the end of it.

What I questioned—I still do, and I shall raise it if I am called to speak—are the policing tactics that were used at the end of the demonstration, the lack of co-operation with the organisers of the demonstration who wished to avoid trouble, why Park lane was closed to all through traffic at the time, thus exacerbating the problem, and why there was no co-operation to ensure that the crowd were able to leave Hyde park by other exits to reduce the pressure of numbers in the area.

I get the feeling that the Home Secretary is glorying in this matter and is refusing to consider all the problems and the tactics that were later used by the police. The earlier policing tactics—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have had occasion to say before that long interventions are not appropriate. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will seek to catch my eye, and he will be able to expand on his points if he so wishes, but not now.

Mr. Howard: One thing has emerged clearly in the past couple of minutes: any attempt by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to suggest that the hon. Member for Islington, North is alone when he attacks the police for those events would be entirely wide of the mark. Almost every Labour Member on the Opposition Back Benches supported what the hon. Member for Islington, North said in his intervention. That is the authentic voice of the Labour party when it comes to policing matters. There is absolutely no need for any inquiry.

Mr. Corbyn: Answer my point.

Mr. Howard: I am answering the hon. Gentleman's point. The only issues that arise in the context of those demonstrations—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) wishes successfully to catch my eye, I suggest that he keeps quiet now.

Mr. Howard: The only issues that arise in the context of those demonstrations are whether individuals broke the law. Those issues are determined by the courts of this land. No other issues arise. It is perfectly clear from some of the leaflets we have seen that there were those who came to the demonstration that afternoon determined to inflict violence upon the police. That is the essential truth of what happened that day, and the Labour party should face up to it.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way, but I regret that in the last few moments he has descended from a general,

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

non-partisan approach in his speech. Does he not realise that there is a difference—I know about the matters that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) raised—between "attack", which is the word that the right hon. and learned Gentleman used, and a comment on tactics, which is always a useful exercise to engage in after the event?

Mr. Howard: When I used that word, I was referring to leaflets which had been prepared and distributed before the event and which clearly demonstrated that people came to that event determined to attack the police. That is the truth of the matter. *[Interruption.]* I did not accuse the hon. Member for Islington, North of physically attacking the police—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not know about the events that are being discussed, but we will have order in the House now.

Mr. Howard: The truth is very simple: there were those who came to the event planning to inflict violence on the police—to attack the police physically. There were also those, such as the hon. Member for Islington, North, who attacked the police after the event—not with physical violence—over their handling of the event. The hon. Gentleman has attacked the police over their handling of the event. He nods in assent when I put that proposition to the House again, and it is clear that he has widespread support in his attacks from the Back Benches of the Labour party.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Home Secretary understand, once and for all that the organisers of the demonstration wanted a peaceful demonstration, and indeed were complimented by the police officers present on the organisation of the march and rally? We were critical of the policing tactics used after the rally had ended and of the absolute refusal of the senior police officers present to co-operate with the organisers, whom they had just complimented, by reducing the pressure of numbers around the Park lane area in order to avoid the very unfortunate and tragic scenes that followed the demonstration and march.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's points. He used considerably more extreme language at the time. There is absolutely no need for a public inquiry into the events. What matters is whether people broke the law, and the courts have the power to deal with that issue.

The Metropolitan police were able to deal effectively with all those challenges to public order, and they deserve our thanks. I pay particular tribute to them for the way in which they policed another event: the Notting Hill carnival. The carnival is the largest outdoor public event in Europe. In 1993, more than 2 million people attended it over two days. The Commissioner deployed 8,300 officers to police the event and there were only 53 arrests, mainly for drunkenness. With an event of that size, I believe that that is a great tribute to the skill and commitment of the Metropolitan police, working in close co-operation with the organisers.

Mr. Dicks: How much did it cost?

Mr. Howard: Of course, it cost a good deal in police time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have certain views about seated interventions, which apply to both sides of the House.

Mr. Howard: That was a successful event, in which I believe that the whole community of London can take a good deal of pride, particularly in relation to the way in which it was policed.

Mr. Stephen: In addition to the incidents of public disorder that the Home Secretary listed, is it not also the case that his residence was attacked by so-called "demonstrators"? Is not that a fundamental attack not only on one of the Queen's Ministers, but upon our democracy? Should it not merit the strongest condemnation from every one of us, including the relevant Opposition Front-Bench spokesman when he addresses the House today?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his solicitude. That is one of the many occupational hazards to which I have become accustomed in this office.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): On the subject of policing public events, will my right hon. and learned Friend consider the policing of football matches that occur regularly at scheduled times on a weekly or bi-weekly basis? The cost of policing inside the grounds is currently paid for by the football clubs, but the cost of policing outside the grounds, which can be very substantial indeed, is not defrayed in any way. Could the cost of that use of police resources, which can be considerable in central London, be met in some way by the financially successful clubs?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, which has wider implications than those confined to the policing of football matches. I have no doubt that it will be considered carefully.

The second of the Met's core functions that I want to deal with—

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Before the Home Secretary leaves the issue of public order, will he tell the House the cost of the operation that took place this week in my constituency at Claremont road, in relation to the M11 link road? The Department of Transport is to blame for that situation. Will he also explain why riot police officers have been present at that protest, as they have been present at other demonstrations in London, without numbers on their police uniforms? That seems to be a habit among the riot police. Will the Home Secretary do something about it?

Mr. Howard: What an astonishing intervention from the hon. Gentleman. Is he not prepared to condemn those who are breaking the law by trespassing on land and obstructing its lawful use? Does he not accept that any democratically elected Government have the right to decide, in accordance with proper procedures, whether a road should be built and that, when a decision has been

taken with all the authority of the law, no one has the right to thwart that expression of the will of the people? Those are the actions which the hon. Gentleman ought to condemn. It is astonishing that he should rise and not condemn the activities which have led to that police action.

Mr. Cohen: I have discussed the matter with local police and even they recognise the people's right to demonstrate and protest, peacefully and legally, and resist the scheme every step of the way. It is their right to do so. The Home Secretary does not seem to understand that civil liberties are at stake. That is no surprise, because Mr. John Maples, vice-chairman of the Conservative party, gave the game away in a leaked memorandum in which he said, "Civil liberties don't matter; let's get rid of a few civil liberties to test whether Tony Blair will accept them in the House." That is how much the Tories care about civil liberties.

Mr. Howard: The cause of civil liberty is not advanced by the deliberate obfuscation of the clear difference between peaceful protest, which is the democratic right of people in this country with which we do not interfere, and the obstruction of lawful activities on other people's land. No civilised, democratic society should be asked to tolerate it. That is the key distinction which the hon. Gentleman totally fails to face.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment on the activities of those who seek to persuade others to commit acts of public disorder, both by making racist speeches in universities, as HUT does, and by the spread of racist and anti-Semitic literature, which is a particular problem in north London?

Mr. Howard: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, and of course I share them. He knows that the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act gives the police a number of additional powers and, in particular, for the first time makes distributing racist literature an arrestable offence.

One of the great problems that the police have always had in dealing with that particular mischief is the inadequacy of their powers to get at the people who are responsible. One of the deficiencies in the former arrangements was that the police did not have the power to arrest people who were engaged in the act of distributing the literature. That is cured by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. I hope that it will prove to be of significant assistance to the police as they deal, I hope, more effectively than they were able to do in the past with such despicable activities.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The whole House will welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend has said about the new powers and provisions.

With reference to the two demonstrations in Welling about which my right hon. and learned Friend spoke earlier and to the Anti Racist Alliance meeting in Trafalgar square to protest against racism, does he agree that it would be helpful if the media spent as much time covering non-violent demonstrations as a constructive protest against racism, as they did covering the violence that we saw at Welling?

Will my right hon. and learned Friend encourage the media—I know that there cannot be a law on this—to make clear in advance of demonstrations organised by the Anti Nazi League or Youth Against Racism in Europe the links between those organisations and the Socialist Workers party and Militant rather than saying it only afterwards, when the violence has been associated with those groups?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend makes some valuable points. He rightly says that those matters cannot be dealt with through legislation. They are matters for the media. I hope that representatives of the media who take note of today's debate will pay particular attention to the important points raised by my hon. Friend.

The second of the Met's core functions is partnership. Partnership between the police and the public is, of course, no new thing. The very notion of policing by consent is based on it. In recent years, partnership has seen a steady development. It is not so long since we were introduced to the idea of neighbourhood watch, which has rapidly become an established part of the fight against crime.

We need to take the partnership approach further. I sought to do that in my "Partners against Crime" campaign, which I launched in September this year. Its purpose is to encourage individuals to help the police. First, it seeks to build on and expand the achievements of neighbourhood watch. Secondly, street watch encourages people to walk round their neighbourhoods keeping their eyes and ears open for anything suspicious. People who are able to make a bigger commitment can do so by becoming neighbourhood constables.

The Commissioner has responded enthusiastically to my initiatives. He is arranging for every division to have an officer ready to assist members of the public who may want to set up a street watch scheme and has pledged the Met's full co-operation and support for the other two tiers of the programme.

I am particularly pleased to report the development of the first neighbourhood constable scheme in Wandsworth, warmly supported, I know, by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) and my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis). The 60 to 100 neighbourhood constables that Wandsworth is looking to recruit will be special constables who volunteer to patrol their local areas. They will help to provide the visible police presence, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North spoke earlier, that is needed to reassure law-abiding people and to deter criminals.

What we are seeing with the scheme in Wandsworth is what I want to see happening throughout the country. The more people sign up as neighbourhood special constables, the more the police will be able to keep crime at bay.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): The Home Secretary will know that I asked him a question earlier this week about stops and searches. I asked whether records were kept of those who are stopped and searched, but not arrested. The Home Secretary replied to the effect that that was a matter for the chief constable of each area. May I ask the Minister, as he is the police authority for London, specifically in relation to the Metropolitan police, whether records have been kept of those who have been stopped and searched, but not arrested and how those records are kept? Are they on police computers or are they written records?

Mr. Howard: I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the new powers in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. They are not yet in force, so I

[Mr. Howard]

cannot answer the question in the terms that he asks. Just as it is a matter for the chief constables of other forces, so it will be a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. The Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), may be able to add to that answer when he replies to the debate.

Some people seem to think that my partnership initiatives are irrelevant to the needs of high-crime areas. I suggest that they go to the corridors of Cowan court on London's Stonebridge estate in Harlesden. The graffiti on the walls have been replaced with neighbourhood watch signs and the corridors and walkways are now free of drug dealing. The community police constable puts that down to

"People working together and keeping an eye out for each other. It's about residents spreading the word and making others more confident about approaching the police".

That is what my partnership initiative is all about. That is why everyone needs it. I am glad to see indications of assent from the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), in whose constituency the estate lies.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary will know that I welcome greatly the direction in which he is taking that policy. It is the only way of achieving effective combating of much of the crime in inner London. Will he say that the implication of that policy is that privatising policing by handing it over to private security firms, particularly on council estates, and the setting up of alternative police forces by local authorities is far less acceptable and desirable, should not be necessary and should be resisted?

Mr. Howard: I have made it clear that the most effective way forward is that shown by Wandsworth. It involves not private policing of estates but recruiting members of the public to act as special neighbourhood constables in the closest co-operation with the police. Of course, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that neighbourhood special constables are police officers, trained, uniformed and with the powers that go with the office of constable.

Partnership goes wider than individual people getting together to help the police. It needs to involve the whole of society, including local authorities, Government Departments and local businesses, public and private. Two key problems in which partnership is of the essence are racial attacks and drugs. The Met co-operates fully in the Government's partnership initiatives to combat racially motivated crime, such as the Home Office-funded project in Newham. Racial incident units such as that at Plumstead lead the field in encouraging victims to report attacks, improving clear-up rates and offering support.

Local authorities, too, can play their part. The royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea has developed an excellent range of measures against racial harassment. Its policy is to take perpetrators of racial harassment to court and to have them evicted. The borough works with the local police to increase protection of victims' homes. There are special turn-round times for erasing racial graffiti and micro closed-circuit television schemes in problem areas. That shows what can be done.

I am confident that the legal framework for dealing with that most insidious and unpleasant of offences is now adequate. I applaud the Met in its continuing vigorous efforts, working with local authorities and a host of other agencies, to eradicate racial harassment and attacks throughout London.

Drug-related crime and drug abuse also demand a partnership approach. A good example is Operation Welwyn in King's Cross. Here a partnership between the police, local authorities, British Rail, London Transport and the local community has had a dramatic effect on drugs and prostitution in and around King's Cross station. The effective policing methods used have produced reliable evidence, which has in turn secured a high conviction rate. At Crown courts, the conviction rate for those arrested in the area for supplying controlled drugs is 97 per cent.

The Met is not, and the Government are not, under any illusion about the continuing need to fight drug abuse and the effects of drug abuse in every possible way. The Commissioner, in a speech in September, said:

"the notion that decriminalising any category of drugs would make the problem 'go away' is extremely dangerous and one that needs to be robustly countered".

I do my best to counter it robustly at every opportunity and I am grateful to the Commissioner for his active support.

The Met's recent record is highly creditable and I shall consider carefully how we can refine the targets for next year to improve performance still further. In doing so, this year I shall have the benefit of independent advice.

I said earlier that the Government are seeking, as far as possible, to apply administratively to the Metropolitan police the reforms in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. For a number of good reasons connected with the force's unique position and special role, we decided after much consideration that the holder of my office should continue to be the police authority for the Metropolitan police and should, as now, be answerable to Parliament. That did not mean, however, that the existing arrangements could not be improved and I am appointing a new body—the Metropolitan police committee—outside the Home Office to advise me on matters for which I am responsible as police authority and to help ensure that Londoners get the best value for money from their force.

I am pleased to be able to announce that Sir John Quinton, formerly group chairman of Barclays bank, has agreed to be chairman of the committee. I very much look forward to working with him and his colleagues to try to ensure that the people of London have a police service that builds on its achievements and responds even more effectively to their needs.

I shall shortly be appointing the members of the committee, with Sir John's help, from the excellent field of applications that we received. Members will be selected for their abilities as individuals and not as representatives of particular groups.

Mr. Spearing: Does not the Home Secretary realise that that announcement and policy are the opposite to that of his predecessor and that in London the municipally elected borough councils might well be a much better way of achieving what he calls an advisory committee—they run the fire brigade—than the means that he has chosen? Appointment by the Home Secretary to the advisory body

is contrary to the constitutional practices and precepts of this country and will be heavily criticised in debate in the House.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept any of that. I explained clearly when I announced my decision to have a Metropolitan police committee for London the reasons for doing so—the fact that policing in London has a national and international significance, which makes it different from policing in other areas and which makes it inappropriate to have the same sort of authority for London as we are putting in place elsewhere. I explained that fully at the time. I welcome the opportunity to explain it further to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to pursue the matter at any stage.

Mr. Cohen: How does board membership of Barclays bank make a person suitable to run a police authority for London? Will the bank put in any money to fight crime in London?

Mr. Howard: When the hon. Gentleman has had time to reflect on the matter and to look at Sir John Quinton's considerable record of public service in many areas, he will realise just how churlish his question is. I have every confidence that Sir John will be able to bring his considerable qualities, expertise and experience to those responsibilities and the people of London will benefit in consequence.

Mr. Carrington: I greatly welcome the appointment of Sir John Quinton, who will be an excellent chairman of the committee. Will my right hon. and learned Friend also consider the fact that the remit of the committee should be to co-ordinate closely with the network of police consultative groups around London, so that the input of ordinary people can be fed in and form part of the advice that is given to him, as the police authority for London?

Mr. Howard: I know that Sir John will want to do that. My hon. Friend is right in identifying those groups as having a very effective role in transmitting the views of the people of London to those who are responsible for policing it.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Will the Home Secretary advise the public in London that, despite the announcement of a ceasefire, there is still a threat from terrorism and that it could be some time before that threat to everyone in the London area goes away permanently?

Mr. Howard: Yes, I can indeed give the advice that the hon. Gentleman suggested is appropriate. We need to remain vigilant and keep up our guard.

Since the House last debated the policing of London, the Metropolitan police has had a new Commissioner, Sir Paul Condon. I pay tribute to the energy and commitment that he has shown during his first 18 months as Commissioner. I know that in the next 12 months he will be consolidating the changes that he has initiated and that he is as determined as I am to ensure that Londoners continue to get the professional service that they have come, rightly, to expect from one of the greatest police forces in the world.

10.34 am

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Throughout Britain, policing is a difficult and at times a dangerous task, but nowhere is it more complex than in the metropolis. Alongside the job of providing a peaceful environment for the capital's 7 million residents, the police in London also have to cope with the demands of 500,000 daily commuters and millions of tourists. When community care or the London health service fail, as they do all too often, the police become the social workers of last resort.

Most political demonstrations take place in London. It is the seat of government, and the home of the diplomatic corps and the royal family. It houses the headquarters of most of our businesses and social institutions, all of which places further burdens on the Metropolitan police.

On top of all of that is the alarming reality that, although the capital has only one eighth of our population and one fifth of the total police establishment of England and Wales, a huge proportion of the nation's serious crime occurs here—one third of all murders and rapes, half of all armed robberies, three quarters of all major frauds, an estimated three quarters of all illicit drug dealing and four in five of all terrorist offences.

First, I pay my tribute and that of my party to the Metropolitan police service, its Commissioner Sir Paul Condon and his 28,000 officers and 17,000 civilians for the exemplary way in which they carried out their tasks in the period covered by the Commissioner's report. In the course of their duties, one in seven officers in the London force has been injured. The number who were seriously injured increased 55 per cent. in the year in question.

The Home Secretary drew our attention to the fact that two officers, Police Constable Patrick Dunne and Sergeant Derek Robertson, lost their lives while trying to keep the peace for Londoners. We salute their work and bravery and express our condolences to their families, friends and colleagues in their bereavement.

The Secretary of State also referred to protection for the police and the development of side-handled batons and other matters that the Commissioner mentioned in his report, especially the use of protective vests and guns. None of us likes the fact that the old image of the London bobby is having to change. Some of us who are now in middle age grew up with that image. As far as we are concerned, however, the only considerations for determining whether side-handled batons, vests and other equipment should be used, are the twin and linked ones of the safety of officers and that of law-abiding members of the public.

The police in London face great and additional burdens, not least because most political demonstrations take place in the capital. I must deal with the matter that was the subject of some exchanges across the Chamber a few moments ago. I am in no doubt that the overwhelming majority of people who came to protest against the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 did so with entirely peaceful intent, and peacefully. As far as possible, they sought to co-operate with the police. It may indeed be the case that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and his colleagues who helped to organise that demonstration, on the peaceful side, could be assisted if they spoke further to the Commissioner and commanding officer of the day about the tactics used.

No one with any knowledge of some of the groups operating in London can be in any doubt that a group was intent on attacking the police on that day, regardless of what the peaceful demonstrators intended to do. That is

[Mr. Jack Straw]

the reality. I have here one of the leaflets issued by Class War just before the demonstration, headed "Keep it Spikey", which reads:

"We should pick our own pitch for the battle . . . When throwing—throw well. Don't stand so far back that you are unable to reach your target"—

the police—

"and your brick ends up cracking the back of someone's head.

Resist arrests. Struggle . . . and call for help. If you see someone else getting arrested then try to wrestle them back into the crowd."

The next passage will be of great interest to those who were organising the peaceful side of the demonstration. There are instructions to those supporting Class War to disrupt the peaceful demonstrators. The leaflet says:

"Ruffle the fluffies. There's people on the demonstration that think we should keep things calm or fluffy. These tossers were even considering spraying trouble causers with green paint to identify them to the police. They are scum, if they get in the way clout them . . . you know they won't hit you back as well."

Mr. Howard: In view of the Labour party's opposition to the changes made in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act to the circumstances in which comment can be made on someone's silence, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will read the next section of the leaflet. It reads:

"If arrested say nothing, do not make any statement to the police, don't get in to conversation with them. They only want a statement because they need it to get conviction against you or others."

Mr. Straw: I shall read the whole leaflet if the Home Secretary wishes, but I have no intention of going on for an hour as the Home Secretary did. There was a serious debate about the issue of the right of silence, and Labour supported the majority recommendation of the Royal Commission which required that there should be a pre-trial disclosure by the defence of their case. That is something that we still support.

As the Home Secretary is seeking to lower the tone of the debate—

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: Yes, he is. I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that there is something of an inconsistency between his approach to the right of silence for those charged with criminal offences and to those facing allegations of serious misconduct or fraud in running certain councils.

Thirteen years ago at the time of the Brixton riots, police and community relations in London were far less satisfactory than today, as the Scarman report spelled out. More recently, Sir John Woodcock, when chief inspector of constabulary, described the problems in the Metropolitan police with which Sir Paul's predecessor Sir Peter Imbert had to cope as coming "close to disaster".

At that time, the Metropolitan police was known as a "force". Today, it is called a "service", and that simple change in title underlines a significant and commendable change in approach from both the Metropolitan police itself and the communities which it seeks to serve.

The key to that change has been the partnership which the Metropolitan police and elected local authorities and others in London have been able to develop. Many examples are listed in the Commissioner's report, such as partnerships in Southwark, Wandsworth, Hammersmith and Fulham, Newham and many other boroughs.

The Secretary of State himself referred to the Kings Cross area—straddling the border of Camden and Islington—and to Operation Welwyn, a joint programme by the police, the two local authorities and other agencies which was actively backed by the two local Members, my hon. Friends the Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). The programme achieved an enormous improvement in the quality of life for the area's residents by dramatic and sustained reductions in the levels of drug-dealing and of open prostitution.

Local authorities have worked actively with the police across London in measures on crime prevention and on key operations like the anti-burglary Operation Bumblebee. The partnership could be developed further. The Home Office recognised that in 1991 in its own official report, the Morgan report.

The report recommended that local authorities be given a statutory lead role in conjunction with the police to develop strategies of crime prevention. The case for implementing the Morgan report is, in our judgment, stronger than ever, and it was backed recently by a Coopers and Lybrand report produced for the Prince's Trust. It is time that the Home Secretary recognised the value of going down that road.

The success of the active partnership which has developed with all local authorities across London should have removed the last tawdry excuse for denying the residents of London some formal say on the way in which their police service is run. That is overwhelmingly desired by the people of London and by most of the police too.

Under the current arrangements, the Home Secretary is the police authority for London, and this debate is the only formal occasion on which the Home Secretary can be held accountable to this House for the discharge of his duties. The debate is supposed to be annual, but this is in fact the first such debate for more than two years. The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not have the good grace to refer to that, nor did he apologise.

Sir John Hunt (Ravensbourne): Is it not possible for the matter to be raised every time that my right hon. and learned Friend answers questions?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that there could be any suggestion by holders of the office of Home Secretary that the chance of getting in once every four weeks during oral questions is in any sense a substitute for an annual debate on the report from the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police.

During a period in which Parliament has been forced to take record holidays because of the paucity of the Government's legislative programme, there is no excuse whatever for an interval of more than two years between debates on policing in London. That must not happen again. The fact that the Home Secretary and those who run the business of the House can be so cavalier about the Home Secretary's responsibility to account to the House serves only to underline the wholly unsatisfactory nature of the current arrangements.

Eighteen months ago, the Home Secretary's predecessor—the present Chancellor of the Exchequer—acknowledged that he recognised that it was time to

change the arrangements for holding the police in London to account. It is worth recording that, while the Chancellor has done many pirouettes on issues during his colourful political career, he can claim some consistency on the need for democratically elected police authorities. He, after all, was the principal author of a Birmingham Bow group pamphlet calling for regional government, which was written shortly after he became the Conservative parliamentary candidate for his constituency. The pamphlet recommended for the whole country—including London—that responsibility for the police

"should be assigned to Regional Authorities"

which were to be composed entirely of elected full-time members.

Although he later diluted the principle of wholly elected authorities, the right hon. and learned Gentleman told the House:

"I have also re-examined the role of the Home Secretary in relation to the metropolitan police. I propose to establish for the first time a police authority for the Metropolitan police on the new national model separate from the Home Office and with essentially the same tasks as police authorities elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 766.]

Six weeks later, there was a new Secretary of State, and six weeks after that, the new incumbent came to the House to wholly reverse the policy of his predecessor. In a Government notorious for vacillation and failure of nerve, that was one of the fastest U-turns on record.

We know the real reason for that about turn. It is that a few Conservative Members with Greater London constituencies could not cope with the fact that, in ever growing numbers, Londoners were freely choosing to elect Labour rather than Conservative councillors. The difference was great last year, and it has become even greater since the London borough elections in May this year.

What the Government have done in place of that, and what the Home Secretary has proposed to the House, is what they always do when they want to bypass the democratic will. They have resorted to the wheeze and the device to which they are so addicted—the appointed body, or quango. We heard the truth last night from the blessed chairman of the Conservative party—whom God preserve—about how appointments to quangos operate. He simply confirmed what we already know; that the first question asked when it comes to appointments is, "Is this person one of us?"

This quango, the Metropolitan police committee, is one without any statutory powers whatever. There is not a single word in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act about this quango. It is entirely the creature of the Secretary of State, and it does not alter by one jot the Secretary of State's anachronistic legal power as the police authority for London.

No matter how good those appointed to this committee are, and I hope that Sir John Quinton does the job that the Secretary of State hopes he will, I very much hope that the Secretary of State will not follow the chairman of the Conservative party but that he makes sure that the people appointed to the body are drawn from a wider variety of Londoners than is normally the case. The simple fact is that if those 12 people are all appointed, they cannot achieve the broader local representation in membership which other police authorities, to a limited extent, will have. The Metropolitan police committee will lack the democratic representation of other authorities.

The local accountability so loudly trumpeted by the Home Secretary's predecessor will be greatly diminished. Time and again I hear the Secretary of State justifying the decisions that have been made on the basis that they were made by an elected Government. He prays in aid the elective principle when it suits him but he fails to understand that it should apply at not only the national but the local level.

Mr. Spearing: If, in two or three years, my hon. Friend became Home Secretary, is it not likely that, especially if the chairman of the Police Advisory Council for London were a former chairman of the Trades Union Congress, Conservative Members would believe that it was fixed in a certain building on Walworth road? Does not the politically neutral person at least suspect at the moment that everything might be being arranged behind the scenes in a building on Smith square?

Mr. Straw: That is of course the case, and my hon. Friend makes a powerful argument for the democratic principle. One should trust the people to elect their representatives; they can then hold their police force, or police service, to account.

A proper police authority for London would build on the good relationship between local authorities, local communities and the police, which has already developed in the capital in recent years. Labour will establish such an authority because we believe that it is right to do so and because, above all, it would greatly assist in maintaining public confidence in the police and public understanding of the problems and difficulties that London police face daily.

We shall use the period between now and the general election to consult widely on the composition of a proper police authority for London and we shall take full account of the views of the police, magistrates and voluntary organisations as well as those of local authorities and all political parties before we come to a decision.

When the present Secretary of State executed his volte face on a London police authority, he sought to justify his about-turn in the House on the ground that the Metropolitan police have "unique national responsibilities". He went on to declaim:

"the national interest in the work of the Metropolitan police makes it right that the Home Secretary should remain the police authority for London."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1993; Vol. 227, c. 666.]

Of course, the Metropolitan police have the functions of what amounts to a national police agency, distinct from their role as London's community police service. Those national functions should, in our view, remain the direct responsibility of the Home Secretary, properly accountable to the House.

However, that in no way undermines the case for the Commissioner to be responsible to a separate police authority for his running of Londoners' police service. The Home Secretary knows that practicable schemes to secure different arrangements for the Commissioner's accountability in respect of his running Londoners' local police service and its important national police agency functions have already been worked out by his Department and Scotland Yard and were perfectly acceptable to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor.

The Commissioner's report brought the welcome news of a 5.5 per cent. reduction in recorded crime in the previous year, including a 13 per cent. drop in reported

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burglaries, thanks largely to the success of Operation Bumblebee. Some people might have criticised the operation, but we did not because we believe that it has been a great success.

The good news, although welcome, should not lead to an outbreak of complacency because, despite the overall fall, recorded crime is still 60 per cent. above the 1979 level and violent street crimes continue to increase. How London compares with other capital cities is of interest but what is of principal interest to Londoners is whether crime has increased or decreased in their city and how that affects their families. The reality is that crime has got worse over the past 15 years.

The Commissioner records in his report that the number of highly publicised racial incidents over the past year shows the pernicious effect of racism. They include the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the violent attacks on Quddas Ali and Muktar Ahmed. The number of reported racial incidents increased by 18 per cent. to more than 5,000, or 100 a week. There is a new determination by the police to tackle racism inside and outside the service but it remains a mystery why the Home Secretary should have obdurately refused proposals from hon. Members of various parties to make racially motivated violence a specific offence.

Crime and the fear of crime remains the most pressing concern for all Londoners. That places a huge psychological burden on the police while the actual load on officers has risen rapidly, despite additions to their numbers. In 1979, there were 25 crimes per officer; the total is now up one quarter to 32 crimes per officer. That brings me to the issue of resources.

The Secretary of State's explanation that he offered today, alongside the letter and notes that he sent to me yesterday, remain unconvincing. I hope that he will place in the Library a detailed breakdown, using proper comparisons, of expenditure in previous years and expenditure in the future. I believe that I heard him say that, according to his figures, the total funding for the Metropolitan police from all sources would increase from £1,616 million this year to £1,628 million in 1995-96. I see that he agrees to that. If that is the case, it represents an increase of £11.67 million or 0.7 per cent. As the gross domestic product deflator—the amount that the Treasury allows for overall inflation in the economy—is likely to rise by more than 3 per cent., it is clear that, according to the Secretary of State's figures, there is to be a real terms cut of up to 2 per cent.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): The hon. Gentleman cannot be allowed to get away with ending the formula there. He will know from what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that the Metropolitan police will benefit from the funds at present used for escort duties. They will no longer be responsible for those duties but the funds will remain with them. They will also benefit from being able to carry forward any surplus from one year to the next, which is at present taken back by the Treasury. That means that two considerable sums of money must be added to the real increase to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Straw: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is some dispute about exactly how much the Metropolitan police will benefit. Evidence supplied by the Police Federation suggests that the cost of prisoner escorts under the contracting-out arrangements is higher than that of prisoner escorts provided directly by the police.

Mr. Howard: What conceivable relevance can that have to the point made my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant)? My hon. Friend's intervention was simple. He said that the Metropolitan police were being relieved of that responsibility but keeping the resources with which they were provided to discharge it. They are not having to pay for the contracted-out service so there will be a clear net advantage of £7 million to the Metropolitan police on that account. Surely even the hon. Gentleman can recognise the ineluctable logic of that proposition.

Mr. Straw: Even if that £7 million is available—it is a still a matter of dispute—it means that the increase in the total available spend will rise from 0.7 per cent. to 1.1 per cent., which is far below the 3 per cent. inflation rate forecast for next year. I take the Secretary of State's silence to mean that he accepts that assertion. I know that when the Secretary of State acknowledges the truth of what I am saying he remains completely silent. He was also silent on the important issue of the cost of contracting-out escort services to Securicor—£128 per prisoner movement is higher than the estimated cost of £105 if the Metropolitan police do it themselves.

Mr. Howard: No. If I rose to my feet every time that I disagreed with one of the propositions advanced by the hon. Gentleman, even he would rapidly tire of the number of times that he would have to yield to my interventions. I serve notice on him that he should draw no such inference from any failure on my part to intervene, either now or in future.

On that specific point, the hon. Gentleman fails completely to take into account the value of the new important flexibility that I mentioned in my speech, which I have been able to introduce in response to a specific request from the Commissioner, and which will enable him to carry forward to next year's budget as much as 2 per cent.—£35 million—from this year's budget.

Last year, as I said, £11 million had to be surrendered even though, no doubt knowing that they would have to surrender any unspent balance, the police made every conceivable attempt to spend it as the financial year drew to a close. They will not be under that pressure this year. There is therefore every reason to suppose that the resources that will be available to them next year will be added to, not only by the £7 million in respect of the court escort service, but by a substantial sum, probably approaching £35 million, which they will be able to use as a result of that new flexibility.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for that explanation. If the Secretary of State wishes people to be less suspicious than they usually are about the figures that come from his Department, he ought to provide that type of detail when the initial announcement is made. None of that was clear from the letter that he sent me yesterday, setting out the funding of the Metropolitan police service. We shall examine with great care the funding of the service from all available sources.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I want to be absolutely sure, so that it is on the record, that the hon. Gentleman is aware, from the Home Office release yesterday, that that special

grant of £130 million is being made available for special policing for the capital. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was going on to mention that, but I wanted to be certain.

Mr. Straw: That is not in dispute, and that is taken into account in the figure of £1.628 billion that the Secretary of State gave for the next year.

Mr. Shersby: Has the hon. Gentleman read point 6 of the explanation to editors accompanying the Home Office press release on Metropolitan police funding, which states:

"This includes the power to hold cash reserves and thus carry forward unspent funds from one financial year to the next."

Anyone reading that sentence would immediately be able to relate it to the £35 million carry-over to which my right hon. and learned Friend has just referred.

Mr. Straw: I was referring to a letter that the Secretary of State sent to me. The Secretary of State did not send me his press notice. I have read it subsequently. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman sometimes receives the Home Secretary's press notices rather more swiftly than I do, although I was grateful to receive, on Tuesday, the one relating to the Budget, which showed an overall real terms reduction in resources to the Home Office of 3 per cent. during the two years 1994-95 to 1996-97.

Two matters could have a damaging effect on morale in the Metropolitan police service. The first is privatisation and so-called "market testing". The Commissioner himself records, at page 58, that, as a result of that,

"many staff are uncertain as to their future within the Service".

Secondly, the core functions review and the imposition of, in our opinion, ill-thought-out indicators, is likely to lead to diversion of police effort and a distortion of their priorities. There is, for example, anxiety in the Metropolitan police service that the so-called "contracting out" of peripheral services, such as lost property and school visits, could lead to a reduction in contact with the law-abiding public and a corresponding decline in the trust that is so necessary for good policing. Trust lies at the heart of policing by consent, and is central to the partnership approach to solving problems and improving the quality of life in the community.

The Secretary of State referred to the fight against drugs. As I told the House at the beginning of my remarks, an estimated three quarters by value of all illicit drug dealing takes place in the Metropolitan police area. Not only do drugs blight the lives of many of their users, but drug dealing is at the root of much violent street crime and additional dangers from knives and guns that confront officers in tackling that menace.

In London, as elsewhere, the fight against drugs and gun smuggling is a joint one, the police working in close and effective co-operation with Customs and Excise. The drugs problem has never been greater. In spite of relatively high seizure rates, street prices of drugs remain low and purity levels high—sure signs that large quantities of drugs continue to find their way into the United Kingdom and are then traded, usually in London.

What is the Government's answer to the rising menace of drugs and drug trafficking? On Wednesday, we had one of the most comprehensively irresponsible announcements ever made by a Minister—that the number of front-line drug fighters in the Customs and Excise is to be cut by 500. The clearest message was sent out by Her Majesty's Government to drug cartels throughout the world, and to drug barons in this country, that Britain's Tories are soft on drugs and soft on the smuggling of drugs. No wonder the permanent secretary to the Customs and Excise, Valerie Strachan, wrote to the Paymaster General before those cuts were made, to admit:

"Without doubt the tricky issue is the proposal to remove" five hundred "people from anti-smuggling [drugs] work."

The Home Secretary knows how tricky that decision will turn out to be, for he was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* on Monday as writing to protest to colleagues at those cuts. The *Daily Telegraph* also said that he had asked an interesting question—what suggestions did his colleagues have on how

"ministers could square the cuts with the Government's law and order policies"?

The Home Secretary got his answer on Wednesday. Cuts in the forces of law and order fighting the menace of drug trafficking and organised crime can no more easily be squared with the Conservatives' rhetoric on law and order than can the biggest tax hikes in peacetime history be squared with the Government's promises at the last general election to make tax cuts.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman ought not to take so seriously everything that he reads in the newspapers.

However, is not the hon. Gentleman's reaction yet another sign of the resolute refusal of the Labour party to contemplate any type of change in any sector? It refuses to contemplate even the possibility that it is possible to change the way in which we do things so that, more cost-effectively, giving better value for money, it is possible to maintain—or even improve—arrangements for tackling drug smuggling effectively, without necessarily keeping in place all the arrangements that have been there in the past.

Mr. Straw: Does the Home Secretary deny the report in the *Daily Telegraph* that he wrote to colleagues protesting at those cuts?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, if we commented on every leak of every alleged document, we would be doing little else. I make it my practice not to do so. The hon. Gentleman should not take seriously what he reads in all the newspapers and, if he is serious about his approach to those issues, he should contemplate the possibility that one can introduce changes, without reducing effectiveness, that will increase the taxpayer's value for money. That is the Government's consistent approach to the discharge of their responsibilities. Obviously, the Labour party is not remotely interested in that.

Mr. Straw: That will not do. I heard what the Home Secretary said. I think that we are entitled to draw what is called an adverse inference from his failure to answer a direct question with a direct answer. He has now in practice confirmed—we all saw that he was extremely uncomfortable as he sought to answer my question—that he wrote that letter, protesting about those cuts.

The truth is that the Secretary of State's private position is the same as the Labour party's public position. He knows that the cut of 500 people in what amounts to Customs-police work to fight drugs will seriously damage

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the fight against, not only trafficking, but organised crime and street violence in our capital. The Secretary of State should have had the authority with his colleagues to ensure that those 500 cuts were not made. That also illustrates his declining influence with his colleagues.

Mr. Stephen: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the House is therefore entitled to draw adverse inferences from the failure of himself and his hon. Friends ever to cost the extravagant promises that they constantly make to the British people?

Mr. Straw: The complaint about the Labour party these days is that we are not making extravagant promises. We make no extravagant promises. Those promises that we do make are carefully costed. That has caused great disappointment in Conservative central office.

Speaking of Conservative central office, yesterday the Home Secretary was billed by the Conservative central office press office to make what it called a "keynote" speech to the Conservative party women's conference. However, the Secretary of State pulled out at the last moment and sent his hapless Minister of State. I am not surprised that he did that because I have had the opportunity to read some of the motions that were down for debate at that conference. The Orpington association submitted a resolution urging the Government

"to give urgent attention to strengthening at all levels the Customs and Excise in their front-line duties against the evil import of drugs."

That is also our view.

However, more important than letting down delegates to the Conservative women's conference is the Secretary of State's betrayal of the victims of crime in London. He was right to say in September that victims have had a raw deal. They have indeed, and from his Government. That is because, first, the Government have presided over a 200 per cent. increase in violent crime in London since 1979 and, secondly, because they have cut the victims' compensation scheme.

They are making the victims of crime in London pay for the Government's inability to stop the rise in crime. No amount of relaunched hotlines or recycled headlines can hide that fact; nor can the Government hide the callous indifference with which many victims are still treated by the Secretary of State's Department.

A case that has recently received some publicity underlines the difficulty faced by victims in getting satisfactory answers from Whitehall. Mrs. Ann Shott watched an obsessed killer stab her husband to death 15 years ago. She has had to spend the last seven weeks in hiding because the killer, Hamish McPherson, was able to walk out of a psychiatric hospital in Beckenham. That was despite the fact that after a medical assessment, it was decided that, instead of being allowed to go free he should be returned to Broadmoor.

Since McPherson's escape, the Metropolitan police have printed numerous posters asking the public for information about his whereabouts. That is a great deal more than the Home Office has done. Mrs. Shott told me that she wrote to the Secretary of State on 4 November asking for official confirmation of Hamish McPherson's escape and an explanation of how it happened. She also sought assurances that every effort was being made to secure his capture.

Since then she has received just one perfunctory note from a Home Office official promising to look into her case. That was received on 17 November, two weeks ago, and since then she has heard nothing at all. That is unacceptable treatment of someone who was a victim 15 years ago and who is frightened to death because the man convicted of the killing is now free.

Crime is the single issue of most concern to ordinary Londoners. There will be no one in the capital who has not been touched by crime, either directly or through the experience of a close friend or relative, in the past 12 months. There can be no doubt about the commitment of the police in London to tackling crime, or about the professionalism with which they approach that difficult task.

The House wants to see the Secretary of State concentrating much more on long-term solutions to crime in London and rather less on short-term and unsuccessful populism. The long-term strategy requires us to work with local authorities and communities as well as with the police. Most of all, the Secretary of State should take the advice of the women of Shrewsbury and Atchan Conservative Association. Their resolution to the Conservative women's conference yesterday, which the Secretary of State dodged, stated, with heavy sarcasm:

"That this Conservative conference suggests that this Government wakes up to reality regarding law and order."

It is time that they did.

11.13 am

Sir John Hunt (Ravensbourne): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. In the good old days, we had regular debates on the whole spectrum of life in London. Unfortunately, over the years, that practice has fallen by the parliamentary wayside, but at least today we are debating an aspect of life in London which is of urgent and immediate concern to everyone who lives in the capital.

Nationally, Ministers rightly point to the decline in recorded crime. The latest figures show the largest fall for 40 years. However, in spite of the statistics, we must recognise that the public perception is rather different. From watching television, reading local newspapers and in conversations with friends and neighbours, we get the feeling that crime, especially burglaries and muggings, is relentlessly increasing. I appreciate that we are unlikely ever to achieve a feel-good factor on law and order, but we can, and must, provide comfort and reassurance, especially for the elderly who too often live in fear and foreboding.

One positive achievement to which we can rightly point, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has done, is Operation Bumblebee, the crackdown on burglary which was launched by the Metropolitan police in June last year. In the year before that operation was launched, there were nearly 200,000 burglaries in London; that is equivalent to more than 500 a day or one every three minutes.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said, domestic burglaries in London fell by some 17 per cent. last year. That is a major achievement and, as the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has said, Operation Bumblebee is a long-term strategy,

"which is about giving confidence to the law-abiding whilst taking it away from those who engage in burglary and related offences."

I applaud that objective.

In my experience, it is difficult to describe one's feeling of horror and devastation on returning home to find that one's house or flat has been ransacked and one's privacy violated. It is not surprising that many people, especially women, feel unable to continue to live in homes that have been burgled, and those homes have to be sold. Domestic burglary is one of the most serious crimes in the book and successive public opinion surveys in London have confirmed the concern felt by most residents of London about that.

The Commissioner speaks about giving confidence to law-abiding people, and I have no doubt that he appreciates that that confidence can be most effectively secured by the physical presence of constables on the street—not in cars or on motor cycles but pounding the beat. That has been mentioned in the debate. That is why I welcome the civilianisation programme. Up to March this year, about 400 posts had been taken over by qualified civilian staff, and a further 400 posts are scheduled for civilianisation in the coming year.

It is important to ensure that police officers who have been released by that programme are transferred to visible street duties. In that respect, I make a special plea for the allocation of additional officers to the newly amalgamated Bromley division. In the recent past, Bromley has been adversely affected by the manpower allocation formula. Chief Superintendent Keith Charlwood informed me in a letter which I received about a year ago that his complement of officers at that time was 182 compared with 203 uniformed constables in 1988. That means that there was a significant and worrying reduction in police manpower in Bromley at a time when crime was escalating.

Mr. Merchant: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his campaign in the Bromley area to increase police manpower. I assure him that he has the full support of all hon. Members who represent constituencies in the Bromley borough.

Sir John Hunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that the recent local problem of police manpower has caused great apprehension among his constituents and mine. That is because the level of protection being provided for them is less than is necessary. We hope that, as a result of my right hon. and learned Friend's speech and the Commissioner's new flexibility, more resources will be allocated to the Bromley area.

It is clearly right that police resources should be subjected to the same financial scrutiny and discipline as other areas of expenditure. Equally, I feel that any cost cutting by Government must not be at the expense of effective law enforcement. That is why I especially welcome the statement in the Budget of the Government's continued high priority for spending on law and order. I can tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the great majority of my constituents would attach much lower priority to tax cuts than they would to the maintenance of a strong and effective police force.

There is one other aspect of Metropolitan police work in London that I want to raise this morning, and it is the future role of the mounted branch. Disturbing reports have been circulating recently in my constituency that it is to be substantially reduced, especially in respect of safety patrols. For example, in Bromley there are many acres of commons and woodland where the presence of police officers on horseback is highly effective in deterring the incidents that can occur in such areas. Yet we are told that the core function of the mounted branch is to be mainly public order. That function is to be carried out with fewer horses, which in turn could mean the regrettable closure of stables in outer London, such as the Warren in my constituency, which has been part of the local community for many years.

The local assistant commissioner, Mr. A. J. Speed, tells me that a number of options are about to be discussed with his policy forum. Therefore, I hope that, before any final decisions are made, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will urgently press on the assistant commissioner and his colleagues the fact that the removal of mounted horses from my part of Greater London would be viewed by its residents as a worrying and unwise reduction in the necessary police presence in that area.

Another matter which I wish to raise relates to law enforcement and the motorist. As the Commissioner pointed out in his report, the enforcement of parking regulations in London has now been largely transferred to local authority parking attendants and the police are much less frequently involved in the clamping and removal of vehicles. That development is broadly to be welcomed as, I hope, it will enable more uniformed police officers to be released for other duties.

However, I am bound to say that I am worried by the increasingly heavy-handed and over-zealous way in which the clamping and removal of vehicles in London is carried out. Too often, cars which are harmlessly parked on a single yellow line or which have an expired residents' parking permit are subjected to clamping or removal, when a fixed notice penalty would suffice. I have a nasty suspicion that those who inflict such punishment on motorists derive a perverse pleasure from their work, and that a form of legalised sadism is operating on the streets of London.

I must make a special plea for foreign visitors and tourists who visit our city. They are often not familiar with our clamping and towing-away regulations. Therefore, they should be treated with particular understanding and flexibility, or I fear that they will take away a bitter souvenir of their stay in our country.

Mr. Carrington: As an inner-London Member, I can tell my hon. Friend that my constituents suffer considerably from illegal parking, which congests the roads and causes them great inconvenience. Surely he is not suggesting that visitors to London who park inconveniently and block the traffic should be allowed to leave their cars there while they transact their business.

Sir John Hunt: I am certainly not suggesting that. Any sort of deliberate obstruction should not go unpunished. I am simply saying that sometimes foreign cars that have been parked on a single yellow line or in a parking bay, probably quite innocently, are towed away. In other capitals—such as Paris, which I know well—British motorists are treated leniently, and we should reciprocate wherever possible. Nevertheless, I take the point that where there is deliberate obstruction and foolish parking, a case can be made for towing away the vehicle. I should be grateful if some guidance could be given to local authorities and the Metropolitan police in that respect.

[Sir John Hunt]

In his annual report, the Commissioner quoted part of his address to the community service volunteers conference in April this year. The key passage reads:

"Preventing crime is everybody's business. We in the police service cannot do it alone. The level of resources devoted to policing will never allow us to have an officer outside every door or on every street corner. And that, in all honesty, would be the only way to deter every incident of burglary or car theft."

That plea has subsequently been reflected in the Government's partners against crime initiative, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred this morning. Each of us has a part to play—perhaps through neighbourhood watch; through pub watch, which operates in almost 2,000 premises in Greater London; through business watch, which has 82 schemes under way, and so on. Such schemes in the Bromley area are to be supplemented by the introduction of closed circuit television in the town centres and multi-storey car parks.

I hope that our debate will also play its part in informing and reassuring the public so that together we have the confidence and commitment to take on the criminals and ensure the safety and security of all those who live and work in our capital city.

11.25 am

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) about the time that it has taken to get a full and proper debate on policing in London. I also agree with him on the question of accountability. The current position is unsatisfactory because the Home Secretary is the sole police authority for London. The right hon. and learned Gentleman represents Folkestone and Hythe and I do not think that he knows very much about London—other than what he has read in the newspapers, and we all know what they say about inner-city areas. I suspect that the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows more about Boulogne and Calais than about Battersea and Camden. The sooner we move away from a one-man band, the better. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said, there should be proper consultation with the people of London.

One reason for change is the need for proper accountability in the Metropolitan police. It was with that in mind that I raise the question of the role of the police in stopping and searching people in London. I have used as my source the Home Office statistical bulletin "Operation of certain police powers under PACE, England and Wales 1993". It is issue 15/94 and the other bulletin references are 14/91, 15/92 and 21/93. I have also used an answer I received from the Home Office to a question that I tabled earlier this week.

The figures show that, nationally, 256,924 people were stopped and searched by police in 1990. Of that huge total, only 15 per cent. were subsequently arrested. That means that 85 per cent. of people were stopped unnecessarily. By 1993, the figure had risen to 442,801. The percentage of those arrested as a result dropped from 15 per cent. to 12.6 per cent. That means that almost 88 per cent. of those people were stopped unnecessarily by the police.

Mr. Stephen: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman accepts that the fact that a person who was stopped was not subsequently arrested and charged does not mean that it was unnecessary to stop him. Does he agree that every law-abiding citizen should be prepared to assist the police in detecting crime and arresting criminals, and should not mind being stopped, provided the officer carries out his duties in a proper manner?

Mr. Grant: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we are all here to see that the police carry out their job properly. Citizens should, of course, work in conjunction with the police. However, as I go through my figures, the hon. Gentleman will find that in a number of cases, the behaviour of the police needs to be questioned.

There was an increase from a quarter of a million stops and searches in 1990 to almost half a million by 1993. In 1993, 385,908 people were stopped, possibly with little justification. Unfortunately, I do not have details from the police of their reasons for not arresting those people, so I have to assume that they were innocent. There has been an increase of 168,189 people—a 72 per cent. increase—in three years.

When we look at the new figures for the ethnic breakdown nationally of stops and searches, we see cause for concern. I appreciate the fact that we have those figures and I think that most people would be grateful that, for the first time, there has been an ethnic breakdown of the national stop and search figures. We have waited a long time for this and people are now saying that the figures are worth while because of what they demonstrate.

The figures are not, however, complete. Two police authorities, Gloucestershire and South Wales, have not produced any figures in relation to ethnic minorities. Five police forces gave an estimate of the various ethnic minority groups who were stopped rather than the actual figures. I do not know how the police are able to estimate what percentage of those stopped and searched were from ethnic minorities. Perhaps the Minister of State can explain the basis of the estimates. I should also like the Minister to tell me what action he will take against the forces that have not complied with the request to produce figures.

However unsatisfactory the figures may be, it is clear beyond doubt that Britain's ethnic minorities are stopped and searched disproportionately. There is also a strange method of compiling the figures. Normally, we have figures for a calendar year. In the case of ethnic minority breakdown, the Home Office has given us figures for the fiscal year 1993-94. In that fiscal year, 441,905 people were stopped and searched, of whom 110,522 were from ethnic minority groups. That means that 25 per cent. of the people stopped and searched in 1993-94 were from ethnic minority groups, yet ethnic minority groups are only 5 per cent. of the population.

That points to racial discrimination on a massive scale by the police and documents, for the first time, what ethnic minority groups have said for many years—that black and minority ethnic communities are picked on by the police in this area over and above other groups in society. The figures are consistent with figures on other parts of the criminal justice system, such as rates of conviction, the chances of getting a custodial sentence and the number of black people in the prison population. All those figures show a pattern of discrimination by the criminal justice system that is very disturbing.

The situation is more serious within the Metropolitan police area. The Metropolitan police area accounts for about 50 per cent. of the total number of people who were

stopped and searched in the country as a whole and the rate is rising alarmingly. In 1990, 150,252 stops and searches were carried out by the Metropolitan police. By 1993, the figure had increased to 228,306, which is a 52 per cent. increase in three years.

At the same time, the number of arrests resulting from the stops and searches is decreasing as a percentage of the total stops and searches. In 1990, 15 per cent. of those stopped and searched were arrested. By 1993, despite an increase of 78,054 in the number of people stopped, the figure for those arrested had dropped to 11 per cent.; in other words, a staggering 202,901 persons were stopped and searched in 1993 in the Metropolitan police area for no understandable reason. That is the position before the additional stop and search powers contained in the notorious Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 have come into force.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham has been speaking about stops and searches under existing police powers. Is he aware that many people from minority ethnic communities who are stopped, especially for alleged motoring offences, often face passport checks and immigration checks which can detain them for several hours? Such parallel inquiries are hardly ever—perhaps never—made when white people are stopped on the same ground of suspicion by the police.

Mr. Grant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If the police stop a black motorist, a check is made automatically with the immigration authorities to discover whether the person is in the country legally. That does not apply, of course, to white people and it is an area of discrimination. I hope that the Home Office will examine the matter.

It concerns me that the Metropolitan police seem to have the time and resources to stop and search about 4,500 Londoners every week, after which they arrest only about 450 of them, yet people cannot get a policeman to come to their home when it has been burgled. It seems that the police are getting their priorities wrong. I am no expert in these matters, but a rate of return of around 10 per cent. , compared with the huge number of people who are stopped and searched, seems to be a little ridiculous. The police would be better spending their time on other matters of greater priority to the citizens of London.

When we consider the ethnic breakdown for the Metropolitan police area in the fiscal year of 1993-94, we find that no fewer than 95,751 people from ethnic minority groups were stopped and searched. That means that 42 per cent. of the total number of people who were stopped and searched in London were from black and minority ethnic communities. When we compare that with the population of London, where something like 8 per cent. of the population are from black and minority ethnic communities, we see the huge difference in how the police behave toward those communities. People living in black and minority communities are five times more likely to be searched. Would the Minister explain to the black and minority ethnic population of London what exactly is going on?

I would like hon. Members to do what I have done on a number of occasions—to observe, whenever they see the police stopping and searching either a motorist or someone in the street, what sort of person is stopped. Is it a black person or a white person? They will find, invariably, as I have found, that most of the people who are stopped and searched are black. I also want hon. Members to do what I do now—to get out of their car and ask the police officer why they are stopping or searching a person. Hon. Members will find that the police give some very strange responses.

I stopped the other day in Tottenham and asked a police officer why he had stopped a black motorist. He told me that he had stopped him because the motorist had taken a circuitous route to get from where he was to Tottenham high road. I thought that that was a little strange. I asked, "What do you mean?" The policemen said, "Oh, well, he went through all the back streets." I said that I did not know that it was against the law for someone to drive in the back streets. The young man piped up and said that the reason he went through the back streets was to drive by his friend's house and see if his friend's car was there. To the police, the fact that a black person was driving through the back streets in Tottenham was enough to stop and search that person.

On another occasion, I was told that the reason a motorist had been stopped was that his fog light had been on. On a third occasion, the police said that the motorist's L plate was displayed wrongly. I am at a loss to understand why someone's fog light being on is a reason to search that person's car. Perhaps there is something wrong with me, but it does not, somehow, seem to add up that someone's L plate being in the wrong position should be a reason for stopping and searching that person.

When I looked at the Tottenham figures in particular, I found that, in the second quarter of 1993, 1,233 people were stopped and 124 people were arrested as a result. In the same period of 1994, that figure had risen to 2,403 people stopped and 205 people arrested as a result. In a period of 12 months, there was a 95 per cent. increase in the number of people who were stopped—almost double the number in the previous year. At that rate, in one year about 10,000 of my constituents in Tottenham will be stopped by the police, and searched, and the majority of them will be stopped for no reason.

I want to ask Home Secretary, what possible justification is there for that sort of police harassment of citizens in my area? Has there been an upsurge in crime, perhaps? No, we know from the Home Secretary's speech this morning that there has been a 5 per cent. decrease in crime in London as a whole. I know from interrogating the police superintendent in my area, before he was retired as a result of the new organisation, that, for a fact, crime in Tottenham decreased over that period. So we see on the one hand a decrease in crime, but on the other a dramatic increase in the number of people who are stopped and searched.

One begins to attach all sorts of motives to why the police are acting in this way in Tottenham and one remembers that in 1984-85, before and just after the introduction of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Tottenham was singled out as a experimental area in which to try out that Act. I hope that Tottenham is not used as another trial area, this time for the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. I hope to hear assurances from the Minister on that in his winding-up speech.

We all understand the need to adopt a preventive approach to crime, but there is a balance to be struck between preventing crime and ensuring the civil liberties of my constituents in Tottenham and the citizens in Britain as a whole. On 7 November, I asked the

[Mr. Grant]

Tottenham police for a breakdown of figures into ethnic minority groups, but I have not had a reply. I do not understand why it is so difficult to give me a breakdown of ethnicity because, of course, the Tottenham police must have submitted those figures and given that breakdown to the Metropolitan police for them to pass them on, as part of the Metropolitan police area, to the Home Office. I suspect that the police are dragging their feet in letting me have those figures on ethnicity because of the large numbers of people from minority ethnic groups who have been stopped, especially in Tottenham.

I believe that stopping and searching a person for no good reason is an abuse of that person's human rights. The Government are always going on about human rights in various parts of the world and they are involved in United Nations organisations, commissions and conferences on human rights, but we are seeing more and more that people's human rights are abused right here in the United Kingdom.

When the police stop and search someone in public, it is a humiliating experience and it causes enormous resentment. A young man told me that, during a period of three months, he was stopped 23 times by police officers and had to produce his various documents in police stations soon after. When people are stopped in public, their cars are stripped, they have to undergo great humiliation and it creates a lot of resentment. I cannot stress enough the resentment that those actions cause in many people.

Also, of course, stopping and searching people wastes time, because by the time the police run their checks on whether the car is stolen or whether the person is a legal migrant or not, often half an hour or three quarters of an hour has passed. The person stopped has to waste all that time, as well produce documents at the police station.

The Secretary of State must explain the figures today. As he is the police authority for London, he must tell us today how he intends to pick up a point made by one of his hon. Friends about the fact that police officers are expected to act in a reasonable and fair-minded manner. How is the Home Secretary going to safeguard people's rights and, in particular, the rights of people from minority groups in London? How is he going to safeguard their rights against the abuses of some police officers?

My final point for the Home Secretary relates to the collection of statistics by the police. Every year, nearly 500,000 people are stopped and searched in Britain. If a written account is made of every stop and search, where do those documents go? Are they destroyed or are they kept on a police computer? We want to know what has happened in relation to people who have been stopped and released without charges or any further action being taken against them. We want to know whether people's names, addresses and car registration numbers are being systematically logged in a police computer somewhere in the Metropolitan police district.

I am aware that the police have a difficult job to do and I believe that, in general, the Metropolitan police do a good job. However, I must question their behaviour in certain areas and, in particular, the way in which police have behaved at certain demonstrations and have used their powers of stop and search basically to intimidate certain communities in London. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer some of those questions today.

11.51 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this very important debate on the policing of London. I also welcome the opportunity to listen to my police authority speaking in the House. There is great value in the Home Secretary having the opportunity to come to the House to speak in this debate. The 84 Members of Parliament elected by the people of London also have the opportunity to come here, if they so wish, to speak and to question their police authority.

Mr. Corbyn: Where are they?

Mr. Shersby: As the hon. Gentleman points out, it is a pity that more of them are unable to be present today due to the pressures on all hon. Members' diaries to be here or in their constituencies.

I welcome the appointment of the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), as the Minister responsible for the police. I welcome the fact that he is a member of this House. I have always felt that, despite the great distinction with which his predecessors held that post, they were often in another place. It is particularly helpful that the Minister with direct responsibility for the police sits in this place.

The "Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis 1993-94" reveals a record of solid achievement by the Metropolitan police that should be welcomed by everyone living in the Metropolitan police district. My constituency of Uxbridge is in the Metropolitan police area and I therefore want to comment on behalf of my constituents on some of the achievements referred to in the Commissioner's report. At the same time, I must declare that I am a parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales. My principal purpose today is to speak in the debate on behalf of the people who elected me to this House.

My first substantial duty in speaking in the debate is to join my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in saying, on behalf of my constituents, that we express our deep gratitude to two Met officers—PC Patrick Dunne and Sergeant Derek Robertson—who lost their lives while carrying out their duty of policing the streets of London.

As parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation, I attended the funerals of both officers—as I always do on such sad occasions. Those funerals were quite outstanding and they made me feel that those two officers will be remembered by the people of London with pride and affection for many years to come. Their names will appear on the roll of honour of the police officers of the metropolis long after all of us have left this place and have been forgotten.

On behalf of my constituents, I want to record their sense of outrage about the number of assaults on police officers which have occurred in the past year and which have resulted in 3,902 officers being injured while doing their duty. Knives were used in 15.8 per cent. of those cases. That is a very serious matter and that was why I intervened in the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to welcome the new provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which give the police the power to search for knives in certain very restricted circumstances. They have not had that power for more than 10 years. Such a power was

desperately needed and I believe that it will result in a substantial reduction in the number of injuries inflicted on police officers.

The more serious of the assaults that the police have suffered resulted in a 55 per cent. increase in the number of officers being placed sick. The figure rose from 648 to 1,007. When we talk about police man and woman power on the streets of London, we must always remember that a number of them are unable to perform their duties because of the injuries that they have suffered.

I am therefore very encouraged to learn that the Met has now adopted and issued the new-style batons that are now in daily use by Met officers. I campaigned vigorously for the introduction of the side-handled baton and the new straight batons that are now seen on the streets of London. The fact that they are seen and in use has been made possible by the rapid decisions taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary immediately he took office, which enabled testing and approval of the new batons to proceed without delay and which enabled them to be issued immediately the tests were satisfactorily completed.

When my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, I would like to know what arrangements for high-quality training are being made for the use of the new batons in the Met area. I would also be interested to know whether the side-handled baton is to be used in the Met area in addition to the straight batons and, if so, what allocation of resources is being made for the training that is necessary to use that particular piece of equipment.

I also welcome the issue of stab-proof and dual-purpose body armour, which should play an important part in protecting officers from serious assault in future. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will also be able to tell us what progress is being made by the police scientific development branch in evaluating the effectiveness and safety in use of the pepper spray. Is that a piece of equipment that we shall see in use in this country? It has been in use in the United States for many years now, I understand with considerable success, and it would be interesting to know whether it is likely to be introduced in our country.

I was particularly glad to hear my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement that a new trunked radio system is to be introduced for the Met. It is a very important system and it will be greatly welcomed by every serving officer. However, will that system be fully encrypted?

I ask that question because my home was burgled while I was attending the large police demonstration at Wembley stadium during the debate on the Sheehy report. Naturally, the burglary caused great amusement among not only the Opposition but the media. I voted in a Division at about 11 o'clock, and when I arrived home I was telephoned by a journalist from one of the national dailies who was formerly on the *Uxbridge Gazette* and who told me the most unwelcome news.

I asked how that information had come so quickly to that journalist's ears. Although it is a tradition that all good journalists do not reveal their sources, I have now discovered that it was probably picked up from local police radio transmissions. Like many other pieces of news which appear in the media and which sometimes are used by the criminal fraternity, they are picked up because police radios are not fully encrypted. I greatly support encryption, and I hope that it will be supported strongly by any other hon. Member who suffers the same fate as I suffered.

If we examine statistics dealing with violence against the person, we find that fewer than 2 per cent. of all offences involved a firearm. If, however, we look at statistics on offences involving assaults on police officers, we find that firearms were used in 41 assaults, compared with six in 1992-93, and that firearms were fired in 23 of those incidents.

That is a significant increase, although, in comparison with almost any other country, firearms were used on very few occasions. As a result of that, the Commissioner tells us in his report that a larger number of officers should be openly armed. He has also altered the arrangements governing the use of armed response vehicles so that officers can draw and wear their arms overtly when dealing with serious incidents in which firearms are likely to be used.

I know that the Commissioner is the first to realise that members of the public will be concerned about the increasing visibility and carrying of firearms by police officers. However, hon. Members who attended their party conference this year will agree that, far from feeling threatened by the overt carrying of firearms, one feels protected, because the officers carrying them are extremely responsible and highly trained. Their only purpose in carrying firearms is to protect innocent citizens and, when necessary, themselves.

I do not believe that we have reached or are even approaching a situation that would result in every police officer being armed as a matter of routine and wearing a sidearm as part of his or her uniform. I hope that that will prevail for many years. Instead, a very small number of officers carry firearms and use them in very limited circumstances. Obviously, that matter must be kept under review by the Commissioner and by hon. Members.

Another aspect of the use of firearms in the metropolis is, of course, the use of imitation firearms. Imitation firearms, as we know, can be purchased easily from several sources. Many are used for harmless purposes, such as starting athletic matches or playing war games. Many are simply collected. However, a considerable number have been used to threaten unlawful violence during robberies carried out on banks, post offices, building societies and similar establishments.

For that reason, I introduced the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1994, which had the full support of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the home affairs spokesmen of the other six parties in the House. The Bill achieved an unopposed passage through both Houses and it has now received Royal Assent.

I should like to express my gratitude for the support that I received from my right hon. and learned Friend, from the Leader of the Opposition when he was responsible for the Opposition home affairs portfolio, from my noble Friend Lord Kimball, chairman of the firearms consultative committee, and from Chief Inspector Colin Fry of the Dorset constabulary. The Act is a small but significant measure, which should help to reduce the improper use of imitation firearms in the commission of criminal offences.

Mr. Corbyn: I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says about the need to curb the use of imitation firearms and the need for there to be an equivalent

[Mr. Corbyn]

offence. However, will he go further and question the need for the manufacture and sale of virtually identical replica weapons which, to all intents and purposes, look, sound and act like the real thing? They are very easy to buy, they require no licence, and nobody can tell the difference until they are used.

Mr. Shersby: I have indeed asked myself such questions, and I have investigated them in depth, with the benefit of expert advice. I have also discussed them with my noble Friend Lord Kimball, in his important role as chairman of the firearms consultative committee. The difficulty is that millions of imitation firearms are in circulation. It would be very difficult to prohibit their existence and to attempt to recall them. We have to find another way of tackling the problem.

The way that was chosen was to make it a criminal offence to threaten unlawful violence with an imitation firearm and to stiffen the law relating to trespass so that if an individual is found with an imitation firearm in suspicious circumstances, it can be confiscated easily by a police officer. I sympathise with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), but it is probably impracticable to try to remove from circulation millions of pistols and other weapons such as machine guns and all the rest of the huge arsenal of imitation weapons that are sold quite openly. We shall have to keep that matter under review. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that point, because it is important.

The debate provides an opportunity for the House to review the effectiveness of the Metropolitan police in dealing with crime in the capital. As my right hon. and learned Friend and others have said, it is extremely satisfactory to record that the incidence of burglary is down by 17 per cent. as a result of Operation Bumblebee. It is also satisfactory to record that there were 5 per cent. fewer notifiable offences in the year ended 31 March. As the Commissioner pointed out in his report, it is the first time since 1988 that there has been a fall in recorded crime. Every hon. Member who represents a London constituency should be pleased to read that statistic. At the same time, it is good to know that the Metropolitan police has increased the number of crimes solved by 6 per cent. to 159,993 and that it has set a target to increase that number even further.

My constituents in Uxbridge are particularly pleased about the success of Operation Bumblebee. They have suffered grievously from burglary in the past few years, as have those who are represented by other London Members. It is interesting to note from the Commissioner's report that in about a third of the burglaries in 1992-93 the burglar did not even have to break in but entered through an open door or window. An enormous amount can be done by every citizen to make sure that his or her home is more secure—for example, by fitting window locks and good strong deadlocks, and other such precautions that would dramatically reduce burglary statistics. The importance of crime prevention cannot be understated, and the Met should pay it full attention in the year ahead.

I suppose that one of the curses of living in modern society is the very unpleasant and upsetting crime which includes the theft and unauthorised taking of motor vehicles, theft from vehicles and aggravated vehicle taking, which accounts for a staggering 25 per cent. of all offences committed in the Metropolitan police area. I am pleased to see that the number of auto crime offences reported has reduced by 8 per cent. compared with the previous year.

I would like to speak about one aspect of auto crime that I do not think has been mentioned in the House before. It concerns the unauthorised taking of hire cars, which is a source of serious concern to rental companies. One such company, Eurodollar, is situated in my constituency. Its chairman, Mr. Freddie Aldous, tells me that the theft of hire cars is a serious and increasing problem.

It is therefore good to know that, as a result of the initiative taken by some motor manufacturers—particularly Vauxhall, which has won the annual award for safer cars several years in succession, and the Rover group—their attention to the security of vehicles is paying off and it is becoming more difficult to steal cars than it was in the past. I hope that other motor manufacturers, urged on by the insurance companies, will follow the lead of Vauxhall and Rover and make it even more difficult to steal, or steal from, parked vehicles in the Metropolitan police area.

I know that the House shares my concern that, in the robbery category, a 9 per cent. increase in robberies of personal property, or muggings as they are generally known, was mentioned in the Commissioner's report. Robberies of personal property accounted for more than 80 per cent. of the total of 24,593 offences. Although in 65 per cent. of cases there was no evidence of a weapon being carried, the fact that about 23 per cent. of cases involved the threat or use of a sharp instrument, such as a knife, and 9 per cent. involved firearms, is very worrying. In my judgment, it fully justifies the additional powers given to the police in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

When we consider offences such as burglary and robbery, it is encouraging to see from the Commissioner's report that the number of offences cleared up increased by 10 per cent. between April 1993 and March 1994, with the result that 3,443 robberies were solved. I suppose that that is still a modest number in comparison with the total, but the increase is encouraging.

The problem of domestic violence causes me great concern, as I am sure it concerns every other Member who represents a London constituency. Every time we organise a constituency advice bureau, we are made increasingly aware of the problem and of the fact that non-violent domestic disputes, which are closely related to it, account for many homeless people in our capital city.

More than half the additional 3,192 reported offences of crimes against the person were related to domestic violence. What is being done about that very unpleasant problem, which brings such misery to London households? In his report, the Commissioner tells us that London has 62 domestic violence units and that 126 officers provide the focal point for victims and all the other agencies involved in the prevention of the problem. I particularly welcome the examples of local initiatives that address the needs of victims of domestic violence and to which the Commissioner referred.

One of those initiatives is a joint project between the London borough of Hillingdon, local police and students from Brunel university. It provides a help line to supply

details of local organisations that can offer support for victims of domestic violence and racial attacks, whether or not the matters are reported to police. Brunel university, which is situated in my constituency, is playing a valuable part in that project. I hope that the project will be a great success and that it may be expanded to other parts of Greater London.

I am the president of Uxbridge Victim Support, which, as hon. Members know, does excellent work in counselling victims of crime in the London area. I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for the financial support that the Home Office has provided to victim support organisations. While I suppose that there will never be enough money to satisfy the wishes of victim support schemes around London, nevertheless they are making a very valuable contribution. That is much appreciated and I pay tribute to them in the House today.

A particularly interesting aspect of the Commissioners's report, which I am sure that hon. Members who represent constituencies in west London will have noted, is the section which deals with the improvement of road safety. The constant reduction in the number of road deaths from 601 in 1984 to 311 in 1993 is greatly welcomed. In particular, the use of automatic speed enforcement cameras appears to have had a dramatic effect.

The selection by the police, in conjunction with the Department of Transport, of 21 sites on the west London approach roads to conduct a pilot scheme into the effectiveness of enforcement cameras has yielded some very impressive results. There have been 41 per cent. fewer fatal and serious accidents, 24 per cent. fewer accidents generally and a reduction in all casualties of 22 per cent. Hon. Members would have been astonished to contemplate such substantial reductions and such effectiveness of the equipment only a few years ago. The pilot scheme has saved at least 16 lives and prevented more than 200 accidents in the first year of its operation. It has also reduced traffic light violations by more than 50 per cent. in the same period.

It is interesting to note that the net reduction in accidents has saved £14.6 million, thus benefiting taxpayers and London council tax payers who have had to foot the bill. I think that we can derive great satisfaction from that section of the Commissioner's report.

I also record my appreciation of the steps that the police are taking to deal with the very worrying problem of trafficking in controlled drugs, which continues to be such a menace in our society. It is good to see that the number of people arrested for trafficking in controlled drugs increased by 3 per cent., from 1,935 to 1,984 in 1993-94.

I strongly support the partnership approach that was announced by the Home Secretary to raise awareness and stimulate action in dealing with the drugs problem in London. The police should be in no doubt that they have the full support of Parliament in their difficult and often dangerous job, particularly in tackling drug dealers who are frequently armed and very dangerous.

I conclude by referring to this year's settlement. I believe that the Metropolitan police will welcome the £1,628.56 million—an increase in cash terms of 0.7 per cent.—that they will receive from central Government in 1995-96. I believe that they will also welcome their ability to retain the £35 million underspend, which can also be retained in the future.

This matter resulted in an exchange between the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn. I have looked at the matter very carefully and, recognising as we all do how difficult it is for organisations such as the Metropolitan police to hit their budget exactly in terms of expenditure, I believe that it should be appreciated immediately that the ability to carry over the unspent amount of their budget each year—which is some £35 million this year—will be very valuable for future planning. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is to be commended for making that change.

I also welcome the fact that the cost of funding the privatised prison escort service will not be clawed back. As we have heard today, that is another £7 million which will remain in the Metropolitan police budget. As a result of studying the figures, we can be assured that there is no need on financial grounds to reduce the number of police officers serving in London. It is clear beyond doubt from the settlement that my right hon. and learned Friend has listened to those who have expressed fears about the possibility of the major cuts in funding that have been trailed extensively in the media. Those fears are now seen to be groundless.

I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee. I frequently have to ask myself whether the taxpayer is getting good value for money for a particular service under scrutiny. In the case of the Metropolitan police, there is no doubt whatever that they are providing excellent value for money. I quote one short passage from the Commissioner's report:

"Since 1990, the percentage of officers employed in operational posts has increased from 82.9 per cent. to 87.8 per cent. The civilianisation of police posts is also an important aspect of this process. In 1993/94, 403 posts were civilianised from a target of 550 and efforts are underway to fill the remaining 147 posts. By the end of 1994/95, we intend to release a further 400 police posts through civilianisation. This process confirms our determination to ensure that the optimum number of police officers is employed at the point of service delivery, on divisions, and that they receive the appropriate support."

The House and my fellow members of the PAC will rightly conclude that the Metropolitan police are giving the people we represent not only excellent value for money but a first-class service tailored to the needs of London, and that we have in Sir Paul Condon a Commissioner who is well aware of the sensitivities of the people of London and who pays close attention to our remarks not only in such a debate as this, but during the valuable opportunity that London Members have once or twice a year to meet him and his senior colleagues to discuss matters that affect our constituencies so directly.

12.21 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I join other colleagues in paying tribute to, and thanking the police for, the work that they do on our behalf. I believe that we are united in doing that. It is only right that I should couple that tribute with tributes not only on my behalf but on behalf of my party to the two officers who died this year on duty in the service of the community in London. We owe a lot to police officers who go where others are unwilling or unable to go. If they make the supreme sacrifice, we must be greatly indebted to them, and we send their relatives and friends our condolences.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Today's debate is important. It was lamentable that we did not have it last year. The Minister of State is on the Front Bench—I welcome the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) to his job—but if the only occasion for full-blown accountability of the police authority for London to London Members of Parliament occurs once a year, the Home Secretary, whatever the other pressures on him, ought to be here for the whole debate. I know that we all have pressures on Fridays, but it is the only time in a year that London's police authority is held accountable. Every other police authority meets and is accountable to its public regularly.

Not only have we not had a debate for two years, which I hope will never happen again, but the Home Secretary has not remained for it. I hope that, in future, he will clear his diary, as he will always have the opportunity to discuss the business of the House with the business managers so that planning can take place. I hope that we can have a regular date for the debate that fits in with the pattern of the publication of the Commissioner's report and strategy documents so that the debate takes place as part of a regular cycle.

I welcome, as the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) did, the opportunities during the year for Members of Parliament with constituencies within the Metropolitan police district to meet the Home Secretary as the police authority. I valued my recent meeting with him. That is an important constituency requirement. It is obviously also right that there is a regular meeting between London Members and the Commissioner and his senior officers.

As this is the first debate since the new Commissioner took office—it seems a long time ago and must seem so to him—I welcome him to his post. It was a good appointment. He came with a good reputation and record, and he has vindicated it in office already. We wish him well.

The two major political matters that have affected the Met in the past year, apart from funding and resources, with which I shall deal in a moment, are the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and, at the other end of the spectrum, the debates about criminal injuries compensation.

On the first, I state clearly that the Home Secretary was right to say that those who fomented the violent protests were a small minority who were entirely unrepresentative and clearly anarchistic. Many more people were unhappy about parts of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, as I was. Many people rightly protested, as they should have the right to do. I hope that we will never confuse the actions of small numbers of anarchists with the right to dissent and proper debate about the merits of the issue.

Mr. Stephen: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, for all practical purposes, it is impossible to prevent anarchists from mingling with otherwise peaceful demonstrators?

Mr. Hughes: It is impossible to prevent anarchists mingling with the hon. Gentleman. That is a rather silly question.

Mr. Corbyn: Would they wish to?

Mr. Hughes: Whether they would wish to or not. The police have intelligence about anarchists. That is part of the job of the police. Indeed, the security services also have intelligence about anarchists acting against the interests of the state. It is difficult to single out anarchists, but the police are trained to pick out and identify the troublemakers.

I have been on many demonstrations in my life. One can have difficulty in identifying everyone who is there to make trouble, but most people are not. I hope that the implication of the hon. Gentleman's intervention is not that there should not be an absolute right to protest, particularly against legislation proposed by the Government, especially when they are a minority Government in terms of their support in the country.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): And in the House.

Mr. Hughes: And, indeed, in the House. According to opinion polls, the Government are not supported by about 80 per cent. of the population. So the right to protest is hugely important. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that, in every respect, that must be upheld as a basic civil liberty of all citizens at all times.

Mr. Stephen: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the right to protest does not include the right to intimidate or obstruct, nor does it include the right to bring the life of a great city to a standstill for eight hours or more whenever one pleases?

Mr. Hughes: On the first issue, no, it does not give one the right to break the law. Different police forces and officers respond differently. Some services and officers are better than others at coping with such issues.

The right to bring the city to a halt may be a consequence of the right to protest, just as a state visit, bad weather and traffic disruption often may have that consequence. Having the right to protest does not mean that one has any less of a right to bring the city to a halt than a foreign Head of State, whose visit closes many roads in our capital city.

Fear that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board will not adequately compensate victims has also caused anxiety. The hon. Member for Uxbridge expressed concern for victims of crime, and they must continue to be one of our principal concerns. They are badly represented in our legal system and often do not get a voice at inquests or trials. The Home Secretary's announcement that representations will be made possible is inadequate. We must seriously consider the way in which we can meet the worries of the bereaved and of victims who survive.

The good aspect of the past year was the fact that there was more collaboration between the police and local authorities and communities. That is improving all the time. In Southwark, for example, there have been two very effective campaigns, although they have not yet achieved all that we would wish for. One campaign is against racial harassment and has involved lots of posters and educative material to show that harassment is a crime; this has had some positive effects.

The other campaign is to get across the message that street robbers are normally cowards. Although this is not a London matter, that is shown in the way someone attacked a 100-year-old woman in Northern Ireland last night. How can people be in any way normal if they attack the elderly, frail and vulnerable? Older people and vulnerable people need the most stringent protection. It is

normally young thugs who attack people in the streets and they need the severest penalty. I can say without qualification that they should be dealt with in the most severe way. One cannot argue against dealing ferociously with offences against the person.

In addition, in Southwark, after a spate of racial incidents on an estate near the Elephant and Castle, we achieved much good collaboration over the production of guidelines for those concerned about, or the victims of, racial attacks. The Rockingham estate now has an anti-racist group, which has led the work with the community and the police and been highly successful.

Only yesterday, at the invitation of the police, I went to see their junior citizenship scheme, in which children in their last year of primary school are monitored and tutored by young people at secondary school and professionals and given training in life experiences—including very real ones such as burglaries and robberies—and in what they should do. I pay tribute to that scheme.

May I say a word on behalf of the police on a matter on which they unfairly got a bad press? Colleagues will remember a controversial incident earlier in the year—I accept my part in the controversy—when an immigration service raid took place on Southwark council employees, agency employees and alleged employees, about 10 days before the local elections. The police were unhappy about the position that they were put in by having suddenly to detain many suspected illegal immigrants in police stations. They were seen to be the front-line force whereas it was an immigration service initiative. Such problems must be dealt with more accurately, honestly and satisfactorily. The problem was compounded when the immigration service issued a press release which was clearly untrue and added to the discomfort caused by the incident and its unfairness.

We use this debate to examine the Commissioner's annual report and consider the service's priorities. On the priorities formulated for next year, we welcome the fact that there is now an annual corporate strategy document and, as it were, a rolling corporate strategy priority document. We should include as a police priority an improvement in the detection of, and effective action against, not merely people with guns but those people involved in the criminal use of knives, which is growing apace. I hope that that will be a priority for the coming year. Combating racial attacks is another matter that is not a priority for this year, but ought to be for the next.

Perhaps the fact that drug dealing and combating it was not a priority this year may explain why the decision about Customs and Excise personnel was allowed to go through this week, but I shall return to that matter.

I hope that all our tributes to the police will not make them complacent. They should not feel that those compliments enable them to be. However good the charter figures may be—for example, the figure of 90 per cent. for arriving at an urgent incident within 12 minutes—there are occasions when things go badly wrong and the police do not appear, the phone is not answered and one receives no reply to a letter. For example, one of my Southwark councillor colleagues recently complained to me about the fact that it was weeks before he received any answer to a telephone call and his request for information. The police must remember that they, like us, are paid for through taxes and that they are locally accountable as a public service.

I shall deal with the funding issues, because we need to tie down the debate about funding. The hon. Member for Uxbridge referred to that matter, but I want to ask the Minister some direct questions with which I hope he will deal when he winds up. The Commissioner made it clear that one of his purposes was to take officers out of Scotland Yard and put them on the streets, and he originally cited a figure of 700 officers.

In an answer to me, the previous Minister of State—now Under-Secretary for Energy and Industry—said:

> "Extra resources made available for civilianisation of non-operational posts currently filled by police officers will enable 400 officers to be released for operational duties in 1994-95."—[*Official Report*, 21 April 1994; Vol. 241, c. *637*.]

By the end of this year, how many officers will have been moved from desk-bound jobs to the street? Will it be only 400, or the 700 that was originally intended? Will the establishment of the Metropolitan police be the same as it is now—the Minister has asserted that it will be—or bigger next year? There have been statements that the 28,000-officer strength would be reduced by up to 2 per cent., and I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us whether that will be the case. We need to know whether the numbers have gone up.

A problem for the London police service is that the Home Secretary is a bit like the Lord High Everything Else in "The Mikado": he asks himself for more resources, and then refuses his own request. I understand that this year the Metropolitan police service—for which the Home Secretary is the police authority—asked for 150 more officers, and got none. In the previous year, it asked for 357 and got 50. It was only three years ago, when it asked for 22 and got 22, that it appears to have succeeded—probably because of its then much more modest bid.

If the Commissioner is saying this year that there ought to be more Metropolitan police, the words of the hon. Member for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt) ought to be heeded. It would cost £4.5 million to fund the extra police requested, and I believe that the public would wish that money to be spent on funding the police, rather than given back to them in tax cuts. I hope that the Government understand that that is certainly the message that I receive loud and clear from my constituents. I doubt if any hon. Members get a different message throughout the capital city.

Is the current strength of the Metropolitan police up to its establishment and, if not, by how much does it fall short? On funding, the hon. Member for Uxbridge said that there would be a 0.7 per cent. increase in the coming year. As that is less than inflation, I ask the Minister to confirm that in real terms there will be a cut in funding of the Metropolitan police service next year. If that is the case, it is regrettable, but we ought to be told the truth.

The Government and the Home Secretary have announced that they have been looking among police forces for a funding formula for the country, and that came from the legislation. There is also a funding exercise going on in London between areas and divisions. I would like to know how far that has proceeded.

Is it true—I have this on very high police authority—that there can be funding for CID operations which give them equal numbers of personnel in an area where there are three serious incidents to investigate and in an area where there are 33? Those were the figures given to me. I was told that, in my area, there are 33 serious incidents,

[Mr. Hughes]

but that we had the same number of CID officers as an outer-London area with three serious incidents on the books.

We need to know what the formula is, because, although I understand the arguments put on behalf of the citizens of Bromley—similar views were put last year by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant)—the incidence of serious crime is more concentrated in inner London than in outer London, and resources ought to be allocated accordingly. As a postscript, is the unemployment rate taken into account in the formula? If so, it is not possible for the Home Secretary to pretend that police resources and unemployment are unrelated.

The Home Secretary is the police authority. I accept that that will not be changed before the next election but hope that, if there is a change of Government, we shall have an elected and accountable police authority for London. My colleagues and I favour that proposition. Given that we are not to have a police authority now, however, I welcome the formation of a police committee and have no reason not to welcome the appointment of its chairman. I look forward to its composition being balanced in terms of age, sex and background and hope, in particular, that at least one young person will be included in order to represent the young people of London. The link between the advisory committee, the police and community consultative groups and the neighbourhood forums needs to be clearly established.

Like other hon. Members, I welcome the community consultative group's structure, but there is frustration at that level because often they are not consulted. For example, often an announcement is made about the Met on which they have not been consulted. The problem of resources is one such issue. The time for consultation on the new resource allocation formula for London had passed before the matter came to the consultative committee, which is nonsense.

As we have consultative committees we should use them. The hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) rightly pointed out their importance. They are groups of good people; they are willing to get on top of the issues and have good and honest dialogue with the police. At the moment, they provide good bottom-up information, but they are not much good at responding to top-down proposals and initiatives.

Who will service the advisory committee? It is important that it should not be civil servants accountable to the Home Office. The relevant people should be accountable to the Metropolitan police service and therefore independent of the Home Office and able to stand up to it if necessary.

The two big issues in my community at present are the policing of estates and neighbourhood noise. In general terms, the crime figures have improved. In Southwark, notifiable offences are down, the clear-up rate is up, residential burglaries and auto crime are down and there have been more arrests. However, as the hon. Member for Uxbridge mentioned generally, sexual offences and incidents of domestic violence are up. In addition, violence against the person, racial incidents and street crime are up. I endorse in particular what the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of tackling the increase in domestic violence, which appears to be growing ineluctably.

The policing of estates and the way in which the police work with the community are, not surprisingly, engendering the biggest debate. This year, public policing has been under threat of being replaced by private policing. I believe that private security firms or forces are the least desirable form of policing our cities, town and estates, and local authority police, separately run and separately managed, run the risk of dividing the responsibility for law and order on the streets of London and elsewhere. I believe that the Home Secretary has the right policy and I strongly encourage him to develop it. The best way forward is to develop estate-based and community-based policing carried out by the police, special constables and ordinary people.

Last year, I was privileged to witness a successful similar scheme on the city council housing estates in New York. Police officers and the residents were together ensuring that those estates were among the most crime-free areas in New York. Officers who know the patch work with local people who live there, often acting as concierges in blocks, with radios, walkie-talkies, and so on. I have commended that approach to the Home Secretary and I believe that he is considering it. I commend it also to the Metropolitan police. I understand that there is a further successful model in Leicestershire, which is held up as an example by the Home Office.

If we are to have policing in London that is accountable, effective and enjoys the confidence of the community, we must have community-based and estate-based policing led by the Metropolitan police, not by private security guards. That is the only way that the robbers, the gangs, the burglars and the yobs will be tackled successfully—not simply moved on somewhere else, which is the risk otherwise.

I do not think that we have become tough enough on neighbourhood noise in the definition of what is criminal and what is not. We do not yet have the local authority or police resources to tackle it. We are conducting a big debate about that in Southwark at the moment, but the law needs to be improved.

Earlier this year, the Home Secretary received much flak for saying that he rejected the evidence in a survey commissioned by the Prince's Trust. He said that unemployment and crime were unrelated. I do not think that the experience on the ground is like that, and I ask him to reconsider, and not to wait two years before reaching a conclusion.

The Home Secretary received the most recent flak this week, when he and his colleagues in Government collectively decided that the Customs and Excise officers' numbers should be reduced, including a cut of 500 people working in drugs and other enforcement.

I think that the Government have got those two aspects of policy wrong. I ask them to reconsider both. If we can strengthen Customs and Excise to deal with drugs and other offences, and if the Government learn to accept the link between unemployment and crime, there will be an effective understanding of some of the other priorities that I hope the police will have in the coming year.

12.46 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I greatly welcome the debate because it has been far too long since we debated policing matters in London, and I was sorry that last year we did not have a debate on policing. My

feelings go wider. We do not debate London matters enough in the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, h··r."] That needs to be put right because the basis of London's local government—which I broadly support—of having local authorities without a London-wide government and without an elected London body, works only if London Members of Parliament are given the opportunity to debate in the House the issues of a wider London concern, which need be brought together.

I wish to associate myself with the tributes that have been paid to the Metropolitan police, because it does an extremely difficult task which is important to all our constituents. My constituents repeatedly and consistently mention the fear of crime, the problems of law and order and their fear of being burgled or attacked in the street—fears which may or may not be justified, and which frequently are unjustified, but which nevertheless exist.

The problem confronting the police was highlighted by the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), who is not in his seat at the moment.

Mr. Corbyn: He is coming back.

Mr. Carrington: I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman is coming back.

We must balance the need for effective policing—sometimes heavy-handed policing—in London, which is necessary to combat crime, against the justified demand that all Londoners have for the protection of their civil liberties, and for people who are not suspected of a crime to be able to go about their lawful business without fear of being harassed.

The achievement of that light touch, which is extremely difficult for any police force, is perhaps best illustrated in relation to the great problem of tackling drugs, which is a problem from which all constituencies in inner London suffer, to a greater or lesser extent. My constituency of Fulham suffers badly from drug taking and drug dealing, which leads at times to levels of policing that cause considerable problems.

I give one example of the nature of drug dealers who create what can only be described as laboratories in the houses and flats in which they live. Such laboratories are difficult to track down, and the police have to raid them without warning and use considerable force. Unfortunately, the police sometimes get it wrong and the surprise and violence is used against innocent people who are living normal lives in areas where there is, unfortunately, a great deal of drug taking. Striking the right balance is difficult.

For obvious reasons there has been an increase in the use of surveillance cameras, not just in shopping centres or other enclosed places—quasi-private areas where one could make a case for them—but in public places such as streets. They have been introduced in west London to counteract drug dealing, and that is a reasonable use for them. But it raises serious problems about what happens to the surveillance tapes. Who has access to them and what is done with the information that is obtained in that way? That is worrying, but the Metropolitan police are feeling their way towards the right balance.

I welcome the reduction in crime. We have been given some figures about the overall reduction in London, and reported crimes in Fulham are down by about 16 per cent. I welcome that, but as we all know, reported crimes are not necessarily a reflection of criminal activity because crimes are reported, or not reported, for many reasons. Perhaps of more significance is the clear-up rate for burglaries as a result of Operation Bumblebee. That rate has increased by just under 20 per cent. year on year, and is down in the third quarter of this year. That shows that with the help of such operations, the police are at last getting on top of the professional organised criminals whom they can identify.

More worry, or at least as much worry, is caused to most people not by the organised criminal, the one who is carefully planning a burglary and about whom the police know because he is an habitual criminal, but by the opportunistic criminal who seizes the opportunity of an open window or an unlocked car. Such a crime also occurs when a young man is walking down the street alone and is set upon by other young men and mugged. Contrary to current mythology, that often happens.

The opportunistic crime is often the most feared, and great steps to reduce it have been made through crime prevention education. But such crime is difficult to stop and people must be reassured by the presence on the streets of those who will stop it. Such people may or may not be patrolling policemen. I hope that they will be, but it is unrealistic to expect policemen to be on the streets all the time. I hope that the climate of fear on our streets will be changed by the welcome steps taken by partnership against crime and street watch and by the other measures that are being used to get people more involved in their communities, looking after each other and taking cognisance of what is happening in their areas.

When a street is empty, people, rightly or wrongly, feel nervous about walking down it. The way to stop that is to ensure activity in the community, and the way to bring that about is to rebuild shopping centres and public houses and use community centres and so on.

Curiously enough, one of the by-products of controlled residents' parking, which is being introduced slowly throughout my constituency and which has given rise mixed feelings among the residents, is that, if it is properly maintained, traffic wardens patrol the streets. They pay for themselves by issuing tickets and they have the added advantage of being a uniformed presence. Although they may not be able to arrest people, they are a deterrent to the opportunistic criminal and in that sense they are an advantage.

I was very pleased to hear my right hon. and learned Friend say that there is no need for a reduction in Metropolitan police numbers this year. I and many other hon. Members have been concerned by the story circulating that there is to be a reduction in the number of active officers. Few people in London believe that there are too few officers in the Metropolitan police. Indeed, most of us want an increase in the number of active officers. That does not necessarily mean an increase in the number of people in the Metropolitan police; it means an increase in the number of policemen who are combating crime rather than doing the administrative and support duties that could be done by less highly trained people.

Equally, some of the traffic duties undertaken by the Metropolitan police could be handed over to people who are not as highly trained as the police officers who are combating crime. There is a case for having a separate traffic enforcement police force, but I shall not comment further on that because of lack of time.

[Mr. Carrington]

I want briefly to comment on the proposed Metropolitan police committee and to reinforce what I believe to be vital: that it should be independent of both the police and the Home Office. I listened to what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said about it being independent of the Home Office. I go one step further, because I believe that it should also be independent of the Metropolitan police. It should exist in the same way as, for example, Ofgas and Ofwat exist to watch over the privatised monopolies. Its role should be as the guardian of the way in which the police behave and to do that it must be independent.

The committee needs to be tied in closely with the work of police consultative committees which, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said, play an important role in feeding information up, but also in examining information fed down. They are non-political, committed to the community and involve a broad section of people.

It is vital that the new committee is not political, so I greatly welcome the fact that it is not to be established as an elected body. Because of the complexity and size of London, any elected body controlling London's police would make the police a political football, which we would all regret. The police do a tremendous job in London and they deserve our support.

12.57 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): In September, the Minister announced with a great fanfare a welcome decrease of 5.5 per cent. in recorded crime over the past year. He described it as the greatest fall for more than 40 years and said that he hoped that it would reassure the public. The reality is—I quote the words used to express it:

"All the real evidence says to the voters that crime is getting worse."

Those are not my words, but the words of no less a person than the vice-chairman of the Conservative party. That is the reality of crime in London.

The Home Secretary introduced this long-delayed debate and invited us to consider his achievements over the past two years. He would do well to bear in mind the perception of those whom we represent that crime remains a very real and growing problem and that the Government have not done enough to tackle it.

We support and work for the notion of partnership—a partnership between the police and the community and between the private and public sectors. There is all the evidence to show that the achievement in combating crime over the past months has resulted from just that partnership. If that partnership is to succeed and to deliver consistent results across the board in the fight against crime, it needs support from the Government, but the Government are not giving the partnership the support it requires.

Yesterday, the revenue support grants for London were announced. It is clear that, as a result of that dispensation, London and London local authorities will find that they are hard pressed in the coming year to maintain the existing level of services. It is also clear that some of the crucial areas in which there has been successful partnership between the police and the local authorities will be undermined by a lack of resources.

There are two areas to which we need to pay real attention in this debate. We have heard a lot about drugs; the cuts that have been made and the future cuts that are proposed in Customs and Excise staff will certainly impact adversely on the drugs problem in the capital. The problem goes beyond that, however. For there to be an effective partnership against those who peddle drugs and for there to be support and assistance for those who are vulnerable to their insidious influence, it is vital that there is an effective youth and community service on the ground working with schools to combat drug abuse. That is what the police, our local chief superintendents and local community bodies tell us.

My own borough of Brent, a Conservative borough, as a result of this Conservative revenue support grant, announced before the RSG statement yesterday that it intended, in effect, entirely to eliminate the youth and community service in the borough. That is an absolute scandal and will set back the work we seek to do in partnership in Brent. The local authority, the police consultative committee, the local voluntary, church and other youth workers and the statutory sector are trying to work in partnership to defeat the menace of drugs, but their work has been undermined by the Government's actions. It is no use the Home Secretary claiming in the House that there has been achievement in the area, when all the evidence tells us otherwise.

It is clear that the formula that is the basis on which the Metropolitan police is funded is flawed. It is also clear that the concerns expressed by the Association of London Authorities and others in the run-up to the RSG announcement were more than justified. The Home Secretary and the Treasury have, in effect, robbed Peter to pay Paul in their sums on the RSG for London. As a result of the resources that have been made available to the Metropolitan police, there is a clawback from other areas where there needs to be adequate funding for local authority services, but where there is not. That is not right, and it undermines the fight against crime.

We need cohesive and sustainable communities if we are to combat crime effectively. That is what the police want and that is what we want. We want a vibrant, active partnership between the local authority and the police, and between the voluntary and private sectors. Everything that the Government do undermines that, not only through the RSG but, importantly, through the imposition of a market ideology on policing.

Privatisation and the threat of privatisation have demoralised the police in London. They are concerned by the Home Secretary's focus on the core functions in his review of the Metropolitan police. There is an idea that helping an elderly lady across the road is not, somehow, a core function. Well, we, as Labour Members, are here to tell the Home Secretary that that is a core function. The police perform a vital service in reassuring the elderly of their presence.

It is vital that the police are not seen only as people who arrive at the scene of the crime in mechanised vehicles, but are seen to be out and about at work in the community; with time to talk to that small shopkeeper on the high street or on the estate who feels vulnerable, who feels threatened; with time to talk to that group of young people, who are not necessarily the tearaways, but who

need to know that there is a police presence in their area. Is that a core function? The police officers who speak to me, young and old, at federated and non-federated ranks, say that they are desperately worried about creeping privatisation and civilianisation in the police force.

We want to see an end to market ideologies imposed on each and every sector of society. Policing and the market just do not mix. Policing is a service. It must be a publicly funded service; a properly resourced service; a partnership between police and public; a partnership between the voluntary and the private sector. That is what we, as Labour Members, are here to argue for. We argue that underpinning that partnership there needs to be genuine democratic accountability. There needs to be a police authority that is more than just another quango, which is capable of reflecting the needs and concerns of all Londoners.

The qualification to serve on that authority must not be the chairmanship of a company which is a major donor to the Conservative party, but that that person lives and works in London. The qualification must be to care about London and have roots in London. Party political affiliation is neither here nor there. What London wants and what London must get is a quality police service. From this Government and as long as the Conservative party occupies the Government Benches, that is what London will never get.

1.6 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): At the outset, I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on the action that he has taken in the past 12 months to strengthen our police. He may not be flavour of the month with the liberal elite, but that runs in his favour because it means that he is clearly in touch with the views and aspirations of ordinary people in this country.

When it comes to the Metropolitan police, what my constituents want is simple: they want more powerful police and they want more powers for the police. By more powerful, my constituents mean that they want more police at the sharp end, patrolling the streets and available to help ordinary people. By more powers, they mean that they want the police to be able to get on with the job of cracking down on crime and not to deviate from that by having to spend a great deal of time on unnecessary paperwork or be too hidebound by regulation, and so on. In other words, they want a police force which gets its priorities right and is also more visible.

All that can be summed up in the old aspiration, undimmed by the passage of time and embodied in the simple phrase "More bobbies on the beat". That was often summed up by Lord Whitelaw, who used to go around repeating the phrase, "More police, more prisons, more police, more prisons."

It may have been a very simple remedy, but it was an effective one and he did much to strengthen the police in his time as Home Secretary. Today, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has delivered as well and—I believe—impressively.

London's police force will have more powers thanks to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. London's police will have more resources in the front line thanks to the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. Both Acts will give the police better back-up through the criminal justice system. There is, of course, still more to be done in the toughening of prison regimes and sentences, and my right hon. and learned Friend has made it clear earlier that that is a priority this year. He also said that it is a priority in respect of speeding up the process of justice.

The police will be effective only if they have the full backing of the criminal justice system working properly and effectively. It is not only the public who want to see that; the police want to see it as well. Police morale can be badly affected if the police feel that, instead of getting on with their principal task, they are tied up in yards of red tape or buried under mounds of what they believe to be unnecessary paperwork and are therefore unable to get out on the streets.

The police also become demoralised if they feel that the courts are not acting by backing up their work through effective sentencing, or if the prisons are not delivering the goods and, at the end of the day, the criminal can turn around and laugh at the police.

I have met and know policemen who prefer to let offenders off rather than charge them because charging them takes so much time out of their working day with hours spent filling in forms and chasing up the evidence. As a result of that, they cannot operate as effectively as policemen on the streets. We must find ways to cut the laborious paperwork processes that are currently involved. I am aware that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering that point.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary was able to chalk up another success yesterday. Despite a very tight spending round which has meant real cuts in many areas, he was able to announce a real increase in total police funding across the country of about 3 per cent. to about £3.67 billion. Of that, a huge £1.6 billion will go to the Met. In addition to its standard settlement, the Met receives a special payment of £130 million to recognise the capital's special requirements.

The Met will also benefit from losing court escort responsibility without losing the cash for that. With that, the Met will receive £19 million more than last year, but it will also gain from its new ability to roll over the money not spent this year into next year. The Met was unable to do that in the past. Previously, the cash was taken back direct to the Treasury.

That sum amounted to £11 million last year. However, it could be considerably more this year—perhaps up to £35 million. In other words, the important point is that the Met will gain this year by up to £65 million in its budget. That is a considerable increase which is equal to, or above, the projected rate of inflation.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) failed to follow the full logic of the figures. In his speech, he made it clear that he was not entirely sure about what the figures involved and he looked again at the text. I pay due credit to him here: I am not suggesting that he deliberately misunderstands the figures—he was simply unaware of the roll over of money and the amount that can be taken from one year to the following year, and he did not appreciate the impact of the police losing responsibility for the court escort service and the £7 million involved there. If the hon. Member for Blackburn realised those things, he would be aware that the amount of money that the police will receive next year is keeping pace with inflation.

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was more guilty of an inexactitude with his numerals. He was clearly unaware that the real cash for the police next year is considerably more than the increase produced by the grant, due to the two factors that I have mentioned. It is most important to take that into account in making any proper and serious assessment of how police resources will work next year.

In addition to the extra cash, we must consider the change in rank structure, the impact of reorganisation in the Met and increasing civilianisation of the police—including, in certain boroughs such as mine, responsibility for parking being given entirely to local authority traffic wardens and removed completely from the police. All that will make the Met more effective at the sharp end.

Therefore, there is certainly no financial need for a reduction in police numbers, and we should not talk about such a reduction. I stress that only because some false rumours are circulating, giving the impression that there might be a cut in police numbers. That is completely unnecessary on financial grounds. Indeed, there is scope now for increasing the number of constables. I would certainly like to see such an increase. My hon. Friend the Member for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt) spoke of the importance of that in the London borough of Bromley, and I fully support him.

One way of bringing about an increase is through imaginative partnership schemes, opening the door for yet further funding. Section 24 of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 empowers boroughs to give police extra funding. The London borough of Wandsworth has already effectively gone down that route, with the co-operation and the full support of the Met, to provide extra special constables—community neighbourhood constables. I suggest that the London borough of Bromley should do the same.

To its credit, the London borough of Bromley has already done much on law and order. It has held a series of important public meetings, it has piloted thorough research into the impact of crime on the borough, and it has helped to institute closed circuit television deterrence, which is another important means of deterring and fighting crime. I hope that that will be followed by considering a new partnership with the Met to increase effective police manpower in the borough in a way that is tailored to the specific needs of the area. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) about the need for the police to be based in, to work with and to understand the community.

How far are local authorities empowered to go in respect of extra financing? That is an important part of an overall package for good policing in areas such as mine.

One of the difficulties facing the Met is that it is one force but has to operate in an extremely diverse area. The policing needs of Beckenham, for example, are a world away from those of Bermondsey, and the needs of Westminster are quite different from those of Bromley. I hope that that point will be fully taken into account by the Commissioner and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary when they examine the funding of the Met in the future.

Quoting statistics about the number of police per head of population and so on does not give a balanced picture of the needs of London, because boroughs' needs are different. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey mentioned that point, and I certainly would not want to rob his constituency to improve cover in mine; nor would I want the needs of his constituency to have an adverse impact on the needs of mine. In other words, different areas of London need to be treated in different ways.

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of visiting the two police stations in my constituency. I was shown around Penge police station by Inspector Stephen Hall, and around Beckenham police station by Inspector Dave Tompkins. I record my gratitude to those officers for the time that they took to educate me in the problems that they face. I also thank them on behalf of my constituents for the work that they and their team do in protecting people in my constituency. Apart from all the individuals whom they have helped, they have benefited the whole community by bringing down the crime rate. According to the latest figures, overall crime fell by 21 per cent. That is a remarkable achievement, and I hope that it will be repeated year after year.

I also take this opportunity to record my appreciation and that of the community which I represent for the various police consultative and discussion groups in the area. We have three: one covering the borough, one covering Beckenham, and one covering Penge. I pay tribute to the work of the chairmen of two of those bodies, Peter North and Bob Groves, who help to keep the police in touch with the community and vice versa. I also compliment all the citizens who involve themselves in neighbourhood watch, which is another important way of extending police-community liaison.

The public need the support and work of a confident police force, and the police need the confidence and support of the public and of their representatives in this place. The steps that the Government have taken in the past year contribute to achieving that aim, and I am delighted to see the work continuing.

1.19 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I have attended every debate on the policing of the metropolis since I was elected to the House and I have always been deeply frustrated by the lack of accountability of the Metropolitan police force and the unsatisfactory nature of the debates. Today's debate is no different from the others.

I have watched Home Secretaries come into the House and speak at great length—I do not complain about that, as they are reporting to the House and it is the only opportunity that the police authority has to report publicly—and then disappear immediately. Not one Home Secretary has stayed to hear the whole of the debate. I must put on record the fact that I deplore that practice and the fact that other hon. Members are not able to take part in the debate. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why Conservative Members are getting so excited: regrettably, it is a fact that no Home Secretary has stayed to hear the whole of a debate about the policing of London. After all, the Home Secretary is the authority of the London police force.

I also regret that the proposals which the Home Secretary has brought forward to "improve the structure of the police force in London", as he puts it, will actually do nothing of the kind. I used to think that it was undemocratic that the Home Secretary should be the police authority for London, but we are now to get something even worse—a quango on behalf of which the Home Secretary will speak in Parliament, rather than on behalf of the police force.

London needs an elected authority to cover the whole of the capital for reasons of planning, housing, health, transport, the environment and, of course, policing. Likewise, we need the development and continuation of local police committees. We need not only a central body, but also a local one.

The suggestion that those hon. Members who raise this question are somehow against the policing of London and have no understanding of the needs of London's police force is way off the mark. I represent an inner-city community which is tragically riddled with very high levels of unemployment, not very good housing—many people are on the housing waiting list—and a great deal of crime.

I cannot complain—nor do I seek to do so—about the co-operation that I get from the local police in my constituency. It is very good indeed. On the occasions when I have had to call out the police to attend incidents where I live, their response has been very good. I have meetings with them whenever I wish to discuss local matters. I have no complaints on that score. Indeed, I thank the Holloway police for the co-operation that they have given me whenever I have raised issues with them. Whether we finally agree is not the point—at least they are prepared to discuss matters openly.

However, I draw attention to the problems of crime in my borough. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has produced some very useful statistics about London boroughs and the crime that occurs within them. There were 3,190 violent crimes in the borough of Islington for the year ended June 1994. There were 1,894 incidents per 100,000 people, compared with a London average of 1,058 and a national average of 605. In the neighbouring borough of Hackney the figure is even higher—2,252 per 100,000 people. Examples at the opposite end of the scale were Kingston, with 746 violent crimes per 100,000 people, and Redbridge with 592.

The crimes to which I refer included acts of violence against the person, sexual offences and attacks, and racially motivated attacks. I suspect that the number of racially motivated attacks is a gross underestimate as many people are unable or unwilling to report what they believe to be a racially motivated attack. The local police are well aware of that fact, and Islington council and others have done a great deal of work to encourage people to come forward and report racially motivated attacks. It would help if the Government were to ameliorate what I believe are the many appalling sections of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 by including legislation to deal specifically with racially motivated crimes. That would help in putting a stop to the vile racially motivated crimes which are the scourge of our society.

I do not have much time, so I shall be brief. I have searched through the annual report of the Commissioner. Unless I have missed something, previous annual reports contained a detailed description of the number of firearms licences issued by the police force in London and the number of police who carry guns in London. I cannot be the only person who is deeply troubled by the growing incidence of the use of firearms and crime in London, the ease of getting a firearm by illicit means such as smuggling, by purchase through gun clubs, or whatever. The need to have a gun-free society is something that I take seriously. That includes not having an armed police force in London. I hope that the Home Secretary will publish the statistics for the number of firearms licences issued by the Metropolitan police in the past year. In previous years more than 700 licences were issued.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) referred to replica weapons. I have raised that issue on several occasions. There is a gun shop not five minutes walk from my home. It sells absolutely identical replica weapons. I went in and bought a replica weapon for £65. The reason why I did so was that someone was killed by a police marksman in my constituency. He was holding a neighbour to ransom using a replica weapon. It was the second such incident in my constituency. The police had no way of telling that it was a replica weapon. I bought one of the guns and showed it to the Police Federation and we discussed the matter. When we fired the gun, it looked and sounded every bit like a real gun going off.

I recognise the problem that large numbers of replica guns are in circulation already, but we have to start somewhere. Perhaps we could license replica weapons as they come on to the market, or even ban the manufacture of new replica weapons. There is no justification for anyone walking around with absolutely identical replica weapons. The hurt, the danger and the deaths that have been caused make this a serious issue. In some cases such weapons have been used by people who are deeply disturbed and in need of much more community care and support than they are able to obtain. I hope that the Home Secretary will have the courtesy at least to read *Hansard* and understand the anxieties of those of us who represent inner urban communities.

I wish to raise several points about the Commissioner's report, but there is not enough time to raise all of them. One is about the number of deaths in custody. I draw attention to appendix 4.7, which refers to the death on 1 August 1993 of a 40-year-old female in Hornsey. I refer to the death of Joy Gardner, and I am not giving away any secrets when I say that. I seriously question the passage in the report which states:

"She resisted arrest, was restrained, collapsed and resuscitation was given. She was taken to hospital where she subsequently died."

I believe that to be a breach of normal law in that the case is sub judice. The inquest has not yet finally concluded its decision as to how and why Joy Gardner died.

Mr. Bernie Grant: Two weeks ago, at Marylebone magistrates court, three officers were committed for trial in that very case, so it is, indeed, sub judice. Is my hon. Friend not surprised, as I am, that the Metropolitan police Commissioner has given a version of the death of Joy Gardner when the court has not decided on the cause of death?

Mr. Corbyn: I agree with the point that my hon. Friend has made. I am sure that it will be drawn to the attention of the representatives of the late Joy Gardner when the case comes to court. I ask the Home Secretary to examine seriously the wording used about the incident as it seems to be prejudicial to the course of justice at a later stage.

[Mr. Corbyn]

The other issue that I wish to raise, as it has been referred to by the Home Secretary and others, is that of public order demonstrations in London and the hidden agenda of many Conservative Members who keep on and on about the cost of policing political and other demonstrations. One Conservative Member raised the question of the cost of policing crowds outside football matches. The right of people freely to demonstrate their political or other views cannot be fettered by considerations of the cost of the policing operations. If one lives in a democracy in which there is a right to demonstrate and dissent, it has to be an unfettered right. I deplore what I believe to be the hidden agenda surrounding that issue.

Mr. Cohen: I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would comment on my question to the Home Secretary, to which I did not get an answer, about the riot police not wearing identifiable numbers when they go into action. That was a problem when they policed the miners' strike and Wapping and it seems to be becoming common practice. Does my hon. Friend agree that it needs serious consideration, as it virtually allows the riot police to act illegally without being identified and prevents people who might be aggrieved at their actions and who might have been physically assaulted from making an official complaint?

Mr. Corbyn: Absolutely. My hon. Friend will recall that some years ago we were members of a Standing Committee when that issue was discussed. We were always assured that whatever uniform an officer wore, his identity number would appear on the outside, on the shoulder pads where the numbers normally appear. I deplore the apparent use at the M11 demonstrations of riot police wearing boiler suits and helmets without any identifying numbers so that no complaints can be made against officers. As everyone knows, to make a complaint against the police one must make a complaint against individual officers. Those are deplorable incidents.

I was involved in a some of the demonstrations against the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The House should be aware that we should take notice if many thousands of people demonstrate against an Act of Parliament. We were demonstrating to defend the historic right of silence in criminal cases, the freedom to roam, and people's right to follow alternative life styles, which is important in a democracy. The people who turned out to demonstrate showed their concern for the libertarian traditions that were developed by people who were also prepared to defy laws in the past century and the centuries before that.

I addressed and chaired the rally in Hyde park at the conclusion of an enormous demonstration on 9 October. For the most part, the demonstration was good humoured and it was certainly peaceful and well organised. After agreement had been reached on the route to be followed, the police complimented the organisers on the stewards' handling of the demonstration.

After the rally started—shortly before the demonstration was due to end—trouble broke out around Marble Arch, some distance away. To prevent any trouble, the organisers and stewards immediately went to see what was going on and offered to co-operate with the police to ensure that there was no crowd build-up so that the trouble would not be exacerbated. The police officer in charge refused that co-operation and went on to close Park lane to the coaches that were arriving to take other people away and the situation went from bad to worse. None of the organisers of the demonstration wanted any trouble.

I wrote to the Home Secretary the following day, on 10 October, asking if he would be prepared to have a public inquiry into what went on and offering my co-operation. I was somewhat surprised that it took until 25 November for a reply to be given—not by the Home Secretary, but by the Minister of State, Home Office—saying that I should apologise to the police and that there would be no public inquiry. Why it took six weeks for the Home Office to respond to a perfectly reasonable letter from a Member of the House of Commons merits, in itself, some sort of inquiry.

I urge the Home Office to look through the reports of what happened at that demonstration. I refer to those in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times* and even *The Sun*, of all papers, as well as a number of others. No one wanted any violence. The organisers certainly did not want any trouble. We wanted to ensure that it was peaceful.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean) *rose—*

Mr. Corbyn: I will give way in a moment.

Police co-operation and intelligence might have meant that we could have avoided some of the trouble that followed. That is what we have been trying to point out for all that time. *[Interruption.]* I know that it is easier for Ministers to sneer than to listen, but I will happily give way to the hon. Gentleman on this occasion.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman keeps stressing that no one who organised the demonstration wanted any trouble. He is conveniently glossing over the fact that a few hundred people from Class War and the Animal Liberation Front and some anarchists did want trouble. After the demonstration, Class War boasted in its newsletter:

"The police were swamped and we gave them everything: burning bins, sticks, bricks, paving slabs, park bench planks, cans filled with sand, bottles and scaffolding poles. But as ever shortage of ammunition was a constant problem . . . so cheers to those of you who kept us supplied on the day."

Will the hon. Gentleman condemn that sort of behaviour as strongly as he seems to be condemning the police for their efforts to contain trouble?

Mr. Corbyn: The Minister knows perfectly well that all the organisers of the demonstration did not want or agree with any violence, and that they did condemn the violence. He knows all that, but he still fails to answer the question: why is he not prepared to have a serious discussion about the policing tactics that were used at the end of the demonstration, so as to avoid such problems in the future? Why did it take six weeks to reply to a letter pointing out seriously that there had been a breakdown in communications? The police chief superintendent who was on the spot absolutely refused even to discuss with the stewards—with whom the police had been happily co-operating for the previous four hours—any actions which might have been taken. I wonder whether there was perhaps some other agenda from the Home Office and

whether it was perhaps not awfully convenient for the Home Secretary's speech at the Tory party conference two days later.

Mr. Bernie Grant: Perhaps I may jog my hon. Friend's memory. I recall that, at the time, my hon. Friend went on television and radio in relation to the demonstration and that he started off on every occasion by stating that he was totally opposed to violence, that he was in favour of a peaceful demonstration and that he had nothing against the police, who generally did a good job. Why does the Minister not praise my hon. Friend for making those statements? Why is he trying to link my hon. Friend with Class War and other organisations with which my hon. Friend is not associated? I challenge the Minister in his wind-up speech to congratulate my hon. Friend on being so reserved—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. That was a very long intervention.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend, and I look forward to the Minister's reply to the debate, when he can set the record straight. He seems to be more interested in condemning people than in listening to what went on; indeed, he is not even prepared to discuss what went on.

There is not much time left, and I do not want to prevent other hon. Members from speaking, so I will conclude on this point. I found it extraordinary that, two weeks after the demonstration, the Metropolitan police decided to call a press conference to predict violence on a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament demonstration to which they subsequently sent 2,000 police officers. I am glad to say that there was no violence, and I believe that there was only one arrest during the whole demonstration. I got the impression, as did many journalists who attended the press conference, that it was designed to do two things—to deter people from coming to the demonstration and to talk up the prospects of violence on the streets of London. Nobody wanted that, and I am glad to say that there no violence.

Let us have some sense and accept the right of people to demonstrate peacefully in our capital city. We need an accountable police force to defend the liberties of the people of this country.

1.37 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): It is the duty of any Government, second only to the duty to safeguard these islands from external attack, to safeguard people from criminals within our own society. One reason why the entire western world—not just this country—has seen a rise in crime is that successive Governments in this and other countries have paid too much attention to the half-baked 1960s attitudes towards crime and criminals. We are now paying a heavy price for that.

It is true that my party has been in government here for 15 years, and it is also true that they have listened too much over the years to those half-baked ideas. But anyone who believes that, had the Labour party been in power during those 15 years, it would have listened less to those libertarian views will believe anything. Fortunately, today we have a Home Secretary who is determined to roll back 30 years of libertarian attitudes to crime and to put the civil rights of the victims and ordinary law-abiding members of the public first.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on two points. First, I congratulate him on having the courage to get the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 on to the statute book substantially unamended, because it contains provisions that will protect our constituents and give the police the powers that they need to defend us against criminals. Secondly, I congratulate him on the recent financial settlement, involving an extra £180 million for the police. I am especially grateful to him for giving the Sussex force a massive 10 per cent. increase, one of the largest in the country.

The London police have to cope with many specific problems, one of which is mass demonstrations, to which other hon. Members have adverted. No one would deny that the public have the right to protest; it is one of our democratic rights. People have every right to express their disapproval of anything that anyone in authority does in their name, but I maintain that the right to protest does not include the right to intimidate others who have different views or to obstruct others from going about their lawful business. As with anything in the real world, it is a question of balancing the rights of one group of people against those of another.

It may be said that people have a right to assemble in very large numbers in the centre of a city to express their views, but we must not forget the tens of thousands of other people who live and work in those cities—especially in London—and who have a right to go about their business and to get to and from their homes and places of work. There is a right for fire engines to attend to burning buildings, for ambulances to attend the sick and for police cars to attend to emergencies. Those rights are perhaps forgotten by those who hold it to be an absolute right to be allowed to assemble in very large numbers in urban areas to express their views. I maintain that there are no absolute rights in this world; it is always a question of balance.

If very large numbers of people are involved, the disruptive effect on a city is very much the same whether or not a demonstration is peaceful. Unfortunately, it is for all practical purposes impossible to prevent anarchists, to whom my hon. Friend the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) referred, mingling with peaceful demonstrators. I pointed that out to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) whose response was particularly fatuous, even for him. It should be apparent even to him that the ability of an anarchist to mingle with an individual Member of Parliament—even himself—would not have the effect of turning a demonstration into a riot.

We are often reminded of the fact that, in centuries gone by, the Tolpuddle martyrs, the suffragettes and others demonstrated, chained themselves to railings or threw themselves under race horses. We should all be proud that they took those risks so that future generations might have greater freedom and wider democracy. However, in those days, women did not have the right to be represented in Parliament. There are two women currently in the Chamber who speak out fearlessly for the rights of women whenever they feel that those rights are under threat, which is right and proper, but when the suffragettes chained themselves to the railings there were no women in Parliament to argue on their behalf. Some men did, but women could not do so.

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

Similarly, in the days of the Tolpuddle martyrs, working men had no representatives in Parliament. They had no one to put their point of view, to put their arguments or to fight for their rights. That is not true today. As I sit in the House, I listen day by day to the representatives of working men and women arguing for their rights, putting their point of view. They do so with great skill and determination, and I pay tribute to them.

I believe that the type of mass demonstration that might have been necessary in an urban area in a bygone age is no longer necessary or desirable in the television age, because anyone who has enough support to stage a mass demonstration can obtain air time on television and radio and communicate his point of view to millions of his fellow citizens. In fact, the more anti-Government his views may be, the greater the opportunity that he will have to communicate them on television or radio. Therefore, mass demonstrations in urban areas, especially in London, are outmoded, and we ought seriously to consider placing a total ban on them.

A frivolous reference was made to the disruptive effect of a state visit. The two situations are totally different and, as I have said, anyone who wishes to persuade may communicate his opinion on television to millions of his fellow citizens. That will not enable him to intimidate his fellow citizens by creating a large crowd and threatening or obstructing people, but I maintain that the right to protest does not involve the right to intimidate or to obstruct. I doubt that any Member of the House would maintain otherwise.

If, at the time of the Park lane riot, the police had had the stop and search powers that they will shortly have under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, they might have been able to remove from the knapsacks of demonstrators the bricks, the CS gas canisters and perhaps, if we widened that section, even the literature to which the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred, inciting people to violence. The responsibility for the violence which occurred is theirs alone, and anyone who suggests that it is the responsibility of the police, who were responding to a difficult situation that had been created, is, in my respectful opinion, utterly wrong.

One type of demonstration affects the House and our very democratic process. That is the attempt, which we have witnessed all too frequently in recent weeks, to lay siege to these very Houses of Parliament. Those demonstrations have prevented hon. Members from reaching the House to attend to their constituents' affairs, and even to cast their votes in important Divisions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No hon. Member has been prevented from taking part in any Division, as far as the Chair is concerned.

Mr. Stephen: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understood that, on one occasion, Members had been unable to get here, and that one hon. Member had been knocked down and was taken to hospital, but the record will show whether that is correct.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What the hon. Gentleman understands is not relevant to the statement he made that hon. Members were not able to take part in Divisions. The Chair received no complaints on the Divisions that took place that night.

Mr. Stephen: I am grateful for that advice but, to any of us who witnessed the demonstration outside, it must have seemed a miracle that any hon. Member was able to get through to take part in a Division. If that type of demonstration occurs in future, no one can guarantee that hon. Members will not be prevented from casting their vote in a Division.

Demonstrations of that type are not only a breach of the ordinary law but contrary to the Sessional Orders of the House, which require the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to keep the way clear for hon. Members to come to the House to attend to their constituents' affairs. The Commissioner failed in that duty. I am not criticising the Commissioner—he did his best, but he failed in that duty. He must revise his views as to how those matters are to be dealt with and he must reconsider the powers that Parliament has given him under the Public Order Act 1986.

I believe that the time has come to say that there shall not in future be any mass demonstrations within one mile of this place. In other legislatures—especially in Germany, I think—there is a rule that no demonstration shall take place within 1 km of the Parliament building. Such a rule should also apply here.

Such obstruction must not occur again, and the Commissioner must never again allow demonstrators to invade this Palace and sit on the roof of the building. That was an attack on our democracy. Another such serious attack was when the private residence of a Minister of the Crown was invaded. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made light of the attack on his residence, and I pay tribute to him for his fortitude, but the House cannot pass lightly over the matter. It was a fundamental attack on a Minister of the Crown who performs his duties to the best of his ability in the interests of all our people. Those who do not agree with the way in which he discharges his duties can say so through their representatives in Parliament, and they do so almost every day.

I shall turn briefly to one other important matter. Recently, there have been a number of cases in which householders have been confronted by intruders, and have tackled them and found themselves before the courts. Under existing law, a householder has the right to use reasonable force in self-defence, but we should look again at the case and statute law to see whether the right could be drawn more widely. I believe that, save in the most exceptional cases, a householder confronting an intruder should not find himself in court and be required to pay compensation to the intruder. That matter has outraged our constituents and I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to look again at the law on the matter.

1.51 pm

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Their time comes to those who wait. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, especially as the Home Secretary seems to have avoided having such a debate for more than a year and might not have had one today had the matter not been raised by me with the Leader of the House shortly before the House was prorogued.

The Home Secretary was quick to tell us that he is the police authority for London and that as such he is accountable to Parliament. Given the length of time that it has taken for this debate to be held, he obviously has a limited view of that accountability. When we consider the spiralling crime wave in London and the depth of fear of crime among Londoners, we should not be surprised that he wants to avoid public scrutiny and accountability.

The Government have presided over a near doubling of crime in our capital city. They promote policies that undermine the Metropolitan police and they have demonstrably failed to allow London to have its own democratically accountable police authority. When Home Office Ministers trumpet the 5.5 per cent. decrease in crime over the past year and try to reassure the public, it is difficult for us in London to take them seriously. We have had a 15 per cent. increase in violent crime in the past year and there was a 15 per cent. increase in sexual offences between June 1993 and June 1994. More than 160,000 burglaries were reported in London in the past year, robberies are up by 4 per cent. and one in 10 of all London crimes is defined as violent according to the Home Office classification. The cost in stolen property amounts to some £167 per head for every Londoner.

Perhaps the most devastating statistic is that 90 per cent. of Londoners are concerned about the level of crime and two out of three expect it to get worse. Next week the Association of London Authorities will publish a poll showing that 46 per cent. of Londoners rate crime as their top concern. What does the Home Secretary say they should do? He says that they should walk with a purpose. People in London are not over-impressed by that idea.

The *Evening Standard* said last week that people in London have no intention of walking with a purpose. The paper did a little detective work and found from police in Walworth, Stoke Newington, Southwark, Croydon and even Tory Bromley that there had been absolutely no response to the call to walk with a purpose. In my borough of Lewisham the police consultative committee, which is extremely active, said that there were simply no takers. In Islington, the chief superintendent described the response to the call as a disappointing zero. Another senior officer said, "We put a constable on probation for two years, with all sorts of training to ensure that he or she is able to cope on the beat. You just can't put members of the public in that position. No one is going to let me be a brain surgeon just because I fancy it." Perhaps we should not let people become Home Secretaries just because they fancy it.

Two people did respond to the call. One in Brixton said that he would like to walk with a purpose if he could go out and shoot people. Another in Twickenham was simply described by police officers as "unsuitable". It is no surprise that Londoners are not over-impressed by the Home Secretary's stewardship of London policing.

What could the right hon. and learned Gentleman have done? He could have supported the London authorities that are giving free home security equipment to some of their elderly population. He could have supported the safe travel group in Wood Green, the racial harassment project in Tower Hamlets and the Association of London Authorities' "Zero Tolerance" campaign—especially as the report by the Home Affairs Select Committee specifically recommended that

"the Home Office . . . fund a campaign designed to raise awareness amongst the public and in particular actual and potential perpetrators and victims of the criminality of domestic violence."

But he did not do so.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman could have unequivocally backed the work of London's local authorities in community safety work, but instead he rejected every suggestion by Labour Members during the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. In 117 clauses, there was only one reference to crime prevention. He could have fought for a better deal from his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in determining the standard spending assessments and the capping levels in London. On all counts, it is London and Londoners who lose out.

I want briefly to comment on the policies that have undermined the police. First, there is the threat to police funding. It is not surprising that the police fear that they could lose up to 1,600 police officers and that stations will be closed. The dampening that has taken place as a result of changes to the formula simply delays the effect for a year. The police say that the cuts in police overtime will mean fewer bobbies on the beat and less patrolling.

In my constituency in Lewisham, four out of five crimes of violence against the person are cleared up, but fewer than four out of 10 sexual offences are cleared up. The police are understaffed and need more resources if they are to improve on those figures.

The police are also painfully aware that there is increasing evidence that Government policies are undermining their morale. Some 53 per cent. of police officers say that their morale is low; 62 per cent. would take another professional job if they could. The review of core functions combined with the threats to funding have been a major source of demoralisation.

Sir John Smith, the deputy Commissioner, who happens to have been brought up on the Downham estate in my constituency, has said that Government accountants run the risk of removing all non-confrontational tasks from the police and that public trust would inevitably be lost.

The Commissioner, Sir Paul Condon, is concerned about the Government's privatisation policy and said:

"it could undermine the quality and standards which underpin our relationship with the public."

In Lewisham, Chief Superintendent Ken Chapman told me of his great concern about performance monitoring. He said with great emphasis that the police force is a service and that when the police help, for example, an elderly person who has had an accident in the home, and deal with him with such sensitivity and tact that he rings the next day to thank the officers concerned, they know that none of that will be taken into account when the performance targets are put in place.

The police believe that care in the community has increased their work load. If a member of the public sees someone walking around in a daze or hanging about at night, he is likely to call the police, who then discover that the suspect is mentally ill but that there is no place for him to be hospitalised. None of those examples would be taken into account in the targets.

Chief Superintendent Chapman has said that there is intense pressure on the police to perform to targets, which will not deal with the relationship which the police have with the public and on which they have been building for so long. Superintendent Doaks of the Catford division has said that the police are concerned about the changes that the Minister is making to the redundancy arrangements. They believe that they have been set up to make more

[Mrs. Bridget Prentice]

police officers redundant in coming years. The police believe that the 4,000 redundancies among Customs and Excise officers are a first step towards swingeing cuts in the police and a Government attempt to lay off officers more cheaply and more expediently.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has dealt with the setting up of a police authority more than adequately. I say simply that the people of London want such an authority and that the police in London want it. The only reason why we shall not have a police authority is that the Home Secretary does not want Labour councillors to have any say or influence in the way in which the police work in London, despite the fact that Labour authorities throughout London have worked positively in partnership with the police on all the community safety aspects that I mentioned.

Sir John Smith said:

"The community is our life-blood and we need to be, and be seen to be, accountable to it . . . There is a real danger of making detection the top priority for the police, with little regard for the preservation of peace or crime prevention . . . a comprehensive review of policing will need to be undertaken by an influential group"

which

"will support the continuation of the style of public policing which, while not yet perfect, is admired and emulated throughout the world."

We agree with that. Without such policing, we shall accelerate, almost out of control, towards a future for policing that will in no way meet our needs. Londoners deserve better.

2.1 pm

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): This has been a good debate, which has been wide ranging in the number of issues covered. The debate is, however, long overdue. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) on her efforts to ensure that we had the debate today.

Crime is a problem that blights the lives of Londoners. In a poll to be published next week, almost 50 per cent. of Londoners say that they rate crime as their top concern. That is no wonder. Since 1979, the rate of violent crime in London has risen by more than 200 per cent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East said, almost 10 per cent. of all crimes in London are violent, which is the highest percentage in England.

Given the combination of crippling fear of crime and the crime figures themselves, it is no wonder that many pensioners are frightened to go out at night. How frequently have hon. Members addressed a pensioners' meeting or a pensioners' group in their constituency in the evening? I suggest that they have done so rarely, if at all. The tragedy of life today for many people in London who are elderly or vulnerable is that they are frightened to go out at night. They find themselves prisoners in their own home. Many women are frightened to come back unaccompanied at night. They sometimes find themselves at a destaffed British Rail station and they are extremely apprehensive. One of the great shames of our fine capital city is that many members of our black and ethnic minority communities are apprehensive of racial harassment.

Nor is the business sector exempt. The latest quarterly report of the Forum of Private Business shows that more than 43 per cent. of businesses surveyed in London described crime as a significant burden. That has serious implications in terms of the number of people whom small businesses employ. London ought to be a world-class capital. We want it to be a capital in which businesses flourish. Yet fear of crime and the crime figures themselves put a damper on that and hamper our business community in this great capital.

Very sadly, for too many people in our city, crime and the fear of crime stalk the streets in which they live and work. Against that background, the Metropolitan police service, under Sir Paul Condon, does an extremely difficult job very well indeed. We know, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) pointed out, that the police, in very difficult circumstances and, often, tragically, at the risk of their own lives, put the interests of the citizens of London first. For my part, I would again like to put on record the high regard in which we on the Labour Benches hold the work done by the Metropolitan police in London.

The picture in London is not entirely gloomy. Initiatives such as sector policing, the PLUS programme and community policing initiatives in partnerships between the public, local authorities and the police are much to be applauded. Operation Bumblebee, which has been much spoken of this morning, started in my area of north London. It is an initiative of which we are very proud. It was taken not only by the police and the community, but by the local authorities. I am extremely proud that my own Labour local authority played its full part.

There is absolutely no doubt that that operation has helped to reduce incidents of burglary and catch the perpetrators. Let us make no mistake: burglary is not a minor crime. It is a very serious crime. It concerns not only property, but the invasion of people's homes, and the invasion of the right of citizens to enjoy the privacy of their own homes. The Metropolitan police, local authorities and the community have worked together and are to be congratulated.

We have heard about many other good initiatives. In my area, I know of school citizenship days organised by the local authority and the police, and of crime prevention schemes to reduce burglary in the south Hornsea area of my constituency. Reference has already been made to the excellent work around the King's Cross area, and to Operation Welwyn, in which my hon. Friends the Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) have taken part.

We would do well to remind ourselves, when we talk about such partnership schemes, of the comments of Commander John Townsend, the operational commander for Operation Welwyn:

"This working relationship between the council and the police to get things to happen in their respective organisations has been essential and the partnership would have failed without it."

That is why we, as Labour Members, place so much emphasis on the tripartite relationship between the police, the public and local authorities because, between them, they can have an enormous effect on reducing the rates of crime. That is why we are so disappointed that the

Government have not implemented in full the report of the Morgan committee, which the Home Office itself set up. As that report said:

"investing in crime prevention and safer communities is potentially an unparalleled way of improving the quality of life in many areas: it is also potentially one of the most cost-effective things it is possible to do."

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), I note that a former Minister said that the partnership approach was the very "cornerstone" of the Government's policy. Labour Members would take that claim rather more seriously if the Morgan report were taken more seriously and implemented in full.

I want to draw attention to closed circuit television. It is now widely accepted that CCTV has proved to be a significant crime prevention measure. The evidence from cameras during the tragic Jamie Bulger case and in respect of the Harrods bombing proved invaluable in finding the perpetrators. Harrods pays for its own CCTV, but most shops cannot afford it. Many local authorities and police divisions are understandably keen to implement CCTV schemes in conjunction with proper consultation and accountability.

The local authority in my area installed CCTV in a local car park and the rate of crime there has declined considerably. However, we need money to implement CCTV schemes properly. The £2 million in 1994-95 is a pathetically small sum to invest in CCTV. We should compare that with the £5 million being spent by the Home Secretary on publicising his "walking with a purpose" scheme. What a waste of money. Let us have that money, but let us invest it in CCTV.

When applications arrive for such schemes, there should not be the bias against London that is revealed in the guidelines. According to the *Evening Standard* recently,

"London loses out in the TV blitz on crime".

The Home Office has stated:

"the focus will be away from large towns and cities . . . Priority consideration will be given to smaller centres of population".

Once again, we can see how lowly rated London is in respect of crime and crime prevention initiatives in our great capital city.

I want to refer to two important matters in relation to crime in London. The first is the appalling problem of racist attacks. It is clear from the figures that probably half the reported racist attacks nationally occur in London. That is a great challenge for us in this capital city. There are some very good initiatives on racist attacks—the Home Secretary referred to the initiative in Plumstead. I have seen it and I commend the officers involved. However, it would have been more appropriate and fitting if the Home Secretary had joined Opposition Members and some Conservative Members in pressing for a specific law against racial violence.

I want also to draw attention to domestic violence. I very much welcome the Government's campaign on domestic violence. However, it was very late and overdue when we consider that the Home Affairs Select Committee recommended such an initiative a considerable time ago. The Association of London Authorities introduced an excellent campaign on domestic violence—the "zero tolerance" campaign—long before the Home Office stirred itself.

We have had an interesting debate today, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) made some interesting remarks about stop and search and ethnic monitoring. Opposition Members also drew attention to the perhaps overriding strategic question in London—the lack of a police authority for London.

The argument for a police authority for London is not a new, fashionable or trendy argument. In 1888, the London county council called for such a body and many people have been lobbying for such an authority for many years. Some time ago, before the Home Secretary's predecessor said that there would be an elected police authority for London, I had the great opportunity in the Home Affairs Select Committee to question Sir Peter Imbert, the present Commissioner's predecessor, about an elected authority. He replied:

"I found the elected police authority in the Thames Valley very helpful. I would equally find, I suspect, an elected authority for London helpful in the same way."

We know that senior police officers in London think that an elected police authority is a good idea and that it would positively help them in their work in the fight against crime.

For many people, including myself—I am certainly proud to call myself a Londoner—London is a wonderful and vibrant place in which to live and work. It is diverse and challenging. However, as hon. Members have said, the quality of life for Londoners is impaired by crime and by the fear of crime. London is a world-class capital, which deserves world-class policing. We have heard from the Home Secretary—doubtless we shall hear it from the Minister—information about resources. Let us judge the Home Secretary's announcement on funding not by what happens next year but by what happens in other years to come. I predict that there will be fewer police officers in our capital city.

The people of London want proper resourcing so that there are enough police officers to work in partnership with local authorities and others to prevent and fight crime. They do not want constant uncertainty and the undermining of the service. They want a democratic voice in the policing of their city, not a toothless quango to be ignored by Ministers. Judging by this year's election results, they want a Government who are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, not one who have let down the people of London and sold them very short indeed.

2.15 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I welcome the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) to the Dispatch Box and congratulate her on her appointment as an Opposition Whip. I am not sure whether I can welcome the rather radical innovation of a party which allows its Whips to speak in the House. The Conservative party will not do that. Perhaps the hon. Lady's training as a Whip does not permit her to be as forthcoming as she could have been when she quoted Sir Peter Imbert. The next line of his statement reads:

"It so happens the system we have actually works."

I happen to agree with that.

The hon. Lady was right to touch on some important points. The fear of crime is very real. There is a duty on all of us not to make matters worse. That is why I deplore those who condemn and rubbish the latest figures which

[Mr. David Maclean]

show the largest drop in 40 years—those people do not include the hon. Lady or the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—and say that crime is rising.

The hon. Lady referred to burglary. Some of her colleagues said, "They are having success only with trivial things, the things that don't matter. What about crimes of violence?" I condemn those words, because burglary does matter. For far too many people the crime of burglary is violent. I greatly welcome the hon. Lady's opinions on that matter, and I hope that they will filter through to all her hon. Friends. I hope that, if we and the 43 police forces in the country are successful, Opposition Members will welcome that.

The £5 million which has been spent on the partnership campaign should give us an extra 10,000 special constables, increase neighbourhood watch schemes to 200,000, and permit street watch schemes to start. If we have an extra 10,000 special constables, that will be the best investment that any Government could make.

We have had a thorough and wide-ranging debate. It has covered fundamental issues such as the constitutional position of the Met as well as detailed concerns about crime prevention, local initiatives and the deployment of officers. I, too, pay tribute to Metropolitan police officers who have been killed or injured in the course of their duty, serving the people of the capital. I pay tribute to the 28,000 others who, every day of the week, risk their lives in the same cause of keeping Her Majesty's peace in the capital.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House raised many points during the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt) mentioned the large drop in the number of burglaries in the Metropolitan police area, which has decreased by 14 per cent. The incidence of theft has decreased by 8 per cent. and total crime in the Metropolitan police area has decreased by 6 per cent. in the past 12 months. I pay tribute to the welcome that my hon. Friend gave to the partnership campaign.

My hon. Friend was concerned about police, not numbers, in Bromley borough. These are matters for the Metropolitan police Commissioner to consider, and I am sure that he will read the transcript of the debate carefully and pay attention to my hon. Friend's comments.

My hon. Friend was also concerned about the mounted branch. The Commissioner informs me that he has now considered the scrutiny recommendations and, in the light of these, he does not propose to make any significant reduction in the strength of the mounted branch. It has not yet been decided whether any change should be made to stabling arrangements. Of course, we will ensure that my hon. Friend's remarks are drawn to the attention of the Commissioner.

The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) asked about stop and search. It is irrelevant whether a person is arrested: a written record must be made of all stops and searches by police officers. However, the method of the retention of such records is a matter for the chief officer of the force concerned. I reject entirely the hon. Gentleman's claims of deliberate harassment of his constituents. The police must operate within the law.

I welcome the opening remarks by the hon. Member for Blackburn. He praised the Metropolitan police and said that it was good to see them tackling pockets of racism and taking the importance of impartiality very seriously indeed. I agree that the Metropolitan police are doing just that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) asked what batons the Metropolitan police would use. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has approved a range of batons as suitable for use by the Metropolitan police, and it is up to the Commissioner to decide which ones will be most appropriate for which circumstances.

Of course, there must be adequate training in the use of the batons; no chief officer wishes to issue any equipment to his officers without ensuring that training is adequate. I understand that it is envisaged that there will be about six hours training in the use of the new batons.

My hon. Friend asked also about pepper spray. He should know that my right hon. and learned Friend has commissioned research into the possible carcinogenic risks of the spray. We should examine the risks carefully. I know that many members of the police force are desperately keen to access this very useful defensive method if it is safe. However, we have a duty to undertake research to ensure that it is safe not just for the person in whose face it may be sprayed, but primarily for the officer who may use it over many years and therefore soak up a larger dose than anyone else. We expect to receive the report before the end of the year, but we must ensure that the research is thorough and adequate.

I understand that the technical specifications for the new radio system can include encryption, and that the Commissioner intends that all police radios should have this important protective device installed in due course.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked what the establishment figure will be next year. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not hear the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), who gave an excellent explanation of funding and police establishments. If the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey had been in the Chamber, he would have heard that we do not intend to set police establishment figures in the future.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the present position. The current establishment figure for the Metropolitan police is 28,201 and the current strength is 28,079—99.5 per cent. up to the establishment figure. That is pretty good going. Of course, the hon. Gentleman must not read too much into the figures. Only one group of trainees needs to graduate from training school and suddenly the strength of the force is increased. If more people are waiting to go through training school, force strength may appear to be down. The levels fluctuate—admittedly, to a greater extent throughout the country than in the Met.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey suggested that the unemployment element in the formula undermined arguments that unemployment was not a cause of crime. Of course it is not a cause of crime. The unemployment portion of the formula is less than 0.4 per cent. That is a standard Department of the Environment calculation in the formula. It has existed for the rest of local government for many years. If the hon. Gentleman suggests that that is positive proof that unemployment is a cause of crime, even he would admit that that is pretty cockeyed.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the raid on Southwark. He said that timing was a problem. I suggest that perhaps it was not merely the timing. Perhaps his remarks could have exacerbated the problem. He issued a press statement which said:

"for every illegal immigrant employed by Southwark Council, a local legitimate job seeker is deprived of a job".

I am not sure how much that stirred the pot. Before the hon. Gentleman criticises immigration service or police tactics, he should pay careful attention to his own remarks.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) for his tribute to the Metropolitan police for their success against crime and his welcome of the partnership approach. I hope that he will suggest to Fulham council that it could follow the Wandsworth approach, which is an excellent way of acquiring more special officers in its area. Special constables wear the uniform of the regular police. They are trained as regular police officers. They are sworn as constables. They are the only ones to have the powers and duties of a constable. If Fulham follows the excellent example of Wandsworth, which is helping through advertising campaigns to fund more special constables, that would help solve its problems.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: No. I wish to deal with another point that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey raised. He mentioned that more officers were now working operationally. That is a key point. While the House tends to become obsessed with regular police numbers, we must not lose sight of the fact that what matters is the number doing operational duties.

However, it is worth comparing the overall numbers for 1979 and 1994. In 1979, there were 111,500 regular officers. There are now 128,000 in the country as a whole. In 1979, there were 16,000 specials. There are now 20,500. We hope to increase that to 30,000. Civilian strength was 35,000 in 1979 and is now 50,000. That is an increase of 46 per cent.

The Metropolitan police had 22,000 regulars in 1979 and has 28,000 now. It had 12,000 civilians then and has 14,000 now. So the House will see that throughout the country and in the Metropolitan police the Government have ensured through their funding of the police service an increase in regular officers, the special constabulary and the vital civilian support staff.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) is not in his place. I must say to him—I hope that one of his hon. Friends will tell him—that there is no threat of privatising the police. Before he says that little old ladies will not be helped across the road and the police will no longer be able to get cats out of trees or perform other essential community policing tasks, I hope that he will read the core and ancillary tasks report. He will see that there is not the slightest suggestion of taking away from the police those vital community policing tasks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham asked whether local authorities could help finance the police. Of course they can, if they so wish. They can do so up to their capping limit but they can also give them support in many other ways. It is not just financial help. They can give support by helping architects to produce better design of housing estates, undertaking truancy initiatives in education and rehousing troublesome families. All those things can be done in conjunction with the police. Local authorities can help support advertising campaigns for more special constables. There is a host of things that caring and concerned authorities can do. I welcome that. I also welcome my hon. Friend's excellent exposition of the funding formula.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) made some valid points about the right to protest to which all people should pay careful attention. The hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) sought to ridicule street watch by quoting a study which found only one person in London willing to join it. Another wider survey, perhaps in *Police Review*—I am not sure—also sought to knock street watch. It said that only 17 per cent. of neighbourhood watch members would want to take part. Neighbourhood watch has 5.5 million members and that makes it almost 1 million members who would want to take part. If 17 per cent. of the 200,000 neighbourhood watch schemes that we hope to create participate in street watch, that will indeed be great.

I must conclude with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). It really is not good enough for the hon. Gentleman to stand up in here and say, "Of course, I condemn violence and when I was speaking as a keynote speaker at the rally, yes, I condemned violence," knowing full well that, after his back was turned or he was safely tucked up in bed, violence broke out. It was organised by groups who publish leaflets months in advance to "Keep it Spikey", as the hon. Member for Blackburn quoted. The hon. Member for Islington, North might be regarded as one of those "fluffies" that the leaflet mentions. They are:

"people on the demonstration that think we should keep things calm"—

and not have violence—

"these tossers . . . are scum. If they get in the way clout them."

The hon. Gentleman made allegations about police tactics. Those are the same police--

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

DATA PROTECTION

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That the Data Protection Registrar shall, with effect from 1st September 1994, be paid a salary which shall be the same as that payable from time to time to a Grade 3 Officer of the Home Civil Service;

That there shall be paid to any Data Protection Registrar appointed after 1st January 1994 the same pension as that payable to or in respect of a Grade 3 Officer of the Home Civil Service under the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.— [*Mr. Wells.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 6th December, the Speaker shall put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to public expenditure, including the Question on any amendment thereto which she may have selected, and the said Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.— [*Mr. Wells.*]

Twyford Down

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I am grateful for this Adjournment debate. There is no doubt that the section of the M3 that is being constructed through Twyford down in Hampshire is among the most controversial ever to be constructed.

More than 20 years were spent in trying to identify a route around, under and finally through the top of Twyford down. With the pattern of roads that had been established by the mid-1980s, it was inevitable and, indeed, essential that some proper link be established between the M3 and the M27. As a Member of Parliament representing Southampton, I fully recognise that. I have always believed, and believe today, that less destructive alternatives were available.

As the impact of the current route on the beauty of the downs and the Itchen valley and the destruction of sites of special scientific interest and archaeological sites became widely known, the outcry grew. More than any other road scheme, Twyford down came to symbolise in the minds of many people all that was wrong with the Government's roads policy. In the words of Lord Justice Dillon in the Court of Appeal,

"it is not very surprising that there are many people who deplore the decision and who regret that Twyford Down should be defaced by a motorway. In the circumstances, it is also not surprising, in a democracy, that some people should have thought of holding peaceful protests or peaceful demonstrations against the construction of the motorway along the selected route over Twyford Down".

Twyford down attracted many different people from all parts of the country and all types of background to participate in a variety of protests. The great majority took part in symbolic peaceful protests around and on the site. In my experience, the majority of people who take part in any demonstration of that sort say the same thing, "I never thought that I would find myself doing something like this." The freedom to protest is not one that most people use most of the time; only when a particular event or issue that matters deeply to us hits us, are we finally moved to respond. For that very reason, that freedom is fundamental and must be protected.

Of course—I do not want to avoid this point—other protesters went further. Some sought to delay construction by passively obstructing the work; others, going beyond what I could regard as reasonable, damaged construction equipment. For a democratic society, direct action poses a dilemma. I do not believe that the decisions of a democratically elected Government can, or should be, lightly thwarted by direct action, no matter how altruistic or well-intentioned, or how correct their criticism of Government policy. That would simply give power to the most determined and not the most representative.

On the other hand, we should understand the sincere and honest passions that motivated some people to participate in that action. In any case, the response to protest must be measured and appropriate. Even those who commit direct action have the right to be treated appropriately. The Government simply cannot say, "These people are causing a problem, so we are entitled to do anything we feel like to stop them."

I believe that the response, both to the peaceful non-disruptive protest and to the direct action protest, was neither measured nor appropriate. First, Twyford down was, as far as I can establish, the first time that widespread surveillance was carried out on British people by private detective agencies acting on behalf of the Government. Secondly, the Government have played a direct role in the retention of private security guards who used violence against protestors. Thirdly, the Government are now pursuing, at taxpayers' expense, a punitive legal action against people who allegedly took part in protests of the most innocuous and innocent form.

Brays detective agency was hired, for what turned out to be a cost of more than £250,000, to take photographs of protesters and to serve papers on them. As far as I can establish, that scale of surveillance has never been undertaken by any Department. The privatisation of surveillance and snooping should therefore have been approached with great sensitivity and care—but far from it.

There are no guidelines, either in the Department of Transport or in the Government, as to the use of private detective agencies. I asked the National Audit Office to investigate the hiring of Brays, and the Comptroller and Auditor General confirmed to me in a letter dated 18 October that expenditure on Brays was allowed to grow from an initial £836 allowed within delegated authorisation to £250,000.

Expenditure reached nearly £100,000 before a proper written contract was let—albeit then without competitive tendering. It was only after I had tabled parliamentary questions about contracts that any formal contract was let. The Comptroller and Auditor General concluded:

"Whilst the Department felt they had to respond quickly to the escalating protest action it is still important for them to follow authorised contract procedures . . . in this case, however, the Department neither established a contract when the scope of the work changed from a one-off action to an on-going surveillance operation, nor held a competitive tender exercise once they recognised the extent of the work involved."

The rules of the Department were not followed.

The National Audit Office was clearly not initially convinced that expenditure on Brays was even legal. The Comptroller and Auditor General wrote to me, saying:

"there were no special guidelines in place on employing private detective agencies; our financial auditors have looked into whether this expenditure should have treated as novel and contentious, and therefore subject to Treasury approval."

I understand that the Treasury has now ruled that the expenditure was allowable, and there I suspect that the issue will remain unless it is challenged in the courts.

I must say that I doubt whether Parliament has ever knowingly voted money to the Department of Transport for such a use of private detective agencies. I hope that we can be told what the role of Ministers was in the affair. Were all the decisions taken by junior civil servants rattling around out of control, or were Ministers involved in the decisions on the surveillance? If so, which Minister took the decision to use Brays in this role, to overrule normal contracting procedures and to spend £250,000 of public money? I hope that the Minister for Railways and Roads can tell the House the answers.

Brays' performance for £250,000 appears to have been incompetent, inefficient and a threat to civil liberties. Of 76 writs issued, more than half have been to people who were identified not by Brays but by Hampshire police.

Many writs have not been served, leaving some people unaware that they are the subject of legal action. I know of a well-documented case where repeated attempts to issue a writ against an individual were dropped only when a solicitor successfully challenged Brays' identification.

That raises an important question. If one individual has been wrongly identified, how many others may have been? How many files are held, on whom and in what form, and to what other uses will that inaccurate information be put? There were no guidelines covering the work of Brays, and no effective safeguards either.

I understand that Brays has written to protesters saying that it would deny them access even to computer records under the Data Protection Act 1988, as they form material likely to be the subject of court action. I do not believe that the holding of inaccurate records by a private company paid for by the taxpayer can be treated lightly, and certainly not with the cavalier approach to civil liberties, proper contracting procedures and financial controls shown by the Department of Transport. Why has no Minister ever introduced even the most basic safeguards over Brays' activities?

Those who took part in direct action also met a private security firm, Group 4. The protesters tried passively to block the construction of the road and must, therefore, have expected to be removed with some necessary force. However, it is clear that the force used by Group 4 went way beyond what was acceptable.

A solicitor who visited the down on 9 December 1992 wrote:

"On attending the site and in the company of the Observer film crew, one of my clients was severely manhandled by five Security Officers. This client was deliberately poked in the eye by one of those men. The writer immediately informed the surrounding Security Officers of her presence and requested the Officer to release her client forthwith. She was ignored and our client was subject to further bodily assault."

On another occasion, it is claimed:

"two women were admitted to hospital . . . with serious injuries. One was unconscious on the Down for thirty minutes following strangulation by private security officers who again refused to release our client even though she was very distressed and had been vomiting as a result of an assault".

Let us be clear: the protesters were attempting to delay the construction of the road, as far as anyone could tell. Although many people supported their motives, to others—those who want the road to be constructed, and certainly the Department of Transport and the contractors—they were a blessed nuisance. However, that does not in itself justify such excessive force.

We do not yet, I hope, live in a society in which all rights are suspended because someone commits what was, at the time, a civil offence. If the Department of Transport wishes to use private security agencies to implement its policies, it must take full responsibility for ensuring that those agencies function within reasonable guidelines and controls.

Although the contractors retained Group 4, that company's employment was agreed by the Department of Transport. All the extra costs of its activities, which amounted to some £2.5 million, were paid by the Department. Group 4, like Tarmac, has close connections with the Conservative party. Was the Group 4 contract subject to competitive tendering? What measures did the Government take to control its expenditure and ensure that its activities were appropriate?

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the whole issue is that the Department of Transport is pursuing a punitive and vindictive action for damages of more than £2 million against 76 protesters. As I shall attempt to show, many of these protesters were involved in the most innocuous and reasonable actions but now face personal ruin. The action is being pursued in spite of the fact that, in all but a handful of cases, the protesters obeyed entirely injunctions against them to desist from trespass or any other form of protest on the site. Those who did break the injunctions on what they regarded as a point of principle were, I understand, gaoled, which is what the law requires.

The pursuit of further legal action for damages has nothing to do with preventing these individuals from protesting—they have done what the court ordered—but everything to do with intimidating others in the hope that they will not take part in any form of protest.

The legal action now means that people who have taken part in the most innocuous activities are being sued for damages. The same is true of people who do not know even that they have been the subject of an injunction and who have not been near Twyford down since the injunctions were served and of people who have complied with the terms of the injunctions in every respect.

My constituent, Maggie Lambert, is a mature student of photography with an ambition to become a photo-journalist. She was on Twyford down on several occasions to photograph the down, the construction work and the demonstrations as part of a student project. She successfully challenged parts of an injunction which implied that she had supported and been involved in direct action. In the Court of Appeal, Lord Justice Mann said:

"There is nothing in the evidence to suggest Mrs. Lambert was present at some disturbing scenes other than as a mature student of press photography".

However, as the Court of Appeal upheld the injunction against trespass, Maggie Lambert is still a party to the claim for damages.

Mr. David Plumstead, described by Lord Justice Dillon as

"a man of mature years",

went to the down once. He went in what Lord Justice Dillon described as

"respectable but trespassing parliamentary company".

That company was myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). It seems to have occurred to someone of above average intelligence in the Department of Transport that serving injunctions on three hon. Members for addressing an assembly of free British citizens on an English hillside on a sunny spring Sunday afternoon might be a bad idea. Mr. Plumstead, who does not enjoy that protection, and who went there only on that one Sunday afternoon, finds himself confronted by the same claim for £2 million.

Jane Child was, according to her injunction, on the down for 15 minutes. She was arrested on that occasion but, subsequently, she received a payment of £4,500 compensation for wrongful arrest. She, too, finds herself still the subject of that claim for damages.

Michael Halford, a professional man, attended one day when direct action and violence from the security guards occurred. He had noticed that, in the absence of what he calls "respectable observers", the police seemed to have

[Mr. John Denham]

less regard for ensuring that security guards did not use excessive force against non-violent protesters. In the course of offering himself as a witness to the police about that violence, he volunteered his name and address. He now finds himself being sued for damages. Incidentally, the expensive Brays failed to serve notice on him, either.

As he has said in a statement:

"Legal action is being taken against individuals regardless of whether they were responsible for any damage or at how many events they were actually present. We are being sued primarily because they have our names. In my case I only recently discovered that I am included. It is considered that I have been served with a summons because the Plaintiffs have put up a notice in a field somewhere. I have never seen this notice yet according to reports in the press I can be sued for £1.9 million for damages I have not caused without receiving any notification beforehand. This appears to contravene the very essence of a fair and democratic legislature."

I agree with what he says.

Mr. Stephen Ward—another man of mature years, according to the courts—attended on days of direct action as a non-participant observer, hoping, as I think he has expressed, that, by recording the actions of security guards, he could help to moderate their conduct. In the Court of Appeal, Lord Justice Dillon declined to quash any injunctions against Mr. Ward. He held—these are my layman's terms, so I hope that I will be forgiven if I do not get it absolutely right—that Mr. Ward, by attending in that role, was a party to the direct action. However, in the High Court, Mr. Justice Alliott said to Mr. Ward:

"Accepting him as a man of honour I hope he will recognise that the best way to avoid violence is to let the rule of law prevail and to ensure that he and all the other protesters act within the law."

That is the point. Mr. Ward obeyed Mr. Justice Alliott's urging. He has not broken the injunction. He has obeyed the ruling of the court. The vast majority of the others have obeyed the injunctions against them. Yet he and they continue to be pursued for their share of more than £2 million in damages, when interest is taken into account.

That is the real threat behind the Department's pursuit of that action. The Department seems to be intent on creating a position in which anyone who attends a place where someone else has taken direct action, whether or not the person has participated in direct action, or even, as in the case of Mr. Plumstead, on a day when no direct action took place, may find himself or herself the subject of a punitive court action. Even so, some people might ask, should not the Government attempt to recover the costs of actions that they claim have cost £1.9 million, plus interest?

Good public money is being poured after bad. Many of the protesters have no income or assets. Those who do are confronted by heavy legal bills and perhaps the loss of their homes. Any reasonable estimate must be that the Department will not even recover court costs, let alone damages.

By June last year, £216,000 had been spent on legal actions. There have been two further expensive court hearings since. Only a handful of people have been able to challenge injunctions in court. In Maggie Lambert's case, the court costs were £36,000, which could only be met because a third party, her trade union, could afford to fund the action. As each day passes, legal bills to the Department of Transport increase. The taxpayer is not only meeting the Department's costs; some of the people covered by injunctions are legally aided. Each day, the taxpayer's bill for their defence costs increases.

Most alarmingly, the Department of Transport has guaranteed to pay the bills of the two private companies—Tarmac and Blackwell—which are parties to the court action. Why should the taxpayer pay those bills? Because those companies, which are private, profit-making companies, know that there is no conceivable chance of damages being obtained and court costs being covered if they sued on their own account. The taxpayer's money is used to fund a punitive, vindictive and all-embracing action against people who wanted to express their opposition to the destruction of an especially beautiful corner of southern England.

The threat of the action is intended deliberately to dissuade middle-of-the-road, middle-class, middle-income people from associating themselves with, or supporting, more radical campaigners, as they have done in increasing numbers in recent years. It would be quite wrong, using the premise that direct action has taken place, to throw the net so wide that anybody who in any way takes part in a form of public protest against a scheme such as the M3 is faced with punitive legal costs.

I hope that the Minister will say that the case is to be dropped and that the Government recognise the need to re-establish consensus and consent on transport policies. I hope that he recognises the real dangers to civil liberties and freedoms which our people cherish and that he will appreciate what the Government have done. I hope that he will promise that guidelines and safeguards on the use of private agencies will quickly be brought into force and backed by law.

2.49 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I emphasise that the legal proceedings to which the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) has referred and which were initiated by the Department of Transport, arise from unlawful protest action. I was somewhat gratified that the hon. Gentleman drew a distinction between legitimate protest and action that goes well beyond what can be tolerated in a civilised society.

I assure the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I fully support the public's right to protest lawfully about the Department's road building programme or about anything else that we do. We all cherish that freedom. We are all able to make our views known on issues that we consider important, and I do not doubt that many of those who protested about the building of the last link in the M3 have a sincere concern for the environment. I share that concern, as do hon. Members. However, holding such views does not give people the right to stop others engaging in lawful activity.

It might be helpful first to explain some of the scheme's history. Mindful of the time, I shall then deal directly with the hon. Gentleman's points. The old A33 Winchester bypass was a pre-war, dual two-lane carriageway. It was extremely congested, carrying far too much traffic. Proposals for a motorway to replace the bypass were first published in 1970. The current scheme for the section between Bar End, north of Winchester, and Compton, to the south of the city, was finally approved by the then Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment in February 1990. That section involves the construction

of 3.7 miles of dual three-lane motorway and it is expected to carry at least 85,000 vehicles per day by the year 2007.

I am sure that the House will realise that the completion of this final section of the M3, which also forms part of the strategic route from the midlands to the south coast and will serve the hon. Gentleman's port constituency in Southampton, will be widely welcomed by local people who will experience less noise and congestion, particularly in the residential and conservation areas of St. Cross. It will also be appreciated by many motorists.

I recognise that the scheme has attracted a great deal of controversy. It involves a cutting through Twyford down and affects two sites of special scientific interest and two scheduled ancient monuments. However, only some 8.6 acres out of the total of 244.6 acres in the Itchen valley water meadows SSSI and 4.7 acres in the Dongas, which forms part of the 102.5 acres of the St. Catherine's hill SSSI, were required to build the new road. Neither SSSI has been destroyed, as has often been claimed. That was claimed again by the hon. Gentleman.

I have explained that background because I want to demonstrate to the House that all the necessary steps were taken to provide considerable opportunities for objections to the proposals to stop the Department from proceeding within the legal framework before building of the road commenced. However, there comes a point at which it should be recognised that a scheme has satisfied all the statutory procedures and should be permitted to go ahead. Even then, the public may still oppose the proposals and seek to change the Department's mind.

However, the line must be drawn at the unlawful actions that were witnessed on Twyford down. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Malone), through whose constituency the road passes, fully supports the action that was taken to curb the dangerous and unlawful behaviour of protesters which has disturbed so many of his constituents for far too long.

An advance works contract was started in February 1992 to provide haul routes to facilitate the construction. That is now largely complete and traffic started to use the cutting at the end of July. Most of the new road should be opened to traffic as a dual three-lane motorway by about the middle of this month.

In view of the time, I shall now deal with the points raised by the hon. Gentleman. If time permits, I shall then return to other remarks that I had hoped to make. First, he suggested that the Department was in some way vindictive in pursuing legal action and action to recover costs and damages. He knows that the losses suffered through delay and damage to equipment have been substantial. He cited a number of individual constituents' cases. He will understand that I do not intend to comment on individuals whose cases are still a matter for the courts. He knows that a summons for directions was issued in the summer and served by our solicitors, as the next stage in the proceedings. The hearing of that summons took place on 19 September. The Department is now proceeding in accordance with the directions of the court. We will continue to take appropriate legal action that we consider necessary at the time.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we would drop the action. I am not prepared to concede that. We are protecting the interests of the taxpayer against the unlawful protest action taken by so many people. However, if the defendants in the actions wish them to come to an early conclusion, the hon. Gentleman should advise them to make proposals to settle and give appropriate undertakings about future conduct for our legal advisers and the Department to consider.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Would the undertakings include one not to take part in any further peaceful demonstrations? If that were so, it would be an outrageous condition.

Mr. Watts: As I said, I urge hon. Members to advise their constituents to make proposals to settle the action if they wish to bring it to a speedy conclusion. I shall not respond off the cuff on what undertakings we would consider adequate if such proposals were to be made. It is for the defendants to make the proposals and for us to respond to them. Hon. Members have my assurance that we shall not be vindictive in our attitude if reasonable proposals are made.

The hon. Member for Itchen referred to Brays detective agency. There is nothing sinister about the matter. As he described—but in rather more colourful language than I would use in sticking strictly to the facts—the agency was employed to serve injunction papers on protesters and to obtain photographic evidence for use in legal proceedings. Although there have been wild claims about spying on protesters, Brays' employees were on land properly owned by the Department and took photographs for the purpose of evidence to use against the people trespassing on site.

The hon. Gentleman said that he had raised the employment of Brays with the National Audit Office. I am aware of that, but I am not a party to the correspondence between him and the NAO. Therefore, it would not be right to comment either on his allegations or on what he predicts will be the NAO's reaction. I am assured that there is no evidence of any financial impropriety in the single-tender contract agreement with Brays. To be effective, action needed to be taken with immediate effect. I have no doubt that the NAO will bring any concerns that it has about the handling of Brays' appointment to the Department's attention. If and when it does so, that will be the appropriate time for the Department to respond.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to Group 4 Security. He will be aware that, under the terms of the contract that we issued for the construction of the road, the contractor is responsible for the security of the site. As trespass is a civil, not a criminal, matter, the contractor needs to employ security staff where he believes that the security of his site is under threat. The hon. Gentleman made a number of allegations about inappropriate use of force by the security service. The instructions given by the contractor to Group 4 were that only minimum force should be used in removing unlawful trespassers. Any complaints of assault or harassment are clearly a matter for the police and not one on which I should reach a judgment.

The hon. Gentleman must recognise that it is not just the scheme for the M3 through Twyford down where there has been unlawful protest action. I hope that he will join me not in condoning, but in condemning, such unlawful action. That is the real measure of the threat to a civilised and law-abiding society.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 17 November 1994

DEFENCE

Service Housing

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on plans to improve service housing.

Mr. Rifkind: We indicated some time ago that our original proposal to improve the quality and management of the married quarters estate by establishing a housing trust had encountered difficulties. We have therefore been considering alternative options for achieving our underlying objectives of improving housing and management and transferring the married quarters estate to the private sector. NatWest Markets, the merchant bank, has been engaged to help us develop proposals. We believe that there is considerable latent value in the estate which could be realised with the introduction of private sector capital and expertise, for the benefit of service families, the taxpayer and investors alike.

Meanwhile, we intend to improve the way in which our married quarters are managed. I intend to set up a new, integrated, tri-service housing organisation to manage the married quarters estate as an entity rather than on the single-service lines on which it is currently managed. This organisation will be known as the Defence Housing Executive; and Mr. Michael Robinson, whom we appointed as chief executive designate of the housing trust, has taken charge of planning its formation.

The Defence Housing Executive will assume responsibility for managing the estate and its maintenance on 1 April 1995, bringing together the various separate staffs. It will be able to maximise efficiencies and provide a better service to service families occupying the houses. The organisation will be established in the first instance as a budgetary unit within the Ministry of Defence, but with a remit to move towards autonomous operation as a likely candidate for privatisation in due course. Much of the work we had already done in planning for the housing trust will be relevant to the new organisation, and I am confident that its establishment will work to the advantage of service families.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Chessington Computer Centre

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the future of Chessington Computer Centre.

Mr. David Hunt: When Chessington was launched as an agency and trading fund in April 1993, my predecessor announced that it was a clear candidate for privatisation, but that a decision would be deferred to allow Chessington to develop a commercial track record, and to give time for private sector competition to become established.

Chessington has been very successful as an executive agency, for example, achieving all its performance targets in its first year. Over the coming months, I will be reviewing the case for privatisation and how it might best be achieved in the light of developments since April 1993.

I would welcome contributions to this review from those with an interest in Chessington and its work by January 1995. Further details are in the December issue of the *Market Testing Bulletin* to be published on 21 November.

TREASURY

ECOFIN

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the most recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the United Kingdom at the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Brussels on 7 November.

The Council discussed the follow-up to the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment. On financing of trans-European networks—TENs—the Council accepted that there was a need to deal with projects on a case-by-case basis, with no need for any additional new sources of funding. The chairman of the European investment bank—EIB—stated that he believed that existing requirements could be met through EIB and private sector loans. There were also discussions of the Economic Policy Committee reports on employment aspects and on growth and environment aspects of the White Paper follow-up. On the basis of all these discussions, the presidency agreed to prepare draft ECOFIN conclusions for the European Council.

The Council discussed presidency reports on the progress of the Commission's proposal for a tax relief for biofuels and the draft directive on taxation of savings. There will be further discussion at the next ECOFIN meeting on 5 December.

The Council discussed the proposed directive on taxation of interest and royalties payments. In view of the continued lack of agreement on this issue, the presidency agreed to discuss the next steps with the Commission.

The Council agreed to a presidency non-paper expressing scepticism about Commission suggestions for new forms of financial co-operation with the central and eastern European Countries as part of the pre-accession strategy to be agreed at the Essen European Council.

No formal votes were taken at the Council meetings.

Double Taxation Treaties

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will outline policy on the negotiation of double taxation treaties; and if he will make a statement on recent developments.

Sir George Young: The Government are committed to expanding the network of double taxation treaties and modernising existing ones. In this way, we minimise

barriers to international trade and investment—objectives stressed in the competitiveness White Paper.

Double taxation treaties are of major importance for United Kingdom business, as they assist taxpayers to trade or invest abroad without the impediment of double taxation or excessive compliance problems. The United Kingdom has led the way in this field by negotiating the largest network of double taxation treaties; we now have treaties with about 100 countries—reflecting our role as a major trading nation.

Most recently, the House has approved 10 double taxation treaties, including those with Vietnam, Mexico and the Russian Federation. At least another dozen treaties have been signed or are at an advanced stage of negotiation, including those with France, Malta and Argentina.

Looking to the future, I have approved an Inland Revenue programme of negotiations covering the period to March 1996. This targets, in particular, the fastest developing economies offering greatest growth potential for United Kingdom business. These priorities have been determined following extensive consultation between the Inland Revenue and business, commercial and professional representatives bodies and other Government Departments. This is an excellent example of the benefits of close co-operation between business and the Inland Revenue.

ENVIRONMENT

Bathing Water

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the results of this year's bathing water quality monitoring; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The monitoring carried out during the 1994 season shows that 82 per cent. of the 457 identified bathing waters in the United Kingdom met the mandatory coliform bacteria standards of the EC bathing water directive. This compares with 80 per cent. in 1993 and 79 per cent. in 1992.

During the season, over 97 per cent. of the 18,000 coliform samples were within, and in most cases well within, the required standards.

It is encouraging to see that the continuing improvement in the overall standard of our bathing waters is being maintained. I look forward to further increases in compliance in the near future as more and more schemes in the bathing water improvement programme begin to have an effect. Although we still have some way to go, it is especially encouraging that some waters which have repeatedly failed year on year have this season for the first time achieved the EC standards.

The main results for the United Kingdom are summarised as follows with details for English and Welsh bathing waters. This information will be placed in the Library of the House today and will be supplemented by a report with more detailed results in due course.

Bathing Waters Survey—1994 Results for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. (Compliance with Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC): Coliform Standards).

	Pass	*Fail*	*Total*
England and Wales			
NRA Regions			
Northumbrian[1]	29(25)	5(9)	34(34)
Yorkshire[1]	20(21)	2(1)	22(22)
Anglian	27(28)	6(5)	33(33)
Thames	2(3)	1(0)	3(3)
Southern	53(58)	14(9)	67(67)
Wessex[1]	40(35)	2(7)	42(42)
South West[1]	111(107)	22(26)	133(133)
North West	24(13)	9(20)	33(33)
Welsh	39(42)	12(9)	51(51)
Total	345(332)	73(86)	418(418)
Scotland	16(18)	7(5)	23(23)
Northern Ireland	15(15)	1(1)	16(16
Grand Total	376(365)	81(92)	457(457)

(Results for 1993 are in brackets)

[1] Northumbrian and Yorkshire, and South West and Wessex NRA regions have amalgamated, but results are recorded separately here for the purpose of comparison.

SCOTLAND

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what decision he has taken on Lothian health board's strategy for people with learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I am today announcing my approval of Lothian health board's strategy for people with learning disabilities and the consequent closure of Gogarburn hospital in Edinburgh before the end of the century. The strategy was developed by Lothian health board and other agencies last year and went out to public consultation in the summer. I have considered the proposals carefully and I am satisfied that they will provide for the development of a comprehensive community care service which will enhance the quality of life for people with learning disabilities in Lothian and, in particular, those currently at Gogarburn hospital. I applaud the collaboration between the key agencies that has made the agreement on Gogarburn possible, and their joint commitment to provide the resources needed.

The board's strategy is for the provision of support, care and treatment services for people with learning disabilities away from hospitals and into the community. The planning and purchasing of long-stay care accommodation, day-time activities and other social care services will become the responsibility of Lothian regional council. Lothian health board will continue to purchase specialist health care, support and treatment services for this group of people as an integral part of the comprehensive network of services proposed. Two NHS units—a challenging behaviour unit and a dual diagnosis unit, for those with both a learning disability and a mental health problem—will be built to provide short-stay, specialist assessment and intensive treatment for in-patients, together with day hospital facilities. The board will also purchase medical and paramedical services

provided in the community, and these services will be expanded above current levels.

The public consultation demonstrated wide support for the aims of the strategy and for the closure of Gogarburn hospital which, it is now recognised, is an inappropriate and inaccessible place for the care of people with learning disabilities. There will be a carefully planned and phased rehousing, between now and the end of 1999, of more than 300 residents into supported accommodation in the community. A strong message from the consultation was the importance of ensuring that there was proper alternative accommodation in the community and that all placements would be based on a thorough assessment of the needs of Gogarburn residents.

I am satisfied that these issues have been fully addressed. A comprehensive network of alternative services will be developed with an emphasis on achieving domestic style accommodation in ordinary housing where possible. This will mean considerable adaptation of properties, the provision of social care and, in some cases, paramedical support, and carefully planned day activities. Each of the residents will be rehoused only after a detailed assessment of his or her social and health care needs has determined exactly what kind of care and accommodation he or she needs. Full account will be taken of the wishes of users and their carers, and particular attention will be given to the needs of the more profoundly handicapped of the residents who will need the most intensive support.

The board and other agencies have addressed the need to ensure that carers delivering support in the community are appropriate trained and skilled. As far as possible, staff of Gogarburn hospital will be offered the opportunity to deploy their skills in the community and much effort is already being put into identifying new job opportunities and providing retraining where necessary.

There will be considerable transitional costs incurred in maintaining Gogarburn hospital while alternative provision is being developed and relocation of residents gets under way. I am therefore pledging a substantial amount of bridging finance to meet these double running costs. This will amount to £1·4 million in this financial year, up to £2·8 million in 1995–96 and a further sum in the ensuing years, bringing the total sum up to £14·14 million. In addition, I will provide £2·5 million, spread over the first two years, to help with the capital costs of supported accommodation.

These substantial Government contributions are a measure of our commitment to ensuring that community care for this vulnerable client group is a success.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new items, accepted in lieu of inheritance tax, have been allocated in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to announce that I am allocating a collection of items, accepted in lieu of approximately £108,000 of inheritance tax, to the National Trust for Scotland. The collection of items, mainly consisting of furniture and fittings, was accepted in March 1994 in lieu of tax arising from the death of Major Charles Smiley. The items are historically associated with Castle Fraser, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, and will remain on display at Castle Fraser in accordance with the condition on which the offer was made.

WALES

Local Government

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he received in response to his Department's letter of 7 April "Local Government Reorganisation: Lead Authorities for Certain Financial Matters"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I received several representations on the arrangements for administering superannuation and Welsh Church Act funds from 1 April 1996; and on the closure of the accounts of district and county councils, including their residual loan debt and insurance matters.

I have considered all the representations carefully and have reached the conclusions set out in the three following tables, which will be given effect by secondary legislation in due course. In the case of superannuation funds, regulations will be made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Table 1: Superannuation funds

Current administering authority	*New administering new authorities*	*Covering areas of following authority*
Clwyd	Flintshire	Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham
Dyfed	Carmarthenshire	Carmarthenshire, Cardiganshire, Pembrokeshire
Gwent	Torfaen	Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport
Gwynedd	Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire, Aberconwy and Colwyn, Anglesey
Mid Glamorgan	Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Rhondda, Cynon, Taff, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil
Powys	Powys	Powys
South Glamorgan	Cardiff	Cardiff, The Vale of Glamorgan
West Glamorgan	Swansea	Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot

Table 2: Welsh Church Act funds
Each of the new authorities will be vested with and responsible for administering its own Welsh Church Act fund, except in the following cases:

Current administering authority	*New authority to be vested with fund*	*Covering areas of following new authorities*
Gwent	Monmouthshire	Monmouthshire, Blaenau-Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport,Torfaen
Mid Glamorgan	Rhondda, Cynon, Taff,	Rhondda, Cynon, Taff, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil
South Glamorgan	The Vale of Glamorgan	The Vale of Glamorgan, Cardiff

Note:
While the funds would be vested in the three authorities listed in the second column, it would not prevent the other authorities listed in the third column from taking decisions about how to apply income from the funds, whether jointly or individually.

Table 3: Closure of accounts (includes responsibility for residual loan debt and insurance matters)

New authority	*to close accounts of*
Aberconwy and Colwyn	Aberconwy, Colwyn
Anglesey	Anglesey
Blaenau Gwent	Blaenau Gwent
Bridgend	Ogwr
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	Arfon, Dwyfor, Meirionnydd, Gwynedd
Caerphilly	Islwyn, Rhymney Valley
Cardiff	Cardiff, South Glamorgan
Cardiganshire	Ceredigion
Carmarthenshire	Carmarthen, Dinefwr, Llanelli, Dyfed
Denbighshire	Rhuddlan, Glyndwr
Flintshire	Delyn, Alyn and Deeside, Clwyd
Merthyr Tydfil	Merthyr Tydfil
Monmouthshire	Monmouth
Neath and Port Talbot	Neath, Port Talbot
Newport	Newport, Gwent
Pembrokeshire	Preseli Pembrokeshire, South Pembrokeshire
Powys	Brecknock, Radnorshire, Montgomeryshire, Powys
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Cynon Valley, Taff Ely, Rhondda, Mid Glamorgan
Swansea	Swansea, Lliw Valley, West Glamorgan
Torfaen	Torfaen

Table 3: Closure of accounts (includes responsibility for residual loan debt and insurance matters)

New authority	*to close accounts of*
The Vale of Glamorgan	Vale of Glamorgan
Wrexham	Wrexham Maelor

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Cash Limits

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in the 1994–95 cash limit for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Baldry: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on the external assistance vote—class II, vote 5—will be increased by £11,068,000 from £1,912,875,000 to £1,923,943,000. The increase includes £10,205,000 in respect of rollover of underspending against the 1993–94 external assistance vote. The gross running costs limit for the ODA has been increased by £863,000 from £73,930,000 to £74,793,000. This includes £860,000 in respect of an end of year flexibility entitlement and a transfer of £3,000 from HM Treasury to pay for the average property price list. The increase will be offset by a transfer and a claim on the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 14 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The only decision taken at this Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, was the adoption by a qualified majority of a measure laying down rules on the definition and designation of butter, margarine and similar spreads. I voted against the measure, on the grounds that it was unnecessary, likely to confuse rather than inform consumers and, through its requirements on the use of designations, liable to inhibit the development of low-fat spreads. Luxembourg also voted against.

The Council had a general discussion of the Commission's proposals for implementing the agricultural aspects of the Uruguay round settlement, and a further discussion of the Commission's proposals for reforming the wine regime.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what proposals he has for the frequency of payments of incapacity benefit.

Mr. Hague: Incapacity benefit will normally be paid fortnightly in arrears in line with the arrangements for benefits to unemployed people. Fortnightly payments will also apply to severe disablement allowance and income support for those incapable of work. The new payment frequency will apply to new claims only.

EDUCATION

Sixth Form Colleges

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she has received the report of the inquiries conducted into affairs at Derby tertiary college, Wilmorton and St Philip's Roman Catholic six form college, Birmingham, and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have received recommendations from the Further Education Funding Council concerning the governance of Derby tertiary college, Wilmorton and St Philip's Roman Catholic sixth form college, Birmingham following the inquiries conducted respectively by Mr. Michael Shattock and Sir John Caines. I am most grateful to the Council and to Mr. Shattock and Sir John for having carried out the inquiries. Copies of the reports and the recommendations have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Those affected by the recommendations should have the opportunity to comment on them and on the reports. We have written to all those concerned to invite them to do so. I am mindful of the need to take appropriate action in the interests of sound governance of the colleges. I shall also wish to consider, in consultation with the Further Education Funding Council and others involved, what action should be taken to apply any lessons arising from these reports more generally across the further education sector.

I have been glad to see that, despite their difficulties, the colleges have been providing effective education for their students and I am satisfied that they can continue to do so.

Common Funding Formula

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what decision she has made as to where and how the common funding formula will operate in 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend announced on 14 November 1994 the Government's decision to extend the common funding formula for secondary schools in 1995–96 to all areas where, as at 30 September 1994, 30 per cent. or more of secondary school pupils were being educated in grant-maintained schools. This will mean a further 17 areas on top of five in which the CFF is operating this year.

A copy of a letter sent by the Department to all grant-maintained schools and local education authorities, explaining the 1995–96 CFF arrangements in more detail, has been placed in the Library.

Administration Expenditure

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what further changes she proposes to make to the announced 1994–95 cash and running cost limits on class X, vote 4, administration, within her responsibility.

Mrs. Gillian Shepherd: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the announced cash limit for class X, vote 4, administration, will be revised from £98,943,000 to £94,922,000.

The revision to the announced cash limit reflects the decision not to take up my Department's running costs end-year flexibility entitlement of £4,021,000 at this time.

As a consequence, the announced running costs limit for my Department will also be revised from £94,400,000 to £90,379,000.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 18 November 1994

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons (Home Leave)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Home Department if he will announce the outcome of the review into the operation of the prison home leave and temporary release schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have announced to the House today the outcome of the review into the operation of the prison home leave and temporary release schemes. Details of my decisions and copies of the report of the Prison Service working group have been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Legal Advice Centre

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to receive Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's interim report on a legal advice unit for the holding centres.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have today arranged for copies of Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's interim report on the proposal for a legal advice unit for the holding centres to be placed in the Library.

I am grateful for the further work Sir Louis has undertaken to produce this report. The proposal for a legal advice unit will be studied carefully, and I shall, of course, seek the views of other interested parties.

TREASURY

Statistical Office

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has begun a review of the agency status of the Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Nelson: The status and organisation of all next steps agencies are required to be periodically reviewed. In accordance with these requirements, a review of the agency status of the Central Statistical Office—CSO—is now under way. The performance of the CSO will be evaluated and CSO activities will be subjected to the normal prior options tests set out in the 1993 "Next Steps Review"—Cm 2430.

Comments and contributions from those with an interest in the CSO and its work would be welcome and should be sent by 30 December 1994 to John Pullinger, Central Statistical Office, Room 61/2, Great George street, London SW1P 3AQ.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 21 November 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Industrial Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what calculation he has made of the additional court days and members of the judiciary needed consequent on the abolition of the industrial injuries compensation scheme.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No such calculation has been made.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the future of the industrial injuries compensation scheme.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate has been made of the additional costs to the legal aid fund of abolition of the industrial injuries compensation scheme.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No such estimate has been made.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many overseas visits he and the Lord Chancellor made between 1 January and 30 June; during how many of those visits he or the Lord Chancellor took part in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and in which countries those activities took place.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have not made any official overseas visit in the period 1 January to 30 June. The Lord Chancellor has made two official overseas visits. Both these visits were arranged and taken in the Lord Chancellor's capacity as Speaker of the House of Lords and did not include any fund-raising activities for the Conservative party. The first was to India, Singapore and Papua New Guinea, from 1 to 9 January; the second to The Hague, from 23 to 26 June.

Small Personal Injury Claims

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he intends to respond to the consultation exercise conducted by his Department into legal costs in small personal injury claims.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In August, following the Court of Appeal judgment in the case of Afzal *v.* Ford Motor Co. Ltd., the Lord Chancellor announced that he does not intend to take any further action at this time on the proposals contained in his consultation paper on small personal injury claims. The central aim of the proposals was to clarify the position of personal injury claims falling below the small claims limit, and this clarification has been provided by the Court of Appeal. The Lord Chancellor will continue to monitor the effect of the judgment on these cases.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the delay in making a decision in respect of equal treatment as between men and women in the payment of invalidity benefit upon reaching retirement age.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) on 3 November at column *1376.*

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department between 1 January and 30 June 1994 those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place.

Mr. Hague: Two of the Department's Ministers made overseas visits during the period 1 January to 30 June 1994. The right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) made a visit to Norway and the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) made visits to Luxembourg—twice—and to Canada and the United States of America.

Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

ENVIRONMENT

Commons Registration Act 1965

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what purposes land registered under village green in the Commons Registration Act 1965 can be used; and who has the final jurisdiction over such land.

Mr. Atkins: Town and village greens are defined in section 22(1) of the Commons Registration Act 1965 as places where people have a customary right to indulge in lawful sports and pastimes.

Town and village greens are protected from inappropriate development or activities by section 12 of the Inclosure Act 1857 and section 29 of the Commons Act 1876. Only the courts have ultimate jurisdiction over town and village greens.

Timberwolf Crossbreed Dogs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to register timberwolf crossbreed dogs.

Mr. Atkins: Licences are required for keeping any animal which appears among those species listed on the schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. Wolves and any wolf hybrids are listed in the schedule. Licensing under the Act is the responsibility of district councils in England.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many incidents of people being attacked by timberwolf crossbreed dogs have been reported in each of the last four years.

Mr. Atkins: I am aware of the recent reported incident in Anglesey. No other incidents of people being attacked by timberwolf crossbreed dogs have been reported to my Department.

Environmental Damage (Coalfields)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make adequate resources available to clear up environmental damage in coal areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: English Partnerships, under the sponsorship of my Department, has since 1 April 1994 has responsibility for the derelict land grant programme which encourages reclamation of derelict land for beneficial uses, including the improvement of the environment. My right hon. Friend issued guidance on 14 April 1994 identifying coalfield reclamation as a priority for English Partnerships to address in developing its derelict land reclamation programme. For 1994–95, English Partnerships has allocated £122 million to this programme of which around £30 million will be spent in the coalfield areas.

TREASURY

EC Expenditure

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total net burden—gross payments to the EC less abatement on the United Kingdom Exchequer—of EC spending in the current financial year; and by how much it will increase in 1995–96 and 1996–97.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's current forecast of the United Kingdom's gross contributions to European Community Institutions and our abatement for the current financial year, together with forecasts for the period 1995–96 and 1996–97, are set out in table 11.1 of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's departmental report—Cm 2517, page 92. As is usual, revised forecasts are being prepared for the Budget.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions he made about the growth of gross domestic product in the EU as a whole in his calculation about the consequences of the increased resources agreed at the Edinburgh summit.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The effect of the Edinburgh financing settlement will be to increase the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC budget by about £75 million in 1995–96, rising to £250 million in 1999 compared with what we would have paid if the present 1·2 per cent. own resources ceiling had been retained.

This estimate is based on the assumption that EU GNP will grow by 2½ per cent. a year in real terms, and that inflation will be 2½ per cent. a year, over the period 1995 to 1999.

VAT

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the revenue secured from VAT on fuel in the current financial year; and what percentage this is of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EU.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The estimated revenue from VAT on fuel and power in the current financial year is £950 million. These receipts have no direct effect on the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC, which is calculated on a notional harmonised VAT base.

Civil Service

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what redundancies are being made in the civil service; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Government expect civil service manpower to fall significantly below 500,000 over the next four years. The Government's aim has been, and will continue to be, that reductions in the size of the civil service should as far as possible be achieved without redundancies. But the scale of the changes in prospect raises the possibility that, in some areas, some redundancies will be unavoidable.

Wherever possible, these will be dealt with on a voluntary basis. There will be full consultation with staff and unions as appropriate.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines he has issued to Departments that use private sector consultants to advise on whether civil service functions should be privatised.

Sir George Young: General advice on the use of private sector consultants is contained in a booklet produced by HM Treasury entitled "Seeking Help from Management Consultants", published by HMSO in 1990.

Household Debt

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount of debt per household for every £100 of disposable income in 1993.

Mr. Nelson: Figures for the level of household debt outstanding are not available. For the personal sector as a whole—which includes unincorporated private businesses and non-profit-making bodies as well as households—total financial liabilities were about £109 per £100 of disposable income in 1993.

Charities

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list of those registered charities for which the Inland Revenue has waived tax liability in each of the past five years.

Sir George Young: I cannot comment on any charity's tax affairs.

National Audit Office

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total amount of public money which is no longer subject to the remit of the National Audit Office following the creation of *(a)* the Housing Corporation, *(b)* opted-out schools and *(c)* the non-departmental public bodies.

Sir George Young: Nil.

Flight Tax

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue he estimates will be generated by the flight tax; and what proportion, as a percentage of that revenue, will be spent on promoting inbound tourism to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is expected that £90 million will be raised from air passenger duty in the remainder of 1994–95, £315 million in 1995–96 and £340 million in 1996–97.

It is not the Government's policy to earmark the revenue from any particular tax to any specific part of the public spending programme. The best way to decide among competing claims on taxpayers' money is to consider each on its merits and set priorities among them.

TRANSPORT

West Coast Main Line

5. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress towards achieving the upgrading of the west coast main line.

17. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current timetable for upgrading the west coast main line.

Dr. Mawhinney: The feasibility study for the modernisation of the west coast main line is progressing well. Railtrack aims to select next year a private sector partner for the main works.

Cycling

13. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to adopt a policy for cycling which reflects Her Majesty's Government's sustainable development strategy and planning policy guidance 13.

Mr. Norris: Our June policy statement recognised that cycling is an economical, healthy and environmentally friendly form of transport for local journeys for a great many people.

Fenchurch Street Line

15. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the privatisation of the Fenchurch Street line; and if he is now in a position to state if the line is profitable.

Mr. Watts: The London, Tilbury and Southend line is planned to be franchised in 1995. It currently receives Exchequer support.

Motor Vehicles (Defective Exhausts)

16. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of prosecutions in 1993 and since 1 January 1994 against motorists for driving a motor vehicle with a defective exhaust system.

Mr. Norris: No figures are available on the number of prosecutions and convictions in 1993 because detailed figures are not kept on the number of prosecutions for emissions offences.

Figures for 1994 are, in any event, not available.

Bypasses

18. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what environmental considerations he takes into account in assessing his policy towards the building of bypasses.

Mr. Watts: Our aim in building bypasses is to take heavy through traffic out of communities. In doing so, we always seek to limit any adverse environmental effects by thorough assessment and good-quality design.

Driving Licence Fraud

19. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to combat driving licence fraud.

Mr. Norris: We plan to introduce a new plastic card driving licence in 1996 incorporating a photograph of the holder. This will help to eliminate misuse of licences and impersonation at driving tests.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

20. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the total expenditure on the high-speed rail link between London and the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The estimated cost of the channel tunnel rail link is around £2·7 billion at fourth quarter 1992 prices.

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the environmental statements for the channel tunnel rail and the M2 widening scheme will be published.

Mr. Watts: The environmental statements for the channel tunnel rail link and the widening scheme for junctions 1 to 4 of the M2 and the A2 at Cobham were published on Thursday 17 November. They were circulated to statutory agencies, local authority offices, libraries and information centres along the route. Copies of both statements were placed in the Library. Further background material to the CTRL statement is available for inspection at the offices of my Department's parliamentary agents, Sherwood and Co., 35 Great Peter street, Westminster.

Related to the environmental statements and the Bill, a leaflet, entitled "A Guide to Parliament's consideration of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill", was also published on 17 November. The leaflet contains advice on who can petition against the Bill, how to petition and the parliamentary process. It has been distributed widely.

A2

21. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce proposals to dual the A2 road between Dover and Lydden.

Mr. Watts: The highways agency expects to announce arrangements for consulting the public on its proposals for the A2 Lydden—B2060—to Dover improvement scheme later this month.

Northern Line

22. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the involvement of the private sector in the Northern line.

Mr. Norris: London Underground Ltd. is holding a competition for the supply of privately financed trains for the Northern line. It is currently evaluating the bids which it received early in September, and a decision is expected later this year.

Heathrow (Tunnels)

23. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice was received from AMEC regarding the construction of the tunnels at Heathrow airport.

Dr. Mawhinney: The refurbishment of the road tunnels entering the central terminal area and of the western side bore is an operational matter for Heathrow Airport Ltd.

London Lorry Ban

24. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional resources will be furnished to assist the implementation of the London lorry ban after the present permit system is abandoned.

Mr. Norris: Additional resources will be provided for the revision of warning signs. Administrative savings made by the local authorities following abolition of the permit system could be used to strengthen enforcement.

Air Pollution

25. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department intends to take to tackle the problem of urban air pollution.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am determined that transport will play its part in reducing pollution in the air we breathe. As a result of improvements to vehicle standards and measures such as my recent initiative on enforcement, we are now set to see a marked and progressive decline in pollutants that will extend well into the next decade.

London Transport

26. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about investment in London Transport.

Mr. Norris: Investment expenditure by London Transport has been at record levels in real terms since 1990, averaging £800 million a year at today's prices, and this year is forecast to be around £1 billion.

South London Rail Study

27. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with London Transport concerning its involvement in the south London rail study.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the chairman of London Transport to discuss a variety of issues, including possible improvements to the underground. I understand that London Transport is still assessing the results of the south London rail study and hope to produce a report shortly.

Networker Trains

28. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about when future orders will be placed for class 465 networker trains for Kent commuters.

Mr. Watts: British Rail is currently considering the business case for new class 465 networker passenger trains. I expect to hear the outcome of its considerations next month.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the minutes of discussions between the Secretary of State for Transport and journalists in March 1989 on the subject of Lockerbie.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not normal practice for minutes to be taken of press briefings.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department between 1 January and 30 June 1994 those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Rural Areas

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations he is giving to the needs of rural areas with minimal public transport.

Dr. Mawhinney: Our transport policy has always given weight to the needs of rural areas. We have made it easier for local authorities to subsidise socially necessary but uncommercial bus services, and for unconventional transport, like post buses, to be introduced in very sparsely populated areas.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of BAA's application, and supporting statements, to be permitted to operate a mix landing mode at Heathrow airport.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to hold a public inquiry in the event of him not rejecting outright the request of BAA for permission to operate a mix landing mode at Heathrow.

Mr. Norris: I have had no request from BAA regarding the mode of operation at Heathrow airport. I have, however, received a report of a Heathrow runway capacity

enhancement study sponsored by BAA, National Air Traffic Services and airlines. We are currently studying the report.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Research Councils

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to conclude his review of manpower requirements for the research councils.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: By the end of this year.

Historic Government Papers

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he will be taking to bring forward the publication of historic government papers.

Mr. David Hunt: All possible steps.

Citizens Charter

Dr. Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to publish the third annual report on progress in the citizens charter.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: We expect to publish the citizens charter third report during 1995.

Breast Cancer

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to change the method by which medical research projects into breast cancer are assessed as appropriate for funding by the Medical Research Council.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have told the hon. Lady on several occasions that it is for the Medical Research Council to assess research applications, and to allocate resources according to the quality of the proposals it receives.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many overseas visits the Chancellor of the Duchy and the Parliamentary Secretary made between 1 January and 30 June; during how many of them he and the Parliamentary Secretary participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and in which countries these activities took place.

Mr. David Hunt: The then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made two overseas visits, to Belgium and Japan, in an official capacity between 1 January and 30 June 1994. The then Parliamentary Secretary made only one overseas visit in the same period, to Belgium. Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

Research and Industry Co-operation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new proposals he has to improve the co-operation between scientific research institutions and British industry.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government continue their commitment to innovation and wealth creation in science and technology laid out in the White Paper "Realising Our Potential" and have announced a number of initiatives to this end, of which the innovative manufacturing initiative was the latest. A foresight forum was held in September to consult business and S and T communities and participants praised the success of the networks formed by the technology foresight panels.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Offshore Oil and Gas Licences

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will announce the blocks to be offered in the 16th round of offshore oil and gas licensing on the United Kingdom continental shelf.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I hope to be able to make an announcement very soon.

Coal Industry

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Boartd of Trade if he will ensure that British Coal land leased to miners' welfares will be outwith any disposal scheme; and if he will ensure that its future use for sport and recreational use is safeguarded.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A number of options are currently being considered for the future of British Coal's recreational land. No decisions have yet been taken.

It is the Government's objective, however, that land currently in active use for sport and recreation is retained for those purposes.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what mechanisms he will apply to ensure that the assets of the coal industry are not packaged in a different way from its liabilities.

Mr. Eggar: In general, the property, rights and liabilities of British Coal which relate to the on–going business will transfer to successor companies. Certain liabilities of British Coal relating to the period before privatisation—for example, liability for personal injury and disease as announced on 6 June—will remain in the public sector.

This was explained in the information memorandum which was provided to prequalifiers for the sale.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ensure that proceeds from the coal industry's assets are used to tackle the aftermath of the industry's decline; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No. However, the Government have put in place a substantial regeneration package for areas affected by coal closures, with support of £200 million.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the value of United Kingdom trade with Indonesia in the last three years.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information is regularly published in *Business Monitors* MA20 and MM20, overseas trade statistics of the United Kingdom, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Skinner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will issue a directive to the Coal Authority and British Coal to stop further opencast applications.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No.

Textile Machinery

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if the Export Credits Guarantee Department, while under Government ownership, was ever subject to a claim for payment from Stone Platt International, Platt Hollingsworth, Platt Saco-Lowell, John D. Hollingsworth, Longclose Engineering, Platt Longclose, Stone Platt Industries or Platt Brother, relating to the export of textile machinery supplied to PT Westra Inda, Texmaco-Polysindo of Indonesia or companies owned by Texmaco of the Philippines or any related companies under the ownership or control of Mr. Marimutu Sinivasan which was subsequently not made in full; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what settlements the Export Credits Guarantee Department reached with PT Westra Indra, Texmaco-Polysindo of Indonesia or companies owned by Texmaco of the Philippines or any related companies under the ownership or control of Mr. Marimutu Sinivasan relating to non-payment for textile equipment received from British suppliers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I can confirm that an agreed settlement of certain outstanding amounts due to the United Kingdom organisations mentioned by my hon. Friend and guaranteed by ECGD has been reached.

Details are commercial in-confidence between the parties and I am, therefore, unable to disclose further information to my hon. Friend.

Companies House

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to privatise the activities of Companies House *(a)* fully or *(b)* partially.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No decision has yet been taken on the future of Companies House.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 19 July, *Official Report*, columns *179–80*, that consultants were to explore further the possible contracting out of most of the activities of Companies House. Their report has now been received and is being considered.

Ship Building

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role his Department plays in preventing the growth of monopoly in *(a)* commercial ship building, *(b)* major warship building and *(c)* defence prime contracting.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading keeps markets under review and, if appropriate, will refer them, to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for investigation. Any concerns the hon. Member has should be directed to him.

Defence Division

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will describe the responsibilities and staffing of the Department of Trade and Industry's defence division.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department does not have a defence division. Defence-related matters as they affect my Department are dealt with by the appropriate divisions.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs during how many of the overseas visits made by his Ministers between 1 January and 30 June those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will name the Ministers and the countries in which these activities took place.

Mr. Baldry: Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

MI6 Headquarters

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the current situation in relation to the cleaners at MI6 headquarters.

Mr. Hurd: I wrote to the hon. Lady on this matter on 17 November, and I have arranged for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Al Yamamah Agreement

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for publication in the *Official Report* of a copy of the letter on the Al Yamamah agreement with Saudi Arabia to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent referred to in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1257*.

The Prime Minister: No. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Cabinet Meetings

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Prime Minister whether the fact that a given Cabinet Minister has or has not attended a given meeting of the full Cabinet is a matter of public record.

The Prime Minister: It is not normal practice to publish details of attendance at Cabinet.

Security Services Committee

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give the names and Departments of the proposed Clerks to the Committee relating to the security services.

The Prime Minister: As stated by my right hon. Friend the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Cabinet Office will provide the support staff for the committee on the intelligence and security services, *Official Report*, 22 February 1994, column *247*.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what expenditure has been allocated and under which vote for 1994–95 for the committee on the security services;

(2) if the committee on security services will be able to travel abroad to take evidence.

The Prime Minister: The expenditure for the intelligence services committee has been allocated under the Cabinet Office vote, class XIX. The annual cost of the committee is expected to be approximately £100,000. As my right hon. Friend the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, explained—*Official Report*, 22 February 1994, column *247*—this sum will be met from within existing provision. It includes provision for foreign travel where necessary for the committee to fulfil its functions.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects the committee on the security services *(a)* to meet and *(b)* to submit its first report to him; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Subject to the provisions of the Act, the committee will determine its own procedure. The date of the first meeting will therefore be a matter for the chairman and the committee. The committee is required to make an annual report to me on the discharge of its functions.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister (1) when he expects to give evidence to the committee on the security services;

(2) what restrictions there are on the people from whom the committee on the security services will be able to hear evidence.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statements made by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office—my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg)— *Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 24 March 1994, columns *250–54;* 29 March 1994, columns *259–60;* and *Official Report*, 27 April 1994, columns *336–37*. I have nothing further to add.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now name the hon. Members who are on the parliamentary committee relating to the security services.

The Prime Minister: I have been in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), over the membership of the committee and expect to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Small Business Bureau

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister what hospitality he has provided at 10 Downing street for the Small Business Bureau since April 1992.

The Prime Minister: None.

Youth Policy

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Prime Minister what steps the Government takes to co-ordinate youth policy.

The Prime Minister: Matters affecting young people are dealt with by the Government Department which has the responsibility for the specific issue involved. Where policy matters involve a number of Departments' interests, Government Departments work closely together.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister how many overseas visits he has made as Prime Minister; and during how many of those visits he has undertaken fund-raising activities for the Conservative party.

The Prime Minister: I have made 83 overseas visits as Prime Minister. Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of my official duties.

HEALTH

Herbal Medicines

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy towards herbal cures; and if she will make a statement.

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received concerning the proposed Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations and the future availability of herbal medicines.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether she will consult all interested parties before taking final decisions on regulations concerning the availability of herbal remedies and essential oils for aromatherapy;

(2) whether she will make a statement on Government proposals regarding the availability of herbal remedies and essential oils for aromatherapy;

(3) whether she will take steps to ensure the continued availability at a reasonable price of harmless herbal remedies and essential oils for aromatherapy.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will now make a statement on her policy on the future availability of herbal remedies.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether traditional herbal remedies will in future require registration; what representation she has received on this issue; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Herbal medicines currently exempt from product licensing requirements under section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968 will continue to enjoy this exemption. The exemptions and public health safeguards under section 56 of the Act also remain. The position on the sale of aromatherapy oils also remains unchanged. There should, therefore, be no effect on the prices of these products.

We have received representations on the issue of herbal medicines from herbalists and manufacturers of those medicines, their representative organisations and from members of the public. Officials will be holding further meetings with the organisations involved before new regulations are finalised.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she intends to take to ensure that future European directives or European court decisions do not provide a definition of industrially produced products

which threatens in any way the continued availability of herbal remedies; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We are confident that we have safeguarded the position of herbal medicines in the United Kingdom, under European Community law. We will continue to work with other European Community member states and the European Commission to ensure that herbal medicines remain available to the many people in the United Kingdom who use them and to maintain existing public health safeguards.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are routinely taken by the Medicines Control Agency to ensure that in bringing forward proposals for new regulations or legislation to reflect new European directives and regulations its proposals are no more stringent than the minimum which is required; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Where the United Kingdom enters into European Community undertakings our policy is to implement fully but not to over-implement. We routinely consult industry and others with an interest in the control of medicines. This includes inviting comments on any new burdens on business. Our aim is to minimise such burdens and we take all comments into account in finalising legislation.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are taken by the Medicines Control Agency to ensure that any proposed new European directives allow the United Kingdom the greatest flexibility in the interpretation and implementation of those directives; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Where it is appropriate for the European Community to legislate, the United Kingdom seeks to ensure in negotiations that the text agreed is fully consistent with our policy objectives. The United Kingdom's policy is to implement fully our European Community undertakings, but not to over-implement.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has concerning the guidance given to the Medicines Control Agency by the deregulation unit of the Department of Trade and Industry and the extent to which the agency communicates with the unit about the drafting of proposed new regulations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Trade and Industry has published a number of guidance documents for Departments and their agencies on deregulation. There are regular contacts between the Department of Health and the Department of Trade and Industry on deregulation issues.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she is now able to add to the answer given on 18 April 1990 to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) concerning the work of Barry Richardson and cot deaths; and if she is now in a position to give a definitive response to his findings;

(2) what is her response to the work of Barry Richardson, the Robens institute at Surrey university and others linking cot deaths to abnormally high levels of antimony in the blood and tissue of victims.

Mr. Sackville: A hypothesis by Mr. B. Richardson, that sudden infant death syndrome was caused by toxic gases generated by fungal action on plastic cot mattresses, was examined in detail by an expert working group set up by the Chief Medical Officer in 1990. The group considered Mr. Richardson's evidence, evidence from work specially commissioned for it from the Laboratory of the Government Chemist and the International Mycological Institute, and other scientific evidence including published work. It concluded that the hypothesis was not supported by the evidence. Its report was published in May 1991 and copies are available in the Library.

The Department of Health has seen no further evidence to contradict the group's conclusion, in particular those relating to the suggestion that antimony and other chemicals are released by fungal action from cot mattresses. Trace levels of antimony are widely distributed, including food, water and tobacco smoke.

The work reported form the Robens institute has provided no answers, but raised some questions which need proper investigation. The Chief Medical Officer has asked for additional information, and will convene a small expert group to steer further work.

The advice to parents and carers of small children remains that of the successful "Back to Sleep" campaign:

Lay your baby on its back

Don't expose your baby to cigarette smoke

Avoid overheating the baby

Follow good hygiene—keep all clothing and bedding clean and fresh.

Special Transitional Grant

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations she received in response to her circular LASSL(94)3; and if she will summarise its contents;

(2) in how many cases she has exercised her discretion on the repayment of special transitional grant in respect of meeting the independent sector condition; and if she will name the authorities concerned.

Mr. Bowis: Final audit returns for 1993–94 are not required until 31 December 1994. In considering any action to be taken as a result of those returns we will take into account representations made by local authorities, including any made by those authorities listed in LASSL(94)3, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment she has made of the implications for statutory services of local authorities using their base-line budgets to meet their new community care duties under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 because they have already spent their special transitional grant allocation;

(2) what representations she has received from those local authorities which have already spent their 1994–95 special transitional grant;

(3) what steps she has taken to monitor the commitment effect of expenditure incurred during the 1993–94 financial year in terms of the adequacy of the special transitional grant in individual local authorities for the current financial year;

(4) what steps she has taken to establish how many local authorities have already spent their special

transitional grant allocation for 1994–95; and if she will make a statement;

(5) what representations she has received regarding the implications of charging for services arising as a result of the special transitional grant being exhausted in a number of local authorities;

(6) what advice she has given to those authorities that have already spent their 1994–95 special transitional grant allocation with regard to *(a)* meeting community care needs using other resources and *(b)* prioritising their responses to community care referrals.

Mr. Bowis: In addition to resources available to them through the personal social services standard spending assessment, local authorities have been given £1·27 billion to meet their additional responsibilities under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 in 1994–95, including a special transitional grant of some £736 million. We are aware of a few authorities which have expressed concern about the level of their resources for community care. It is for them to decide, from their total available resources, including special transitional grant, what proportion they wish to devote to community care taking account of local circumstances and priorities. It is also for them to manage those resources effectively throughout the year.

Organ Donor Register

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the public response to the NHS organ donor register.

Mr. Sackville: Since 6 October, when the national health service organ donor register was launched, about 1·5 million leaflets with registration forms have been sent to post offices, general practitioner surgeries and other public places, and in response to the telephone freeline No. 0800 777 555. We are very encouraged by the volume of applications already received, including people registering through the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, and will continue to give full publicity to the register.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from health authorities regarding the level of co-operation by water companies towards the fluoridation of water supplied in line with the levels suggested in her Department's oral health strategy for England.

Mr. Malone: A number of health authorities have, from time to time, made such representations.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in her Department between 1 January and 30 June 1994 those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if she will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with haemophilia have contracted hepatitis C in consequence of being given contaminated blood supplied under the NHS; how many have since died of the condition; what action she is taking in regard to compensation; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: These figures are not collected centrally. There are methods of transmission of hepatitis C other than the use of blood and blood products. I understand from the United Kingdom haemophilia centre directors that, of 126 haemophilia patients known to have died in 1993, 12 showed the cause of death as liver disease of which hepatitis C may have been the cause.

We have no plans to make payments to haemophilia patients who may have been infected with hepatitis C.

Elderly Patients

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current number of national health service beds available for nursing elderly people.

Mr. Bowis: There is no designation of national health service beds, whether in hospitals or in nursing homes, intended specifically for the nursing of elderly people.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussion her Department has had with Humberside county council about the provision of secure accommodation for young people on remand.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on 22 April at columns *696–97* for details of the local authority capital programme, funded by the Government, to build an additional 170 secure places nationally for criminal justice purposes. The programme was drawn up in consultation with regional groups of authorities. No further secure provision is currently planned in Humberside, but a total of 17 additional places are to be provided by Sheffield and Leeds, to which all authorities in the Yorkshire and Humberside region will have access.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional resources she will give for Humberside county council to meet its responsibilities to provide secure accommodation for young people on remand.

Mr. Bowis: The Government are committed to paying a fair price through fees to local authorities where they are required to arrange secure accommodation for children and young people on remand.

Young People (Residential Care)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people are in residential care in Humberside for whom there is no proper accommodation available; how many are forced to sleep on camp beds; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The arrangements made for the accommodation of children looked after by Humberside are the responsibility of Humberside county council.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the average cost per household for fire services for each fire authority area in England and Wales for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local fire stations have been closed in each fire authority in England and Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average fire service cover per 1,000 of population for each fire authority area in England and Wales since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fire engines on average were in use for each fire service in England and Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information in the form requested is not recorded by my Department; but information about the number of fire appliances available to each fire authority has been published annually by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The figures for 1979–80 to 1989–90 are published in the annual series "Fire Service Statistics, Actuals" and the figures for 1990–91 to 1993–94 are published in "Fire Service Statistics, 1992", "Fire Service Statistics 1993" and "Fire Service Statistics 1994".

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost of attending an incident for each fire authority in England and Wales for each year since 1979 in real terms.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This information is not available and any attempt to provide it could be only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of hours per year for each fire authority in England and Wales spent on fire prevention for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The average number of hours per year for each fire authority in England and Wales spent on fire safety for each year since 1989 is:

Year	*Hours*
1989	30,877
1990	30,224
1991	34,753
1992	35,807
1993–94	36,377

Collection of data for number of hours spent by fire authorities in England and Wales was not commenced until the year 1989. Data for 1989 to 1992 were collected on a calender year basis; those for 1993–94 were collected on a financial year basis.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firemen and women were employed by each fire authority in England and Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is published in the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services, copies which can be found in the Library.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the capital expenditure budget and *(b)* the revenue budgets for each fire authority in England and Wales in real terms for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the number of incidents attended to by each fire authority *(b)* the class of incident and *(c)* the estimated average loss per incident for each fire authority in England and Wales since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The number and type of fire incidents attended by each fire authority in England and Wales for 1982 to 1992 are given in the annual Home Office publication "Fire Statistics United Kingdom", available in the Library. Primary, secondary and chimney fires are separately identified. The relevant statistical tables for each year are as follows:

Year	*Table number*
1982	59
1983	60
1984	62
1985	65
1986	66
1987	64
1988	64
1989	59
1990	61
1991	62
1992	61

For the years 1979–81, supplementary table S9 contains information on the number of primary and secondary fires for each brigade area. Information on the number of chimney fires for each brigade area for these years is not available.

Information on loss from fire incidents is not collected centrally.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average response time per incident for each fire service for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available data are shown in the following table. Data are not available for 1980. Average response times to fire incidents will vary with the different categories of risk within each brigade area.

Average response time[1] TO FIRE INCIDENTS BY BRIGADE AREA, 1979, 1981–1992

Brigade area	*1979*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Avon	9	7	6	6	7	8	8	6	6	6	7	6	6
Bedfordshire	12	7	8	9	11	14	15	7	8	8	10	8	8
Berkshire	15	8	6	10	10	10	19	6	7	6	9	7	6
Buckinghamshire	11	10	9	9	10	10	10	7	9	8	7	8	8
Cambridgeshire	9	9	10	7	9	14	12	8	7	8	8	8	8
Cheshire	9	6	10	8	9	7	9	6	6	6	7	7	7
Cleveland	8	6	5	7	5	9	6	5	5	5	5	5	5
Cornwall	9	6	6	6	8	9	9	5	9	5	6	6	6
Cumbria	10	7	10	9	11	14	10	8	7	8	7	8	7
Derbyshire	10	7	9	7	9	11	8	7	6	7	7	7	7
Devon	12	9	8	8	9	10	11	8	8	7	7	7	7
Dorset	10	12	8	8	11	12	11	7	8	7	7	7	7
Durham	12	8	7	7	10	8	10	7	10	7	8	7	7
East Sussex	7	6	7	8	9	10	11	6	8	6	6	6	6
Essex	10	9	9	8	12	13	11	8	9	7	7	7	7
Gloucestershire	10	11	10	9	10	12	10	9	10	8	8	7	7
Hampshire	10	7	9	8	12	11	14	7	6	6	7	7	6
Hereford and Worcester	10	9	9	8	11	10	12	8	9	8	9	9	9
Hertfordshire	9	6	6	6	10	8	9	9	8	8	8	7	8
Humberside	8	8	7	8	7	8	13	6	9	6	6	7	7
Isle of Wight	7	6	12	6	18	7	17	10	6	7	6	7	7
Kent	10	7	8	8	11	11	9	9	10	7	8	7	8
Lancashire	8	6	6	6	7	9	9	6	6	6	6	6	8
Leicestershire	9	8	8	6	7	6	12	8	8	7	8	7	7
Lincolnshire	10	8	9	9	11	12	15	9	11	9	9	9	9
Norfolk	12	9	8	11	13	10	12	8	8	8	9	8	8
North Yorkshire	10	9	9	8	9	11	13	8	9	8	9	9	9
Northampshire	9	10	8	8	10	12	11	7	9	6	7	7	6
Northumberland	10	9	9	11	8	8	11	9	8	9	8	8	8
Nottinghamshire	9	8	5	7	9	9	13	5	6	5	5	5	6
Oxfordshire	7	7	8	9	13	11	10	7	7	7	7	8	8
Shropshire	11	9	8	9	9	10	12	7	7	7	7	8	7
Somerset	8	7	8	7	9	10	11	8	8	9	8	8	9
Staffordshire	12	8	7	7	9	10	9	7	7	7	7	7	8
Suffolk	10	9	8	10	12	11	12	8	7	9	8	9	8
Surrey	11	7	7	7	8	9	8	6	6	7	7	7	7
Warwickshire	9	9	10	10	8	9	9	7	7	7	8	9	8
West Sussex	9	9	9	13	13	11	11	6	7	8	6	6	7
Wiltshire	10	10	9	8	12	13	10	8	5	8	8	9	8
Greater Manchester	8	8	6	6	7	9	7	5	5	5	5	5	5
Merseyside	10	10	6	6	7	7	8	4	4	4	4	4	4
South Yorkshire	9	9	6	7	7	9	9	5	5	5	5	6	6
Tyne and Wear	6	6	5	4	5	7	7	5	5	6	6	6	5
West Midlands	7	7	5	5	7	8	7	5	5	5	5	5	5
West Yorkshire	9	9	5	5	8	8	9	5	6	5	5	5	5
Greater London	9	9	7	7	9	10	9	6	6	6	6	6	6
Clwyd	12	12	7	7	13	10	10	7	7	7	7	8	7
Dyfed	18	18	9	10	18	15	12	11	9	9	9	9	9
Gwent	13	13	9	8	14	11	12	7	7	8	8	7	8
Gwynedd	18	18	9	11	11	15	16	8	9	9	9	9	9
Mid Glamorgan	8	8	10	7	12	14	12	8	8	9	8	9	9
Powys	11	11	11	11	15	17	13	10	10	10	11	11	10
South Glamorgan	11	11	7	10	14	12	12	6	5	6	6	6	7
West Glamorgan	10	10	8	7	10	10	10	6	6	7	7	7	7
Northern Ireland	10	10	8	7	10	10	9	6	6	6	7	7	7
Strathclyde	10	10	7	8	10	10	8	6	6	6	6	6	7
Highlands and Islands	15	15	12	11	21	15	11	11	11	11	12	13	11
Grampian	11	11	9	8	10	13	12	7	7	7	8	7	7
Tayside	8	8	9	6	11	9	11	6	6	5	5	6	5
Lothian and Borders	9	9	6	6	8	9	10	6	6	5	6	6	6
Fife	9	9	7	7	7	7	10	6	6	6	6	6	6
Central	14	14	7	8	16	10	9	7	7	7	9	7	7
Dumfries	8	8	8	9	8	14	8	9	11	9	10	9	8

Note: [1] From the time the brigade answered the first call to the time when the first fire appliance attended at the fireground.

Source: Home Office fire statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the factors taken into account when determining levels of capital and revenue expenditure for each fire authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It is for each fire authority to determine the level of its capital expenditure and revenue expenditure. My right hon. and learned Friend, in determining basic credit approvals for capital expenditure for each fire and civil defence authority, takes into

account a number of factors, including the numbers of fire and emergency and specialist vehicles, fire stations and uniformed employees. The responsibility for distributing basic credit approvals for capital expenditure to county fire authorities in England rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is also responsible for determining the standard spending assessments, and determining the capping principles, for all local authorities in England. In Wales, these responsibilities fall to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of hours per year for each fire authority in England and Wales spent on maintaining equipment for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources will be made available to the probation service to deal with additional assessments of high risk prisoners for home leave from 17 November.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The major probation service involvement in the new procedures will be through the contribution of probation staff seconded to Prison Service establishments. These staff are paid for by the Prison Service, so probation services will require no additional funding.

Appropriate Adults Scheme

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research his Department has undertaken into the operation of the appropriate adults scheme;

(2) what stage his Department's working party on appropriate adults has reached; and when it is due to report;

(3) what proposals his Department has to amend the appropriate adults scheme.

Mr. Maclean: The appropriate adults working group, set up in response to a recommendation made by the Royal Commission on criminal justice, has met twice. It has commented during the public consultation stage on the draft revised codes of practice issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and expects to be ready to consult widely about its proposals in the new year.

The Department has recently supported research studies by John Moore's university, Liverpool, and by Loughborough university and MENCAP on the working of the appropriate adults scheme. It is also supporting three other research projects about entry into the criminal justice system and the PACE—Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—codes which deal, among other things, with the scheme.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proposals have arisen out of the discussions his Department has had with other Government Departments over ways of improving the situation of overseas domestic workers in the United Kingdom;

(2) what is the nature and remit of the review currently being undertaken into the situation of overseas domestic workers in the United Kingdom;

(3) when he expects the review currently being undertaken by his Department into the situation of overseas domestic workers in the United Kingdom to report; and if he will then publish it;

(4) what action his Department is planning to strengthen measures to protect overseas domestic workers from abusive employers during their stay in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There has not been a formal review, but I am considering the arrangements for the admission of domestic workers in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Employment Department.

Whitemoor

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what evidence has been submitted to him of inconsistency in the application of Prison Service policy directives in respect of the special secure unit at Whitemoor;

(2) what assessment he has made of the efficacy of management action in respect of any failure by staff at the special secure unit at Whitemore prison complying with written instructions;

(3) how many written instructions were issued to prison staff working in the special secure unit at Whitemoor during *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993; and what subjects were covered;

(4) what evidence has been submitted to him of a failure by the Prison Service to respond to requests for operational directives in respect of the special secure unit at Whitemoor prison;

(5) whether any ex-Ministers have received letters in accordance with the Salmon procedure from the Woodcock inquiry;

(6) what letters were sent by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), to the special secure unit at Whitemoor prison regarding body and cell searches;

(7) how frequently inmates in the special secure unit at Whitemoor are allowed special food orders;

(8) what evidence has been sent to him in respect of non-compliance by prison staff with written instructions in respect of the special secure unit at Whitemoor prison during 1994;

(9) how many prison staff at *(a)* Whitemoor prison, *(b)* Prison Service headquarters and *(c)* elsewhere have received letters in accordance with the Salmon procedure from the Woodcock inquiry at Whitemoor prison;

(10) what artistic materials belonging to any prisoners in the special secure unit at Whitemoor during 1994 were placed in storage; how long these materials had been in storage; and from which prison they were transferred;

(11) whether there was any impediment to the observation of the special secure unit by staff while inmates were in the hobby room at Whitemoor during the last 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: These are matters for Sir John Woodcock as part of his independent inquiry into the attempted escape from Whitemoor prison on 9 September.

Public Appointments

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals were contacted by the Home Office from the public appointments unit in the Cabinet Office and invited to put their names forward to become independent members of the new police authorities.

Mr. Maclean: Four hundred and nine.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Extradition Warrants

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General how many extradition warrants served on the Garda by or on behalf of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland police forces over the past three years have resulted in the person whose extradition was being sought being delivered to the United Kingdom authorities within *(a)* one month, *(b)* two months, *(c)* three months and *(d)* six months, or over, of the warrant being served.

The Attorney-General: There have been 22 persons in respect of whom extradition warrants have been delivered to the Garda since 1 November 1991 by the police forces of the United Kingdom, including the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and who have to date been returned to the United Kingdom on the foot of those warrants.

Of these 22, six were returned within one month, six were returned within two months, one was returned within three months, five were returned within six months and one was returned after more than six months.

In respect of the remaining three, there has not been time to ascertain the precise period of time that elapsed from the delivery of the warrant to the return of the person in question. Central records are not maintained in respect of every aspect of each such case. The records that have already been examined indicate, however, that the period was approximately six months in one case and less than six months in the other two cases.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if officials of his Department have had discussions with Arthur F. Plunkett in the office of the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic about the extradition warrants served on the Garda Attorney-General by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in respect of Brendan Smyth;

(2) on which dates officials of his Department spoke to Mr. Matt Russell in the Department of the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic about the extradition warrant issued by the RUC in the case of Brendan Smyth;

(3) on how many occasions between 1 April 1993 and 1 February 1994 officials of his Department spoke to Mr. Matt Russell in the Department of the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic;

(4) on what dates between 1 April 1993 and 1 February 1994 officials of his Department had discussions with Arthur F. Plunkett in the office of the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic.

The Attorney-General: It is not customary for the United Kingdom to identify officials of a foreign Administration with whom United Kingdom officials have been in contact on departmental business.

Officials of my Department had regular contacts with the Irish Attorney-General's Office from 1 April 1993 to 1 February 1994 on extradition and other matters.

They spoke to the Irish Attorney-General's Office concerning the case of Brendan Smyth on 20 September 1993, 14 October 1993, 18 November 1993 and 6 December 1993.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General what representations his Department received from the Catholic Church in respect of Brendan Smyth; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: None.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General how many extradition warrants have been served on the Gardai by or on behalf of United Kingdom and Northern Ireland police forces which relate to child sex abuse cases over the past three years.

The Attorney-General: Since 1 November 1991, extradition warrants have been delivered by the police forces of the United Kingdom, including the RUC in respect of five persons whose return to the United Kingdom was sought for offences involving children under 14 years old.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Attorney-General how many overseas visits he and the Solicitor-General made between 1 January and 30 June; during how many of those visits he or the Solicitor-General took part in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and in which countries those activities took place.

The Attorney-General: During the period in question, I made two official visits overseas and the Solicitor–General one. No such fund-raising activities took place during those visits.

Opus Dei

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General what is his policy in relation to employing members of Opus Dei in his Department.

The Attorney-General: There is no specific policy in relation to the secondment of Opus Dei members to my Department. The civil service does not discriminate on grounds of religion.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the increase in the total sum spent by the United Kingdom on CAP finance within the domestic budget; and what is the estimate for next year.

Mr. Jack: Details of expenditure in the United Kingdom on the CAP are contained in table 12 of the MAFF-IB departmental report 1994—Cm 2503—which has been deposited in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Shettleston Health Centre

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what charges have been made against the person, or persons, alleged to have destroyed the Shettleston health centre by setting fire to it; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 1 June 1994, three persons appeared on petition at Glasgow sheriff court on charges of wilful fireraising arising out of the fire at Shettleston health centre on 30 May 1994.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Lord Advocate will now review the charges against the two Libyan suspects of the Lockerbie bombing; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate sees no reason to review the charges against the two Libyans accused.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Extradition Warrants

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Attorney-General about the delay in the Irish Republic Attorney-General's response to the extradition warrant issued by the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Garda in April 1993 in respect of Brendan Smyth; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have not discussed this matter with my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations his Department made *(a)* through the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental machinery and *(b)* directly to the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic about the delay in the Irish Republic Attorney-General's response to the extradition warrant issued by the RUC to the Garda in April 1993 in respect of Brendan Smyth; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: None. This extradition case was a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and it would, therefore, have been inappropriate for me to have made representations in the manner described.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations his Department received from the Catholic Church in respect of Brendan Smyth; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My Department has received no representation from the Catholic Church in respect of this matter.

Hualon Corporation

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he intends to take following the statement, details of which have been sent to him, made by a senior executive of the Hualon Corporation relating to its proposed production of high-quality clothing products at facilities in Northern Ireland for which it has been awarded grant aid by the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The Industrial Development Board has sought and received confirmation from the president of Hualon that the company remains 100 per cent. committed to its agreement with the IDB which relates to the production of large volumes of basic fabrics.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make available in the Library copies of the minutes of all those meetings of the Northern Ireland Development Board at which the subject of grant aid to the Hualon Corporation was discussed.

Mr. Ancram: No. Minutes of the Industrial Development Board concerned with the provision of grant aid to any client contains commercially confidential and sensitive information.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which members of the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board have recently resigned; what, in the case of any such resignation, were the reasons given; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Mrs. Jennifer d'Abo recently, citing concern about the Hualon investment as the reason for her resignation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names and summarise the background of the current members of the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board and identity which members of the board are not currently based in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Name	*Occupation*
John B. McGuckian	Chairman, Ulster Television plc
Roy Bailie	Chairman, W and G Baird Holdings Ltd.
Trefor Campbell	Managing Director, Moy Park Ltd.
John Freeman	Irish Secretary, Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union

Name	Occupation
Roger Aldridge[1]	Executive Director, Estates and Store Development, Marks and Spencer plc
Terry Carlin	Northern Ireland Officer, NIC/ICTU
Roy McNulty	President, Short Bros plc
Maria Moloney	General Manager, Marketing and Business Development, Harland and Wolff (Holdings) plc
John Spence	Chairman, Richardsons Fertilizers Ltd.
Paul McWilliams	Chairman, ACT Business Systems (Ireland) Ltd.

[1] Not based in Northern Ireland.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many overseas visits he and each of his Ministers have made between 1 January and 30 June; during how many he or each of his Ministers have participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which these activities took place.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Between 1 January and 30 June 1994, Ministers in my Department made 17 overseas visits in their official capacity. Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

Hillsborough Castle

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what Government staff were on duty at Hillsborough castle during the period it was made available to the Conservative political centre on 4 November; and at what cost.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Ten members of staff were on duty at Hillsborough castle for the Conservative political centre conference on 4 November. Their salary costs, which have been charged to the Conservative political centre, amounted to £250.19.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what rule Hillsborough castle was made available to the Conservative political centre for an event on 4 November.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Where a government building is a Secretary of State's residence, it may be used by that Secretary of State for a private function provided there is no charge to public funds.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what fee has been charged to the Conservative political centre for the use of facilities at Hillsborough castle on 4 November.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Conservative political centre has been charged £878.09 full cost recovery for the conference on 4 November at Hillsborough castle.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to make available the facility of holding meetings at Hillsborough castle to any of the constitutional political parties.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Seeker's Allowance

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provision will be made in the job seeker's allowance legislation to ensure that those who cannot work on a particular day, or in particular types of work, for reasons of religious belief or conscience, will not be disqualified from benefit for failing to accept the first job offered.

Miss Widdecombe: The job seeker's allowance White Paper sets out the Government's intention that job seekers will be allowed to restrict their availability for work on grounds of religious or conscientious convictions. We similarly intend such convictions are to be taken into account in considering whether job seekers have good cause for refusing work which is offered to them.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many modern apprenticeship places have so far been filled.

Mr. Paice: In this year's small-scale prototype development, training and enterprise councils estimate, as at 8 November, that some 885 modern apprentices have started training. Over 790 of these are employed.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the employers or employers' organisations that have so far committed themselves to the modern apprenticeship scheme; and how many places each has agreed to provide.

Mr. Paice: A large number of employers—large and small—have expressed support for modern apprenticeships. In this year's small-scale prototype development, training and enterprise councils estimate that nearly 600 employers are involved. A breakdown of places by employer is not available.

Output-related Funding

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received on the subject of output-related funding.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received representations from the Training and Enterprise Council National Council and other interested parties.

Prior Options Review

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the terms of reference of the prior options review of the Employment Service executive agency; what is its membership; when it is expected to report; and what consultants have been employed to work with the review.

Miss Widdecombe: The terms of reference of the prior options review of the Employment Service are:

With the aim of ensuring that the functions of the Employment Service are organised so as to offer a high quality, cost-effective service to clients, the review will examine the feasibility of abolition, privatisation, strategic contracting out and, where these are rejected, market testing; or of maintaining current arrangements; and will make recommendations to Ministers.

The review is being conducted by officials in the Department in consultation with the Office of Public Service and Science and Her Majesty's Treasury and with the co-operation of the Department of Social Security, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Employment Service itself, with the aim of reporting to Ministers by the end of March 1995.

As part of the review, and following a competitive tendering process, Ernst and Young was commissioned to carry out a detailed examination of the potential and existing external markets in relation to the delivery of the services under review.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what contingency plans he has in the event of a training and enterprise council becoming insolvent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: The contractual relationship between Government and a training and enterprise council might be ended in a number of ways. We have contingency plans appropriate to a variety of circumstances. The choice would depend on the appraisal of the circumstances and the need to maintain appropriate services.

EDUCATION

Pupils

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils in each local education authority area are without a school because of parental requests to mainstream schooling not being met; and for what length of time they have been without formal education.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is the level of expenditure per pupil in grant-maintained schools in 1994–95; and what is the expected level of expenditure per pupil in grant-maintained schools in 1995–96;

(2) what is the estimated outturn in 1994–95 of local authority expenditure on grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is estimated that some £1·4 billion will be recouped from local education authorities in 1994–95 in respect of annual maintenance grant—AGM—paid to grant-maintained schools by the Funding Agency for Schools. Dividing this amount by the most recent information available on numbers of pupils at GM schools contained in the 1994 form 7 census produces a figure of some £2,200 per pupil. However, this should be treated with caution. The final amount of AMG recouped from LEAs will depend on the extent of any redeterminations of AMG for existing GM schools, and calculation of AMG for schools becoming GM, up to the end of the financial year. LEAs will also incur direct expenditure on pupils at GM schools in respect of services for which they retain statutory responsibility. Moreover, the form 7 figures do not include pupils in schools which have become GM since the census date.

Expenditure on AMG in 1995–96 will depend on the number of GM schools and on decisions by LEAs which have not yet been taken.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if the post for the director of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation was advertised.

Mr. Robin Squire: No. The Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation took over from the Grant-Maintained Schools Centre the role of providing factual information to schools considering grant-maintained status, with effect from April 1994. The directors of the centre and the foundation, having taken account of legal advice on the provisions of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 and what they saw as good employment practice, decided that employees of the centre working on information activities should be offered equivalent posts with the foundation. On this basis the director of information of the centre was offered the post of director of the foundation. The Department was not involved in this decision and has no powers to intervene in such appointments.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the level of grant given to the Grant-Maintained Schools Centre before April 1994.

Mr. Robin Squire: After the establishment of the Grant-Maintained Schools Centre in 1988, the following grant was provided by the Department:

	Grant[1] £000s
1988–89	25
1989–90	250
1990–91	425
1991–92	600
1992–93	577
1993–94	782

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the amount of grant aid allocated this year to Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation Ltd.; and who is its finance director.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation Ltd. has been given a grant ceiling of £695,000 for the current financial year. The amount of grant paid, within that ceiling, will depend on the foundation's actual expenditure on agreed activities. The foundation's finance officer is Mr. James Curran.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the level of grant given to the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation; how many existing and proposed offices it has; and how many existing and proposed staff it employs at each of the offices.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation Ltd. has been awarded grant to a ceiling of £695,000 for the current financial year. It has one head office and three existing local offices and plans to increase the number of local offices in England to five. There are currently 7·7 full-time equivalent staff employed at the head office and four full-time staff are employed in the three existing local offices. The number of staff at the head office is due to increase to 9·7. The number of staff

in the local offices will increase to six, one at each of four offices and two staff at the fifth.

I understand that the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation will also be opening an office in Wales, with funding provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department between 1 January and 30 June 1994 those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: None of the Ministers in my Department participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party during official ministerial visits overseas between 1 January and 30 June 1994.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the initial terms of appointment of the chief executive of the Student Loans Company; when he was first appointed; and what proposals there are to extend or renew his contract.

Mr. Boswell: The chief executive was appointed to the company on 10 January 1990, on a fixed-term contract of five years' duration. That contract was extended in December 1993 for a further three years and will now expire on 9 January 1998.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what investigations are presently being held into the financial affairs of the Student Loans Company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what inquiries are currently being conducted or planned into the financial and other affairs of the Student Loans Company Ltd.; and what specific matters are under investigation and by what agency.

Mr. Boswell: Some uncorroborated allegations have recently been made about certain executives at the Student Loans Company. These are being investigated by a team from Coopers and Lybrand which will report to my right hon. Friend and to the board of the company. It would not be appropriate to comment on the nature of allegations which have not been proven and are under investigation.

Teachers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the pupil to teacher ratios for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94 for public sector (i) nursery schools, (ii) primary schools, (iii) secondary schools, (iv) non-maintained schools, (v) special schools and (vi) all schools; and whether these figures include unqualified teachers.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information about pupil-teacher ratios for all types of school for January 1994 and previous years is published in table 2 of "Statistics of Schools in England Press Notice"—ref 204/94. Copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many full-time teaching staff, in public sector schools, there were for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94 in (i) primary, (ii) secondary, (iii) all schools, (iv) further and higher education and (v) university.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information about full-time equivalent teaching staff in maintained schools and institutions of further and higher education and universities in England for the years required is shown in the table:

Full-time Equivalent Teaching Staff by type of school and institution: England

	£ thousands	
	1992–93	*1993–94*
Primary schools[1,2]	179·4	180·6
Secondary schools[1,2,3]	177·0	178·9
All schools[1,2,3,4]	373·1	375·6
FE and HE[5,6]	94·6	N/A
Universities[7,8]	26·5	26·9

[1] Including qualified teachers only.
[2] Position at January each year.
[3] Excluding sixth form colleges.
[4] Includes maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.
[5] Including sixth form colleges.
[6] Includes a small number of staff who have research duties only.
[7] Position at December each year.
[8] Full-time teaching staff only.

Expenditure

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the capital expenditure on education by each local authority in England for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table sets out the gross capital expenditure on education by each local authority in England for 1992–93.

Final outturn figures are not yet available for 1993–94.

Total Capital Expenditure on Education in 1992–93 by LEA[1,2]

	(£'000s)
City of London	25
Camden	1,542
Greenwich	1,122
Hackney	1,397
Hammersmith and Fulham	4,822
Islington	809
Kensington and Chelsea	2,023
Lambeth	2,526
Lewisham	1,057
Southwark	3,586
Tower Hamlets	14,272
Wandsworth	6,076
Westminster	1,298
Barking and Dagenham	6,604
Barnet	2,734
Bexley	3,206
Brent	2,496
Bromley	6,189
Croydon	4,532
Ealing	3,524
Enfield	2,990
Haringey	693
Harrow	5,442
Havering	2,739
Hillingdon	5,513
Hounslow	7,311
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,257
Merton	3,468

Total Capital Expenditure on Education in 1992–93 by LEA[1,2]

	(£'000s)
Newham	6,775
Redbridge	5,370
Richmond-upon-Thames	2,713
Sutton	3,907
Waltham Forest	5,869
Birmingham	13,361
Coventry	5,388
Dudley	10,935
Sandwell	2,242
Solihull	2,644
Walsall	2,618
Wolverhampton	3,897
Knowsley	2,775
Liverpool	2,786
St. Helens	2,169
Sefton	2,524
Wirral	3,022
Bolton	2,322
Bury	1,047
Manchester	10,421
Oldham	8,629
Rochdale	9,404
Salford	2,305
Stockport	2,033
Tameside	1,910
Trafford	5,572
Wigan	4,032
Barnsley	4,170
Doncaster	833
Rotherham	3,399
Sheffield	7,366
Bradford	12,380
Calderdale	2,227
Kirklees	7,663
Leeds	26,207
Wakefield	5,609
Gateshead	4,551
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	3,123
North Tyneside	2,426
South Tyneside	2,538
Sunderland	6,033
Isles of Scilly	117
Avon	14,077
Bedfordshire	5,880
Berkshire	16,234
Buckinghamshire	11,931
Cambridgeshire	23,230
Cheshire	21,908
Cleveland	5,130
Cornwall	14,611
Cumbria	12,325
Derbyshire	15,921
Devon	26,643
Dorset	14,622
Durham	8,218
East Sussex	18,156
Essex	19,844
Gloucestershire	7,331
Hampshire	23,715
Hereford and Worcester	5,493
Hertfordshire	13,432
Humberside	9,416
Isle of Wight	2,184
Kent	25,898
Lancashire	24,352
Leicestershire	12,644
Lincolnshire	19,485
Norfolk	5,707
North Yorkshire	8,170
Northamptonshire	3,250
Northumberland	5,338
Nottinghamshire	8,164
Oxfordshire	10,784
Shropshire	4,256
Somerset	11,132
Staffordshire	10,792
Suffolk	12,328
Surrey	15,917
Warwickshire	4,200
West Sussex	13,845
Wiltshire	9,949
Total England	811,097

Notes:

[1] The figures cover expenditure on nursery and primary education, secondary education, polytechnics, higher and further education, the youth service and other education services. It includes the education element of the urban programme.

[2] The figures include both expenditure financed by central Government, in the form of basic and supplementary credit approvals, and expenditure financed by local authorities from other resources, such as capital receipts and revenue expenditure.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the spending per pupil on *(a)* books and equipment and *(b)* repairs and maintenance in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: Local education authorities' spending per pupil in 1992–93 on books and equipment and on repairs and maintenance was £75 and £82 respectively. These figures are for LEA-maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools. Equivalent information for 1993–94 is not yet available.

Similar information is not available for grant-maintained or independent schools.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated outturn in 1994–95 for local authority expenditure on discretionary student awards and support.

Mr. Boswell: Details of local authorities' expenditure on discretionary awards in 1994–95 are not yet available. In 1992–93, the latest year for which outturn data are available, spending on discretionary awards by English LEAs was £267 million.

Youth Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated outturn for local authority expenditure on the youth service in 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: Local education authorities' net recurrent spending in cash terms on the youth service was £274 million in 1992–93, the latest year for which figures are available.

Nursery Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much she has estimated it will cost to introduce nursery education for all four-year-olds; and what timetable she has set on such plans.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has established an official task force to draw up proposals to implement my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's commitment to provide a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish to take it up. The cost will be determined as part of this work. There is no set timetable, but the first new places will be provided during the lifetime of this Parliament.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils in each local education authority area from black and ethnic minority backgrounds *(a)* are currently in special schools and *(b)* are without a mainstream school place.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the ethnic origin of pupils in certain age cohorts in special schools was collected for the first time in 1994. The data are currently being analysed.

Information on the number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds without a mainstream school place is not collected centrally.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the impact of changes to the standard spending assessment formula on the funding given to local education authorities to meet the needs of children with origins outside predominantly English-speaking countries.

Mr. Robin Squire: The changes made to the education standard spending assessment formula for 1994–95 reflect the latest available information about the relative costs of educating children in different circumstances, including those with origins outside predominantly English-speaking countries, so as to make the distribution of grant between authorities fairer. But SSAs are not prescriptive and LEAs are responsible for funding schools according to their own priorities between and within services.

Student Loans

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to charge students a commercial rate of interest on student loans.

Mr. Boswell: None.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to transfer the student loans scheme to the private sector; and what options for such a transfer she has considered.

Mr. Boswell: The Government have no current plans to transfer the student loans scheme to the private sector. The loans scheme is kept under review, and a range of options for introducing private finance has been examined.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much private sector sponsorship has been received for city technology colleges in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: Private sector sponsorship towards capital expenditure on city technology colleges in 1993–94 amounted to some £2·5 million. A figure for 1994–95 is not yet available.

Local Education Authority-Maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the level of expenditure per pupil in local education authority-maintained schools in 1994–95; and what is the expected level of expenditure per pupil in local education authority-maintained schools in 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: The net institutional expenditure per pupil in respect of LEA-maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools was £1,857 in cash terms for 1992–93 the latest year for which figures are available. This does not include the costs of school meals, home to school transport, LEA central administration and financing costs of capital expenditure.

WALES

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations the Welsh Office has received on the review of the hill livestock compensatory allowances in 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have received representations from individual farmers, industry bodies and Members of Parliament.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations the Welsh Office has made to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the review of the hill livestock compensatory allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The review of hill livestock compensatory allowances is conducted jointly by Ministers from all the agriculture Departments having regard to the representations made to them by the farming industry.

Sheep Quotas

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the operation of the siphon in relation to inter-partnership transfer of sheep quota; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have received a number of representations from the industry over the operation of the siphon in relation to transfers of quota within partnerships.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has made to the Commissioner responsible for agriculture in the European Union on the operation of the siphon in relation to inter-partnership transfer of sheep quota; what responses he has received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Following representations from the United Kingdom concerning the siphon, the Commission is expected to bring forward proposals next year to allow transfers of quota between members of producer groups to be exempt from the operation of the siphon.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the subject of sheep quota in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have received several representations from Members of Parliament, industry bodies and individual producers covering a number of different aspects relating to sheep quota.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the claims for sheep quota from the national reserve will be determined; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Applicants to categories 1 and 2 of the 1993 national reserve have already been notified of the outcome of their bids. Claims for the remaining categories—3 to 7—are being processed and producers will be advised of the outcome of the applications shortly.

Cambrian Coast Railway Line

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps the Welsh Office has taken to ensure the promotion of and the future development of the Cambrian coast railway line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government's plan for transferring the railways to the private sector is the best way of ensuring the promotion of the Cambrian coast line.

Flooding

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what European funding is available to combat the effects of severe flooding and the damage caused thereby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There is no European funding directly available to combat the effects of severe flooding and the damage caused thereby. However, following certain very severe incidents such as the flooding at Towyn and Llandudno the European Community has kindly made money available for flood victims from its fund for aid to disaster victims.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about his Department's handling of the claims made by the people of Llanrwst for compensation arising out of flood damage; when settlement is to be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office agreed to take over consideration of claims in June 1994 following denial of liability by the contractor, who undertook the bridge works at Llanrwst, and his insurers. Before any claims could be determined, it was necessary to establish that the works were a contributory factor in the incident. A specialist hydrologist was appointed, his preliminary report has been received and is being considered. It is the intention to conclude this matter as quickly as possible.

Llanrwst Bypass

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present estimate of the cost of the Llanrwst bypass scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The answer is £9 million. The preferred route for the bypass was published on 18 October 1994. The route will now be protected for planning purposes. Draft orders under the Highways Act 1980 will be published in due course.

A5

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present estimate of the Padogbends A5 road improvement scheme; how many representations he has received on the subject in the past 18 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The estimated costs of the Pont Padog approaches improvement is shown in "Roads in Wales: 1994 Review" as £6 million. Thirty-three representations have been received in the last 18 months. The nature of the work that may be undertaken at Pont Padog is the subject of further consideration. My right hon. Friend expects to discuss options with the National Trust before reaching a decision.

Conwy Valley Railway Line

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps the Welsh Office has taken to promote and further develop the Conwy valley railway line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government's plan for transferring the railways to the private sector is the best way of ensuring the promotion of the Conwy valley line.

Crime

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has made to the Home Office on the crime rate in Wales in 1993–94.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Roads

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the road improvement at Bryn Coed Ifor on the Dolgellau to Bala road is going to be commenced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are no road improvements planned for Bryn Coed Ifor on the A494 trunk road. The hon. Member may be referring to the proposed Drws y Nant improvement which is approximately one mile to the north–east towards Bala. Work is planned to start following the completion of design and statutory procedures and subject to the availability of finance.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning *(a)* the number of consultancy companies and *(b)* the total cost of preparing the agency's corporate plan for submission to his Department; if he will make a statement on the status of the corporate plan; and if he will place a copy in the Library at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Redwood: The preparation of the corporate plan is a matter for the agency. I have, however, recently met the chairman and the board to discuss a draft.

I understand that the agency is considering the publication of a summary when the plan has been finalised.

I wish Parliament and others to be told of the action that will follow from the plan. I will be asking the agency to control its use of consultants more tightly.

Public Appointments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people employed in bodies either funded by his Department or in bodies where appointments to the board require his approval for each year since 1974; and to how many bodies his answer refers.

Mr. Redwood: Information giving the number of staff employed on 1 April in each public body from 1981 to 1993 is shown in the annual report "Public Bodies"—HMSO—Information for the years 1979 to 1981 is shown in the "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies"—1980 Cmnd 7797—, and in "Non-Departmental Public Bodies Facts and Figures" for 1980 and 1981. These publications are available in the Library of the House. Information for years prior to 1979 is not available.

In my reply to the hon. Member on 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1330*, the information relating to NDPBs for the years 1979–80 and 1980–81 was omitted in error. It is given as follows:

Welsh Office Expenditure (£ million)

	NDPBs	
	1994–95	
	Cash	*Prices*
1979–80	70·0	177·3
1980–81	97·0	207·7

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many overseas visits he and each of his Ministers made between 1 January and 30 June 1994; during how many of them he or each of his Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which these activities took place.

Mr. Redwood: Between 1 January and 30 June 1994, Ministers in my Department made four overseas visits in their official capacity. Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

Open Government

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the pricing structure applied to members of the public or organisations applying for information under the open government code of practice.

Mr. Redwood: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, the Welsh Office and its agency Cadw operate the following scheme for charges under the code of practice on access to government information

No charge is made for straightforward requests, including information necessary to explain: benefits, grants, rights and entitlements; the standards and availability of services; the reasons for administrative decisions made in the applicant's case; the ways in which the citizen may exercise rights to appeal or complain about a decision; regulatory requirements affecting affairs of a business, or commercial interests; and the main points of existing departmental policies or initiatives. A charge will be levied where requests do not come within any of these categories and where the staff costs, including overheads as set out in the Treasury guide to fees and charges, to provide the information exceed £100. Up to £100 would normally cover, for example, a day's worth of an administrative officer's time.

For applications expected to cost more than £100 to process, applicants will be given a written estimate and their confirmation that they wish to proceed will be obtained before the work goes ahead. Applicants are informed of their rights of appeal against the imposition of charges, to the Department and Cadw in the first instance and ultimately to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

The charging policy of the Planning Inspectorate executive agency in Wales, for which I am jointly responsible with the Secretary of State for the Environment, follows the charging policy for the Department of the Environment.

The charging policy of ADAS, for which I am jointly responsible with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, follows the charging policy for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the letter of 29 October to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West *(a)* what was the cost of the KPMG and departmental review of compliance with statutory and other requirements of all Welsh Office executive non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* if he will place a copy of the review in the Library.

Mr. Redwood: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

LSD Experiments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) in what year LSD experiments on members of the armed forces at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment *(a)* commenced and *(b)* concluded;

(2) from what source the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment got the LSD for use in experiments with members of the armed forces, referred to in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1235*;

(3) what contact his Department has had with the United States counterpart concerning any military utility in the use of LSD;

(4) what was the highest dose of LSD administered to members of the armed forces during experiments at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, referred to in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1235*;

(5) what long-term physical and psychological monitoring has been used for members of the armed forces involved in LSD experiments at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, referred to in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1235*;

(6) how many members of the armed forces were used in the experiments involving LSD at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down, referred to in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1235*.

Mr. Soames: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from G. Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 21 November 1994:

Questions 13, 22, 28, 31, 34 and 40, Order Paper 16 November 1994

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about work carried out by the Ministry of Defence with LSD have been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) is to carry out work to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of that programme, evaluation is carried out of chemicals that may be utilised by an aggressor as a chemical warfare agent.

3. Our records indicate that work and studies involving LSD took place between 1961 and 1972 and included about 72 Service volunteers who were involved in laboratory and field trails during the period from 1962 to 1968. The maximum dose administered was no more than 200 micrograms and given orally in water. All the volunteers were informed that the purpose of the tests was to assess the effects of LSD on troops in a military setting where the behaviour of those volunteers who were given LSD could be compared with those control volunteers who had not been given LSD. Immediately after the study, all volunteers were told which treatment they had received.

4. The effects of LSD on the Service volunteers were variable and were unpredictable. Although the effects of having received LSD only lasted for about 90 minutes the Service volunteers would have returned to normal behaviour after a night's sleep. All volunteers were medically checked before leaving CBDE and found to be fully recovered. There is no evidence to link controlled administration of a single does of pure LSD with any long term effects. In addition, over the past 40 years there is no evidence that Service volunteers have had any deterioration in their health as a result of their participation as a volunteer in a study at CBDE.

5. The LSD used in the work and studies carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment came from one of three sources: synthesis or partial synthesis at CBDE, purchase from a commercial supplier, as it was not a controlled drug at that time, or provision by the then US Army Chemical at Edgewood, Maryland. The results were published in the scientific literature and one of these papers shows that the LSD used in that study was purchased from a commercial supplier.

6. The results from the work and studies have been published in several articles in scientific journals:

a. Brimblecombe R. W. (1963). Effects of psychotropic drugs on open field behaviour in rats. Phychopharmacologia, *4*, 139–147.

b. Bebbington A. and Brimblecombe R. W. (1969). Actions of some toxic substances (psychotomimetic) on the central nervous system. Br. Med. Bul. *25*, 293–298.

c. Brimblecombe R. W. (1970). The use of animal tests to predict behavioural effects of chemicals on man. Ciba-Found-Study-Group, *35*, 6–24.

d. Barrass B. C. and Coult D. B. (1972). Effects of some centrally acting drugs with ceruloplasmin. Prog. Brain. Res. *36*, 97–104

e. Barrass B. C. and Coult D. B. (1972). Effects of some centrally acting drugs with ceruloplasmin. Biochem. Pharmacol. *21*, 677–685.

f. Bewster K., Coult D. B. and Pinder R. M. (1972). 1-phenylpiperazines. Potential antagonists of lysergic acid diethylamide. Clim. Ther. *7*, 87–91.

g. Buxton D. A. (1972). Behavioural actions of some substituted amphetamines. Prog. Brain. Res, *36*, 143–158.

h. Green D. M. and Aldous F. A. B. (1972). The effects of anticholinergic drugs, chloromazine and LSD25 on evoked potentials, EEG and behaviour. Prog. Brain. Res. *36*, 171–181.

i. Upshall D. G. and Wailling D. G. (1972). The determination of LSD in human plasma following oral administration. Clin. Chim Acta. *36*, 67–73.

j. Barrass B. C. and Coult D. B. (1973). Phenol oxidase activity in brain tissue. Biochem. Pharmacol, *22*, 2897–904.

k. Brimbelcombe R. W. (1973). Psychotomimetic drugs; biochemistry and pharmacology. Adv. Drug. Res. *7*, 165–206.

l. Aldous F. A. B., Barrass B. C., Brewster K., Buxton D. A., Green D. M., Pinder R. M., Rich P., Skells M. and Tutt K. J. (1974). Structure-activity relationships in psychotomimetic phenalkylamines. J Med. Chem *17*, 1100–1110.

m. Leyland C. M., Gwyther R. J. and Rylands J. M. (1979). Improved method for detecting drug effects in the open field. Psychopharmacologia. *63*, 33-37.

7. These results formed part of the technology database held by the Establishment in the area of evaluation of the potential hazard to Service personnel from possible chemical warfare agents. This information was drawn upon during the 1960s and 1970s in the agreements with our NATO allies to exchange information and so promote collaboration and cooperation in areas such as research and development in chemical and biological defence. The agreements with the United States at that time included:

a. The Technical Cooperation Programme involving UK, US, Canada and Australia which had subsumed the earlier trilateral UK/US/Canada meetings.

b. American, British, Canadian and Australian Armies (ABCA) agreement Quadripartite Working Group (QWG) on NBC defence.

c. The NATO Panel VII on chemical and biological defence.

8. As I indicated to you in my reply of 3 November 1994, (*Official Report*, column *1235–1236*) it was concluded that LSD would not present a significant battlefield hazard as it was extremely expensive and being a solid it would be difficult to disseminate further and the effects were not highly predictable.

European Army

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department has given to the creation of a European army; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We have no plans for the creation of a European army.

United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department has given to preparing a common UN peacekeeping military doctrine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A common military doctrine would significantly assist the conduct of UN peacekeeping operations. The United Kingdom has been active in discussions on this issue. As part of our contribution to this debate the British Army are preparing a manual on peacekeeping on which we have consulted closely at the United Nations.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's evaluation of the military implications in Bosnia of any lifting of the UN arms embargo.

Mr. Soames: We judge that lifting the arms embargo would lead to an intensified conflict, with severe risks that UNPROFOR would be caught up in the fighting and lose its impartiality in the eyes of the warring factions. In such circumstances, UNPROFOR could no longer carry out the UN mandate and would have to withdraw.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent meetings he has had with his United States counterpart concerning the Bosnian arms embargo; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has regular discussions with his United States counterpart on a wide range of issues. In the course of these discussions, our opposition to lifting the arms embargo has been made clear, on the grounds that this would only serve to fuel an intensified conflict and that, in such circumstances, UNPROFOR would have to withdraw.

Gulf War

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the licence holders of each of the licensed vaccines administered to military personnel in the Gulf war 1990–91.

Mr. Soames: The licence holders of the vaccines administered to military personnel in the Gulf war 1990–91 are:

a. Wellcome medical division—licence holder for:
Tetanus
Typhoid
Poliomyelitis
Yellow Fever
Cholera
The licence holder for the above products is now Evans Medical.

b. Smithkline Beecham—licence holder of Hepatitis B vaccine.

c. Merieux and Smithkline Beecham—licence holders for meningococall vaccine.

d. Details relating to vaccines employed by British forces against the biological warfare threat are classified.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many patients have been examined by his Department's appointed specialist for problems associated with Operation Granby; if these patients undergo tests to ascertain their immune status; and if there were any toxic residues in their blood or body tissues.

Mr. Soames: Forty patients have so far been examined by the military medical consultant physician appointed to investigate personnel who believe their health has been adversely affected by Operation Granby.

The special tests employed in these assessments are tailored to the particular requirements of each patient after considering the medical and occupational history, the reported symptoms and clinical signs found on examination. If considered clinically necessary, these special tests include immunological and toxicological investigations.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the vaccines administered to military personnel in the Gulf war 1990–91.

Mr. Soames: The vaccines administered to military personnel in the Gulf war 1990–91 fall into three groups:

a. Those administered as a matter of peacetime routine—these are only administered when in-date immunity has lapsed:
Tetanus
Typhoid
Poliomyelitis
Yellow Fever
Hepatitis B—medical staff only

b. Those administered to combat natural disease threats specific to the area of deployment:
Cholera
Meningococcal Meningitis—medical staff and personnel in day-to-day contact with host nation personnel

c. Anti-biological warfare vaccines. Details of the specific medical countermeasures employed by British forces against the potential biological warfare threat during Operation Granby remain classified.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why it was considered necessary to vaccinate Her Majesty's forces serving in Operation Granby against plague and not botulism toxoid; and what account was taken of the policy of the United States Department of Defence on the subject.

Mr. Soames: Details of the specific medical countermeasures employed by British forces against the potential biological warfare threat during Operation Granby remain classified.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list details of the names and specific expertise of the medical specialists examining members and former members of the armed forces who have complained of suffering from desert war syndrome.

Mr. Soames: At present, all members and former members of the armed forces who come forward for medical assessment in connection with the alleged Gulf war syndrome are seen initially by Wing Commander W. J. Coker OBE BA BSc MB ChB FRCP, consultant physician at Princess Alexandra's RAF hospital, Wroughton. Dependent upon the results of these initial examinations, the patient may be referred to an appropriate military or civilian specialist for further investigation.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is an authorised practice to administer whooping cough vaccine together with anthrax vaccine; and what was the reason for administering this combination to Her Majesty's forces taking part in Operation Granby.

Mr. Soames: Details relating to biological warfare protection measures employed by British forces remain classified.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the research data on the vaccines administered to military personnel in the Gulf war of 1990–91.

Mr. Soames: No. The only research material on vaccines held by my Department relates to biological warfare protection measures employed by British forces and is classified.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all the vaccines administered to military personnel in the Gulf war of 1990–91 were licensed.

Mr. Soames: All vaccines administered to military personnel in the Gulf war of 1990–91 were licensed. Civilian vaccine product licences do not, however, cover prophylactic use against a biological warfare threat, but those administered to United Kingdom troops for this purpose were licensed for similar civilian use in their country of origin.

Joint Air Force Command

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his French counterpart concerning the development of a joint air force command.

Mr. Soames: At the United Kingdom–French summit on Friday 18 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, and his French counterpart, launched a new initiative aimed at increasing

significantly the ability of the air forces to operate together on a range of future operations. This common venture will be known as the Franco-British Euro Air Group and will be based at High Wycombe.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on the ratification of the chemical weapons convention.

Mr. Soames: My Department continues to play a major part in the work of the chemical weapons convention preparatory commission, and our national preparations for entry into force are well advanced. We intend to ratify the chemical weapons convention as soon as possible.

Meteorological Office

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the hospitality expenditure for the Meteorological Office for the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Meteorological Office. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. A. Bittleston to Dr. David Clark, dated 21 November 1994:

The Defence Secretary has asked me to respond to your Parliamentary Question which asked for a breakdown of the Meteorological Office's hospitality expenditure for the financial year 1993–94.

As you would expect the total sum of £25,206 is made up by a host of quite small items, most of which were incurred in the course of winning some £16 million worth of commercial business and maintaining in international fora the standing of the Office as a world class science-based organisation.

I have therefore grouped together in the Annex to this letter the main constituent items.

Annex

1. The main categories of hospitality expenditure for the Meteorological Office for the financial year 1993–94 were:

	£
Commercial Hospitality	8,545
Reciprocal International Hospitality	4,712
Academic Interchanges	3,336
Recruitment and Training	3,191
Government, Local Government and Advisers Hospitality	2,000
Miscellaneous	3,422
Total	25,206

Contracts

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts have been placed by his Department under the no acceptable price, no contract initiative; what was their total value in each of the years since the initiative was introduced; and what criteria are used to evaluate the success of the procurement initiatives.

Mr. Freeman: The no acceptable price, no contract initiative was introduced on 1 July 1992. Two hundred and forty-two contracts have been let under the initiative to 31 July 1994. In the 13-month period from 1 July 1992 to 31 July 1993 a total of 46 contracts were placed, valued at £886 million. During the year 1 August 1993 to 31 July 1994 a further 196 contracts were let, with a total value of £2,996 million.

The initiative improves the timeliness of our non-competitive risk pricing. The initiative is a success in the context of the significant increase in the value of work priced before contract placement and industry has not demurred at this approach. Nevertheless, it has still to be proven whether estimating accuracy is maintained. This will be determined by the cost audit of those contracts selected for post-costing examination.

Vaccinations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if members of Her Majesty's forces are permitted to refuse vaccinations or drugs in any theatre of war.

Mr. Soames: The administration of vaccines or the provision of drugs to service personnel would normally be undertaken on the basis of informed consent. In certain circumstances, refusal to receive treatment could lead to disciplinary action.

Departmental Offices

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of *(a)* repairs an alterations and *(b)* air conditioning to his Department's headquarters in Whitehall for the (i) financial year 1994–95 and (ii) financial year 1995–96.

Mr. Soames: The estimated cost of repairs and alterations covering essential maintenance to my Department's main building in Whitehall is £2,462,000, including VAT, in the current financial year, and £2,488,000, including VAT, in the financial year 1995–96. These costs cover works required mainly for health and safety reasons. There is some provision in these figures for the maintenance of essential air conditioning systems in the building.

Defence Accounts Agency

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received concerning the proposed relocation of the Defence Accounts Agency from Cheadle Hulme to Bath; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There is no proposal to relocate the whole of the Cheadle Hulme office to Bath. I have, however, received a number of representations from hon. Members about the proposal to bring together at Bath certain elements of the agency's computer work which are currently carried out at Liverpool, Cheadle Hulme and Bath.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many redundancies among his Department's personnel and civilian support staff would be expected in Cheadle Hulme should Defence Accounts Agency computing facilities be relocated to Bath; and what would be the cost of those redundancies.

Mr. Freeman: I expect to take a decision on the agency's mainframe rationalisation project early in the new year. It is too soon to anticipate the announcement I may have to make then on reductions in civilian posts.

Inhumane Weapons Convention

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Government plan to ratify the 1981 UN convention on inhumane weapons, in relation to the use of land mines.

Mr. Freeman: We continue to work actively towards ratification of the UN weaponry convention—protocol II of which contains strict rules governing the use of land mines—and intend to complete the process so as to be a full state party for next year's weaponry convention review conference. Meanwhile, we do, of course, adhere strictly to the provisions of the convention.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department between 1 January and 30 June those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place.

Mr. Soames: None of the Ministers in this Department participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party while on visits overseas during the period in question.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 22 November 1994

HOME DEPARTMENT

West Midlands Police

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the chief constables of West Midlands police and West Mercia police regarding the implications of the Frankley area coming under the jurisdiction of West Midlands police rather than West Mercia; and what plans he has to increase West Midlands police resources to cover the Frankley area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Boundary changes in the west midlands have been the subject of correspondence between officials at the Home Office and West Midlands police. The police funding formula for 1995–96 will assess the need for policing partly on the basis of resident population. The formula will also take account of the Frankley boundary changes. The funding level for West Midlands police in 1995–96 will be issued shortly after the Budget statement.

Timberwolf Crossbreed Dogs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to include timberwolf crossbreed dogs in its provisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: None. Wolves and wolf hybrids are already listed on the schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to government.

Mr. Howard: In line with guidance on charging under the code of practice on access to government information produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, the Home Office has developed the following arrangements for charging for information under the code of practice.

A charge is not normally made for the work involved in meeting straightforward requests from most inquirers for information, providing it takes less than an hour. A charge is made for dealing with more complex requests which take more than one hour. This is calculated at an hourly rate of £20, reflecting average staff costs.

In addition, a charge may be made for photocopying, supplying a video or tape, for disk or computer runs and for postage. There are no standard charges for these but a charge would not normally be made for costs amounting to less than £10.

No charge is normally made for answering inquiries from journalists. However, journalists may be charged if the cost of providing information to them exceeds the current limit for a parliamentary question.

As regards charging by the Department's agencies, the Prison Service and the United Kingdom Passport Agency have adopted a similar approach to the Home Office. The Forensic Science Service and the Fire Service college charge on a full-cost recovery basis.

The arrangements in the Home Office for charging for information are set out in "Departmental Procedures on Open Government". A copy of these has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Speed Limits

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make full use of new technology to enhance enforcement of speed limits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The enforcement of speed limits is an operational matter for chief officers of police.

Local Government Finance

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the response to the current bidding round under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: There has already been an enthusiastic response to the current section 11 bidding round, and the available funds look set to be significantly oversubscribed. I have therefore decided, in view of the importance of the work funded under this scheme, to double the funding available in the first two years covered by the current bidding round, bringing to £30 million the central funding available in respect of each of 1995–96 and 1996–97.

The additional funding will be provided jointly by the Home Office, the Department of the Environment and the Department for Education and has been made possible by adjustments to spending priorities.

The deadline for applications and revised applications will be extended until 30 December and local authorities and others who are eligible to apply are being informed.

New Prisons

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many companies and consortia have submitted tenders to construct and manage the new prisons planned at *(a)* Fazakerley and *(b)* Bridgend; and if he will identify the companies and consortia and indicate when the contracts are likely to be awarded.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewes to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 22 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the companies and consortia which have tendered for the contracts for new prisons at Fazakerley and Bridgend.

Five companies submitted tenders to design, construct, manage and finance new prisons at both Fazakerley and Bridgend. They are Group 4 Tarmac Ltd, United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd, Premier Prison Service Ltd, Securicor Seifert Atkins Consortium and Secure Care Services Ltd. I expect contracts to be awarded by the end of March 1995.

Remand Prisoners, Hull

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people are at present on remand at Hull prison; what are their ages; and what is the nature of the alleged offences for which they are being prosecuted.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewes to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 22 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of young people on remand at Hull prison.

On 17 November this year nine young prisoners were being held in the separate young offenders' wing at Hull, of whom five were on remand and three were convicted and awaiting sentence. Eight of these prisoners were aged 16 years and one was aged 15 years. The offences with which they were charged are burglary, robbery, criminal damage and taking and driving away a motor vehicle.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Research

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent assessment he has made of the distribution of public investment in research between civil and military projects.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The "Forward Look of Government funded Science, Engineering and Technology", published in April 1994, and available in the House of Commons Library, sets out for scrutiny the current balance of public expenditure on civil and defence research, and changes in this balance during the period 1986–87 to 1996–97.

ENVIRONMENT

Playing Fields and Open Space

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what circulars or directives he has issued to local authorities concerning the retention of playing fields and public open spaces in urban areas.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: National planning policy for open spaces and playing fields in urban areas is set out in planning policy guidance note 17, PPG 17, "Sport and Recreation", published in September 1993, and in planning policy guidance note 3, PPG 3 "Housing", published in March 1992.

Negative Equity

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the number of households with negative equity in each of the last two years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Estimates of the number of households affected by negative equity are calculated on a quarterly basis. Based on Department of the Environment house price data, around 644,000 households were affected by negative equity in the third quarter of 1994, compared with around 801,000 in the same quarter last year.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to government.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, my Department has developed its own scheme of charges for information under the code of practice on access to government information. Generally, no charge will be made for processing a request for information unless it would cost more than £50 to fulfil in terms of additional work. Where a charge is liable, it will cover the whole cost of the work done, including the first £50. My Department made available last July an explanatory leaflet on its charging arrangements. A copy was placed in the Library of the House. A revised leaflet confirming that the arrangements also applied to my Department's agencies was issued earlier this month and a copy placed in the Library.

Timberwolf Crossbreed Dogs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to list timberwolf crossbreeds under the provisions of the Dangerous Animals Act 1976; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Wolves and wolf hybrids are already listed on the schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. A licence is required to keep any animal of a species listed on the schedule.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many timberwolf crossbreed dogs there are in England.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not held centrally since licensing under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 is the responsibility of district councils in England.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what powers are available to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to require electricity generating plant fitted with flue gas desulphurisation to be operated in preference to more polluting plant;

(2) what assumptions are now made by his Department about *(a)* the total electricity generating capacity fitted with flue gas desulphurisation, *(b)* the average load factor of plant fitted with FGD and *(c)* which plant will be so fitted;

(3) what assumptions were made by his Department about *(a)* the total electricity generating capacity fitted with flue gas desulphurisation and *(b)* the average load factor of plant fitted with FGD, in calculating the United Kingdom's ability to meet the terms of (i) the EC large combustion plants directive during negotiations on the directive and (ii) the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe sulphur protocol during negotiations on the protocol.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom's programme and national plan for the implementation of the EC large combustion plants directive, published in 1990, assumed the fitting of FGD to 8GW of generating capacity. At present, 4 GW of FGD are operating or under construction at Drax power station and 2 GW at Ratcliffe. The 1993 emissions inventory under the LCPD showed that National Power and PowerGen together emitted less than 80 per cent. of their national plan allocation of sulphur dioxide emissions for that year.

In negotiating and assessing the feasibility of the agreed reduction target of 80 per cent. by 2010, against 1980 figures, under the UNECE sulphur protocol, the Government took account of a variety of possible abatement options, including the fitting of FGD. The Government will be consulting in due course on the national strategy required to give effect to the sulphur protocol. That strategy will reflect assessment at the time of the most cost-effective measures to deliver our environmental targets, and will take into account such developments as the industry's significant investment in cleaner combined cycle gas turbines to replace older plant.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is currently in discussion with the generators both about the operation of their FGD-equipped plant in the context of each company's overall generating operations and more generally about improvement programmes for all of the companies' stations. Decisions on those questions will be taken in the light of an assessment of what constitutes BATNEEC—"best available techniques not entailing excessive costs".

Packaging

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions his Department has had with the food packaging industry as to a possible levy on packaging; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to introduce a packaging levy on produce that generates waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have no plans to introduce a statutory levy to finance the recovery of value from packaging waste. However, after extensive consultation with the packaging industry and users of packaging, the Government have announced that they are prepared to respond to requests from industry to legislate at the earliest opportunity. They propose to create a statutory framework within which industry-led schemes may operate in order to achieve increased recovery and recycling of packaging waste.

Recycling

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department gives to help the disposal of recycled material.

Mr. Atkins: The creation of markets for recycled materials is primarily a matter for industry. The Government's producer responsibility initiative provides incentives to this end by requiring companies to bear the extra cost of making greater productive use of waste. However, the Government also play their part—for example, through the implementation of departmental "green housekeeping" strategies; through a current review of British standards with a view to removing discrimination against the use of recycled materials; and through direct support to industry research into new uses for recycled materials.

Housing Safety

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the consultation paper on licensing of houses in multiple occupation announced by the then Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction, the right hon. Member for Ealing, Acton, (Sir G. Young) 8 July, *Official Report,* column *327;* and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have today placed copies of my Department's publication "Houses in Multiple Occupation—A consultation Paper on the Case for Licensing" in the Library. It has also been circulated to all local authorities in England and to other interested parties. Additional copies can be obtained from my Department. The period for comments will close on 18 February 1995.

I share the widespread concern about the poor conditions and fire risks in some houses in multiple occupation. However, I have an open mind about whether licensing of all HMOs is the most effective way forward, and before contemplating legislation we need to consider the cost implications for both landlords and tenants and be convinced that licensing is both essential and practical. Alternatives to full-scale licensing, including the tightening of existing fire safety regulations for HMOs, are also considered in the consultation paper.

The issue of hostels in resort areas catering mainly for benefit recipients is covered largely as a separate issue in the paper. They are already subject to additional planning controls but it is for consideration whether these powers should be replaced by an HMO licensing system which would also cover these hostels.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been paid or will be paid to landowners and occupiers under the countryside stewardship scheme for *(a)* linear access and *(b)* open access in each year from 1991–92 to 1994–95.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Total commitments for annual access payments agreed as a consequence of agreements are given in the table below. Payments are made annually in arrears.

Financial year when payments to be made	*Commitments for Open access (£ cumulative)*	*Linear Access (£ cumulative)*
1991–92	—	n/a
1992–93	337,250	—
1993–94	575,200	32,267
1994–95	646,250	62,954

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was or will be the total cost of all operations, except payments to landowners and occupiers, under the countryside stewardship scheme in each of the years 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95; and, in each of the four years, how much of this was connected with the additional public access component of the scheme.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer Monday 21 November 1994]:* The total management cost of the scheme including administration, provision of advice and monitoring and evaluation, but excluding payments to agreement holders for each of the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 was £1 million, £1·8 million and £2·15 million respectively. The projected cost on the same basis for 1994–95 is £2·1 million. The cost of managing the access element is not accounted for separately because many of the costs incurred are an integral part of overall scheme management.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the land which was subject to additional access payments under the countryside stewardship scheme took the form of linear access and how much took the form of open access in each of the years 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer Monday 21 November 1994]:* The information requested is given in the table below. Linear access payments were not available in 1991–92. Payments are made annually in arrears. Figures for 1994–95 are not yet available as some contracts remain under offer.

Financial Year	*Amount of land subject to open access payments (hectares) agreed in that financial year*	*Length of linear routes subject to access payments (km) agreed in that financial year*
1991–92	6,745	n/a
1992–93	4,759	188·6
1993–94	1,421	155
1994–95	n/a	n/a

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the successful applications made under the countryside stewardship scheme involved additional payments for access in each year since 1991–92.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer Monday 21 November 1994]:* The information requested is given in the table below. Payments are made annually in arrears. Figures for contracts for 1994–95 are not yet available as some remain under offer.

Financial Year	*Number of Countryside Stewardship contracts entered into which involved payments for access*
1991–92	320
1992–93	373
1993–94	197
1994–95	n/a

AIDS HIV

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department will publish the research it has jointly funded with the Department of Health on the housing aspects of AIDS and HIV infection.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer Monday 21 November 1994]:* I hope to publish the results of the research shortly.

Directorships

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many officials in his Department have to his knowledge had over the past 10 years directorships in public limited companies while at the same time continuing in post in the civil service.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer Monday 21 November 1994]:* Some 30 serving officials have held company directorships over the past 10 years as part of the Government's programmes for developing senior staff through contact between Whitehall and business. Records are not kept of which directorships are of public limited companies.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fees

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Lord President of the Council in how many cases of employees of right hon. and hon. Members paid via the Fees Office the employer has failed to deposit a contract of employment at the Fees Office.

Mr. Newton: There are currently 312 employees of right hon. and hon. Members who do not have a contract of employment lodged with the Fees Office—that figure includes part-time and other staff who are not required to have a contract.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many right hon. and hon. Members take advantage of the payroll giving scheme by deduction from their parliamentary salaries.

Mr. Newton: There are 43 Members who have authorised deductions from their parliamentary salaries under the payroll giving scheme.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Nuclear Energy Research

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the individual Overseas Development Administration contributions to the nature and locations of each of the 23 Overseas Development Administration-funded research projects into nuclear energy to which he refers in his answer of 2 November, *Official Report*, column *1182*.

Mr. Baldry: A list of those projects, with 1992 calendar year expenditure figures, has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

TREASURY

Public Borrowing

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what definition he currently uses for public borrowing.

Mr. Nelson: The Government's fiscal policy objective is expressed in terms of the public sector borrowing requirement. Forecasts of the PSBR are presented twice yearly, and outturns are published monthly.

The Government also look at other measures of fiscal stance, including the current balance and the general Government financial deficit, the measure which is used to compare budget deficits throughout the EU.

VAT (Sports Clubs)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of payments made to sports clubs since 1 April for value added tax refunds.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Payments of £47 million had been made to non-profit making organisations supplying sporting services by the end of September 1994.

Economy

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the overall effects on the non-oil United Kingdom economy of sterling leaving the European exchange rate mechanism in 1992.

Mr. Aitken: It is not possible to assess the precise effects of sterling's departure from the ERM, but during sterling's membership of the ERM inflation fell sharply and the economy began to recover from recession. The Government's policies of securing sustainable growth based on low inflation have built on this foundation, and the economy is now showing strong well-balanced growth, falling unemployment, the lowest inflation for 27 years and a better balance of payments.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to graduate vehicle excise duty for cars, based on the certified fuel efficiency of a car when new.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce any decisions on vehicle excise duty, as with other taxes, in his Budget next week.

Document (Disclosure)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what inquiries he has made about unauthorised disclosure of a Treasury document on 16 November.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I assume that the hon. Member is alluding to the "confidential Treasury papers" mentioned in *The Daily Telegraph* article of 16 November on the financing of the European Community budget. There was no unauthorised disclosure of any such document. The figure of about £800 million for the increase in the United Kingdom net contribution to the end of the century, quoted in the article, was provided as a normal response to a routine inquiry by an official Treasury press officer. It was wholly consistent with everything that Treasury Ministers have ever said on the subject.

There has never been any secret that the United Kingdom's net contribution to the Community budget is going to rise in cash terms between now and the end of the century, whether or not the Edinburgh settlement is ratified. Growth is shown in the figures in table 11.1 of the Treasury's last departmental report. The trend is, however, obscured by the large annual variations in our net contribution, which make the precise figures for any one year difficult to predict.

Our latest estimate is that the increase in the underlying level of the United Kingdom public sector net contribution—that is, after smoothing out the annual fluctuations—will be about £850 million between 1995 and 1999, from about £2,700 million in 1995 to about £3,550 million in 1999.

This growth is nominal—that is, not real, terms—and results mainly from the effects of (i) inflation, and (ii) real GNP growth. On the assumption that annual inflation and GNP growth will each be 2½ per cent. a year on average over this period, the existing own resources ceiling—1·20 per cent. of GNP—would have allowed an increase in own resources of about 22 per cent. in nominal terms between 1995 and 1999, implying an increase of around £600 million in our net contribution. The effect of the Edinburgh future financing settlement, and the EC (Finance) Bill, will be to increase nominal growth in the own resources ceiling to about 29 per cent. over this period.

The cost in cash terms to the United Kingdom of the change resulting from the Edinburgh settlement and the EC (Finance) Bill is estimated to be *£75* million in 1995–96 and *£250* million in 1999–2000.

Those figures still look large because they are presented in cash terms for consistency with the rest of our public expenditure arithmetic. But the real scale of the Edinburgh settlement can be seen in the fact that it increased the own resources ceiling, over seven years, by only 7/10,000ths of Community GNP.

Milk Quotas

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why he agreed to back date to 1991 Italy's milk quota increase which was agreed in December 1993 to take effect in 1993–94.

Mr. Heathcoat Amory *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* I have nothing to add to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), 25 October 1994, *Official Report,* columns *510–11.*

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the proportion of child support cases involving absent parents who are self-employed for which a maintenance assessment is *(a)* calculated and *(b)* paid regularly for at least three months;

(2) what is the proportion of child support cases involving absent parents who are paying income tax under

PAYE for which a maintenance assessment is *(a)* calculated and *(b)* paid regularly for at least three months.

Mr. Burt: There is no business need for the CSA to collect such specific information on the number of absent parents who are self-employed or paying income tax under PAYE, and those details could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the rules under which the Child Support Agency operates in respect of employees of that agency representing their own partners at tribunal hearings, where the former spouse of the partner is seeking redress under the appeal process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 21 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency's rules about members of staff representing their own partners at tribunal hearings.

Under the terms of their employment, all employees of the Agency are bound to comply with the Department of Social Security Staff Rules. Under these rules, employees are required to obtain permission from a member of senior management before they can represent a person in the course of an appeal at a tribunal hearing or application concerning any matter for which the Department is responsible. Permission would be granted only where the representation would not be open to misunderstanding on the part of the public and there is no conflict of interests within the Agency.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Hague: No charge is made for simple requests for information, where the information can be collected within half a day or less. For more detailed requests which would take more than half a day to process, a charge may be made to recover the actual cost of collecting the information in staff time, photocopying costs and so on. The charges are based on the hourly rate for the grade of staff engaged in retrieving the information.

The Department has always, and continues, to provide information free of charge on benefit entitlements and the standards and availability of services.

Social Fund

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further allocation of funds to the discretionary social fund budget.

Mr. Roger Evans: As a result of the improved recoveries of social fund loans, I am pleased to announce that a further £13 million, funded from these additional recoveries, will be made available to the Benefits Agency's district offices on 23 November 1994.

The whole of the additional allocation will be devoted to social fund loans. We believe that social fund loans offer excellent value for money. They enable us to target available resources on those in most need and to recycle funds to help more applicants.

Since the scheme started, we have been able to make £1·2 billion worth of loans for an outlay of only £280 million. This expansion of the social fund loans budget will ensure that more people receive help and that the fund continues to play a valuable role in complementing mainstream social security provision.

Details of individual district allocations have been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dystonia

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons in Northern Ireland suffer from *(a)* dystonia and *(b)* the form of dystonia known as spasmodic torticollis.

Mr. Moss: This information is not available.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to government.

Sir John Wheeler: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland Departments and agencies have developed the following schemes for charging for information under the code of practice on access to government information:

Department/Agency	*Scheme*
Agriculture	First five hours free. Charges above that on ready reckoner basis.
Economic Development including Training and Employment Agency	First five hours free. In excess of five hours £20 per hour for the full number of hours taken.
Education	First five hours free. £20 per hour after that.
Environment including Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	Requests costing under £100 free. Full additional cost after that.
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland	
Rate Collection Agency	
Finance and Personnel including Valuation and Lands Agency	First five hours free. Charges above that will be determined by Accountant.
Health and Social Services including Child Support Agency Social Security Agency	First five hours free; above that, marginal cost.
Northern Ireland Office including Compensation Agency	First five hours free. £20 per hour or part thereof after that.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Copyright Tribunal

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes he proposes to make to the procedures of the copyright tribunal.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Earlier this year, my Department consulted users of the copyright tribunal on how far they were satisfied with its performance and on how its proceedings might be improved. Around 40 per cent. of those consulted responded and, of those, the overwhelming majority considered that the tribunal proceedings were fair, flexible, unintimidating and thorough. However, concerns were expressed as to the cost and speed of the proceedings and some suggestions for improvement in these and other respects were made. My Department is currently analysing those suggestions, and will consult tribunal users further on any changes which appear desirable.

Net Book Agreement

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the net book agreement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The net book agreement is a voluntary agreement between publishers. It was considered by the restrictive practices court in 1962. The court declared that the restrictions in it were not contrary to the public interest and the agreement was permitted to continue. The Director General of Fair Trading announced in August that he would be asking the court to consider the agreement again.

Post Office

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to alter the arrangements governing the borrowing by the Post Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I am considering whether any changes in the arrangements governing the relationship with the Post Office may be possible. However, I have no immediate plans to change the current arrangements governing borrowing.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Post Office to discuss proposals for the commercial freedom of the Post Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I have regular meetings with the chairman of the Post Office.

British Coal

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is his intention that the final price received for British Coal's regional packages and former collieries should match the bids made by the preferred buyers.

Mr. Eggar: The precise amounts bid for regional coal companies and care and maintenance collieries are commercially confidential and subject to further discussions with bidders. Proceeds will be announced when the sales are completed.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each occasion involving travel abroad at public expense mentioned in his answer of 2 November, *Official Report*, columns *1131–32*, (i) the Minister whose spouse attended, (ii) the location abroad, (iii) the purpose of the Minister's visit and the activities taken part in by the spouse and (iv) the total cost of each trip.

Mr. Heseltine: The occasions on which DTI Minister's spouses travelled abroad at public expense during the past year are listed. Ministerial trips were undertaken for trade promotion and trade relations purposes. All accompanying spouses were involved in the official programmes as well as undertaking separate engagements.

Minister	*Country*	*Cost for Minister and Spouse* £
Mrs. Hamilton accompanied Mr. Hamilton, Minister for Corporate Affairs	Romania	2,004.20
Lady Ferrers accompanied Earl Ferrers, Minister for Small Firms and Consumer Affairs	Singapore/Australia/ New Zealand	12,037.08
Mrs. Taylor accompanied Mr. Taylor, PUSS for Trade and Technology	Germany	726.68
Mrs. Eggar accompanied Mr. Eggar, Minister for Industry and Energy	South America	11,319.38
Mrs. Heseltine accompanied Mr. Heseltine, President of the Board of Trade	Australia/ Japan	12,010.00
Mrs Heseltine accompanied Mr. Heseltine, President of the Board of Trade	South Africa	7,900.00

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make available departmental publications on Internet; and if he will state the Internet address of such documents.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Broadband Communications Command Paper published today is the first Command paper to be made available on Internet. The Internet address is URL:http://www.open.gov.uk/dti/broadband_comms.htm.

The CCTA recently announced an initiative on the wider use of Internet in Government. Departmental officials are in discussion with a number of institutions to establish how effective Internet would be for the distribution of departmental information.

Nuclear Installations (Former Soviet Union)

Mr. Rooker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contribution is being made by Her Majesty's Government towards the cleaning up, and making safe, of nuclear installations in the former Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: At the Economic Summit in Munich, 1992, G7 heads of Government endorsed a multilateral programme of action to help improve the safety of Soviet-designed nuclear reactors in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. For the latter, the Government's main contribution to this international effort is being channelled through the European Union's technology assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States programme, to which we contribute around 16 per cent. of the total budget. Over the past four years, around 280 million ECU has been allocated by the EC for nuclear safety related projects in the FSU. Priorities are set in consultation with recipient countries. So far, the main emphasis has been on reactor safety, although a number of projects relating to waste management and clean-up operations have either been carried out or are under-way.

The United Kingdom has also contributed 11·5 mecu to the European bank for reconstruction and development—managed nuclear safety account, which was established last year to fund urgent safety upgrades at the higher risk reactors.

On a bilateral basis, the Government have supported a range of technical assistance projects in the FSU including a number under the know-how fund. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus Kazakhstan and Lithuania have been amongst the beneficiary countries. Projects include help to Ukraine for land remediation and measurement of radioactive contamination post-Chernobyl; DTI-funded collaboration on RBMK reactor safety between the Atomic Energy Authority and Russia's Research and Development Institute of Power Engineering; and training seminars on radioactive waste management regulation, the safeguarding of nuclear materials and nuclear site inspection techniques.

At the Naples Summit in July, G7 Governments pledged support for an action plan to ensure early closure of the remaining units at Chernobyl within the framework of an energy sector strategy for Ukraine. The Government will make a contribution through the EU, which has pledged up to 100 mecu of grant finance for technical assistance through the TACIS programme and up to 400 million ECU thorough EURATOM loans. The Government will decide their bilateral contribution when detailed arrangements have been agreed with Ukraine.

British Coal

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice has been given to the unsuccessful bidders for British Coal's regional packages about the need to keep their financing in place to enable them to make a further bid.

Mr. Eggar: Discussions with bidders are commercially confidential.

British Telecom

Mr. William Ross: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in each of the last five years *(a)* how many people were employed full-time by British Telecom, *(b)* how many of these have been disabled, by number and as a percentage of the work force, *(c)* how many existing staff have become registered disabled, *(d)* how many disabled persons were recruited by number and as a percentage of all recruits, *(e)* how many disabled persons took early voluntary redundancy terms and *(f)* what is the current percentage of disabled employees of British Telecom.

Mr. Ian Taylor: These are matters for British Telecom.

British Gas

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he plans to take to maintain the levels of research carried out by British Gas; and if he will investigate the effect on research of the proposed closure of the engineering research station at Killingworth.

Mr. Charles Wardle: That is a matter for the board of British Gas.

Multimedia

Mr. Brazier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for further work on multimedia.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to take responsibility for co-ordinating the DTI's interests in broadband communications and multimedia for the information society. I aim to encourage the public and private sectors to exploit the technology available and to take full advantage of the opportunities emerging. By spreading the benefits to businesses and households, we can boost our international competitiveness and improve the quality of life in the United Kingdom.

In taking this forward, I want to be able to draw on the best expert opinion from the private sector. My new role will require me to get to grips with the powerful technological and commercial changes now affecting the media, communications, information technology, and publishing industries. I have therefore asked a number of senior figures from those industries to join a group which will advise me on such matters. The group also includes individuals with experience in education and health-care, since these are two of the most important application areas for multimedia.

I see the group as a collection of expert individuals rather than a representative body. I envisage it acting both as a source of ideas and as a sounding-board for some of our own thinking.

The members of this Multimedia Industry Advisory Group are:

Mr. Hayden Abbott
Managing Director, Sony Professional Products, Europe

Professor John Arbuthnott
Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Strathclyde

Mr. Mark Burrell
Group Strategy Director, Pearson

Mr. David Clementi
Group Chief Executive, Kleinwort Benson

Mr. Don Cruickshank
Director General, Office of Telecommunications

Mr. Robert Devereux
Chairman, Virgin Communications

Mr. David Elstein
Director of Programming, BSkyB

Mr. John Greetham, CBE
Chairman, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Dr. Peter Horne
Managing Director, Apricot Computers

Mr. Peter Job
Chief Executive, Reuters

Mr. Tim Jones
Chief Executive, Mondex

Mr. Nick Kane
Group Managing Director, Videotron

Mr. Robert Phillis
Chairman, BBC Worldwide

Mr. Giles Pugh
Director, Corporate Strategy, W H Smith

Dr. Alan Rudge, OBE
Managing Director, Development and Procurement, BT.

Lord Astor, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of National Heritage, and Robert Hughes MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science have agreed to join the group. The membership of the group may be altered from time to time.

Separately, I will be receiving advice on multimedia and information highways from Mr. Peter Bonfield and Mr. Peter Davies, who were members of the High-Level Group formed by European Commissioner Martin Bangemann at the end of last year. I will also continue to benefit from the views of the many other individuals and organisations with which the DTI has contacts.

Within the DTI, a multimedia steering group has been established to bring together the wide range of multimedia interests inside the Department. This is chaired by Alistair Macdonald, the Deputy Secretary in charge of the DTI's industry command. Mr. Macdonald will be assisted by a new multimedia unit in telecommunications division of the DTI.

These various initiatives are referred to in the command paper, "Creating the Superhighways of the Future: Developing Broadband Communications in the United Kingdom", published today.

Optical Fibres

Mr. Mans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Government will respond to the Trade and Industry Select Committee report on optical fibres.

Mr. Heseltine: In the Command Paper, "Creating the Superhighways of the Future: Developing Broadband Communications in the United Kingdom", published today, I have set out the Government's vision for creating information super-highways in the United Kingdom. We need to build on the substantial investment in telecommunications networks and infrastructure which has been made by the private sector in recent years. Greater emphasis is now required in this country on developing a wide range of applications to be used on the super-highways. The opportunities—particularly in multimedia—are vast, and they need to be better appreciated if the United Kingdom is to gain maximum advantage.

The Command Paper incorporates the Government's response to the Trade and Industry Select Committee report on optical fibre networks and copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses and on the Internet.

Thanks to privatisation and deregulation, the United Kingdom is already a world leader in these new information infrastructures, which gives us an excellent platform to build on the earlier liberalisation of the telecommunications sector. The Government want to see the development of competitive and commercially successful broadband communications networks to bring new opportunities and benefits to business, individuals, and users of public services.

Competition in telecommunications since 1991 has been the engine of rapid progress in both infrastructure and telecommunications services. Industry has responded to the challenge and has innovated to deliver new technologies and services. Customers now enjoy not only considerably more choice but significantly lower prices and better quality services.

In the future, the success of the digital super-highway will be even more customer driven. The winners will be the companies that deliver services and products that customers want, at a price they will pay.

The Government remain committed to the regulatory framework established in 1991. That framework has already provided an important foundation for substantial investment in infrastructure, leading to the creation of truly interactive broadband communications networks. As competition grows and technology advances, the broad regulatory framework is expected to evolve. The existing policy on national public telecommunications operators providing and conveying entertainment services over their national networks remains as set out in the 1991 telecommunications White Paper, and will not be reviewed prematurely.

The Government want to encourage all operators, including national PTOs like British Telecom and Mercury, to gain experience in offering a full range of new interactive services. All operators may do this by applying for new local delivery operator franchises, and the Government hope that this opportunity will be taken up. The intention is to seek to allow national PTOs who acquire such franchises to test new technologies alongside their existing services, making use of the same infrastructure where possible.

Investment in the development of information super-highways, both in terms of infrastructure and the services and applications they will carry, will be led by the private sector. The Government are, nevertheless, committed to being more proactive and innovative in offering public services by these means. The command paper underlines the importance for education and healthcare of developing interactive broadband technologies. As an important beginning, the Command Paper published today is the first ever to be made available electronically on the Internet. In the future, the Government will make an increasingly wide rang of information available in a similar fashion.

It will be vital to match the emerging broadband technologies with the content being developed for the super-highways. My Department will be encouraging the growing convergence of telecommunications, information technology and broadcasting. Building the super-highways and exploiting the whole range of multimedia services that they can deliver is essential for both the economic and cultural development of the United Kingdom into the next century. To drive this work forward, I have asked my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology to take responsibility for co-ordinating the DTI's multimedia interests for the information society.

Coal Industry

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans he has for transferring all British Coal land and property to the Coal Authority; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if it is his intention to create British Coal Property plc;

(3) if he will ensure that the disposal of British Coal land which has job creation potential is transferred to local authorities for regeneration use.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* The various options for the future of British Coal's non-operational property portfolio are being considered by British Coal in consultation with the Government. No decisions have been taken.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department between 1 January and 30 June those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Between 1 January and 30 June 1994, Ministers in my Department made 28 overseas visits in their official capacity. Fundraising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

Offshore Oil and Gas Licences

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will announce the blocks to be offered in the 16th round of offshore oil and gas licensing on the United Kingdom continental shelf.

Mr. Charles Wardle: *[pursuant to his reply, 21 November 1994]:* I have decided to offer 164 blocks for licensing, an optimum number to enable companies to consider all options in a wide range of different areas.

I expect applicants to be committed to the future of the United Kingdom continental shelf by being competitive, innovative and continuing to cut costs.

The largest proportion of the blocks—over 60—are to the west of the Shetlands, where I want to encourage companies to build on the impetus of the Foinaven announcement earlier this month. This area has the potential for further significant discoveries and to develop into an exciting new oil province.

Following that announcement and the success of the "fast-track" 15th round in August, I intend to "fast-track" applications for west of Shetlands blocks so that those can be awarded in advance of the other areas and work can start in the summer of 1995.

The objective of this round, as of previous rounds, is to encourage exploration—particularly in new areas where there has been little drilling to date—and to continue the development of our oil and gas resources well into the next century.

I want the present momentum to be maintained, so I am calling for nominations from companies for the next round, the 17th, which will cover frontier areas to the far west of Britain where there has been little exploration so far.

Blocks offered in the 16th round include relatively new basins such as Cardigan bay and the East Irish sea, and in the English channel, as well as on the fringes of the more established areas of the North sea. The range of blocks offered illustrates the diversity of opportunities available on the UKCS.

A number of the blocks are in areas where there are particular environmental concerns. Special conditions will be attached to the award of licences in those areas in order to safeguard the environment. Those conditions have been agreed following consultation with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and also cover restrictions to protect the interests of other users of the sea such as fishing, transport and defence.

We have conducted a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the 329 blocks which were nominated, involving other Government Departments, local authorities and environmental groups. In all, over 100 organisations have advised us.

It is vital that oil and gas exploration activities take account of environment concerns. In July, the Minister for Industry and Energy launched a joint initiative between JNCC and the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association. UKOOA is making a major contribution to the funding of a series of United Kingdom coastal directories and regional reports setting out the environmental resources of each coastal area. I expect companies applying for blocks in sensitive areas to demonstrate that they have taken the draft reports into account when preparing their applications and environmental management systems.

I am committed to protecting the environment, but this does not mean that there are "no go areas" where oil and gas activity is excluded for ever. As information on environmental resources improves and oil and gas technology develops, there may be increased scope for exploring areas in sensitive areas while still protecting the environment. The main factor in determining the selection

of blocks in the 16th round is that of perceived prospectivity.

Applications for the 16th round are required by noon on 22 March, while nominations for the 17th round are required by 8 March 1995. Except for the west of Shetlands blocks, I expect to announce licence awards for the 16th round during the summer, and the blocks nominated under the 17th round shortly after the March deadline.

I will publish tomorrow in the *London Gazette* and on Friday in the *Edinburgh Gazette* and the *Belfast Gazette*, a formal announcement giving the detailed financial terms for the 16th round, including the format of applications, the information required and the basis on which awards will be made. I will place in the Libraries of both Houses copies of that announcement.

HEALTH

Homicides Inquiry

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether discussions have taken place between the confidential inquiry into homicides by mentally ill people and her Department to ensure that professionals in the health and social services are better informed about the inquiry's work.

Mr. Bowis: Yes.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that her Department or the confidential inquiry into homicides by mentally ill people should summarise and publish annually the findings and recommendations of independent inquiries into homicides by people with a psychiatric illness.

Mr. Bowis: No. Decisions about the publication of the findings and recommendations of an independent inquiry into a homicide by a mentally ill person are taken by the health authority or social services authority which commissioned the inquiry. Departmental guidance in circular HSG(94)27, copies of which are available in the Library, makes it clear that an undertaking should be given at the start of the inquiry that its main findings will be made available to interested parties.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the questionnaire sent to consultant psychiatrists by the confidential inquiry into homicides by mentally ill people.

Mr. Bowis: I understand that the questionannaire will be included in the confidential inquiry's substantive report on homicides and suicides, to be published in 1995.

Blood Transfusion Centres

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration she has given to *(a)* transportation time and motorway congestion, *(b)* the future for local blood transfusion centres donor registries and *(c)* the working relationship between blood transfusion centres and local hospitals and community groups of blood donors when restructuring the blood transfusion centres.

Mr. Sackville: Those matters are the responsibility of the National Blood Authority, which was set up to manage the blood service. I understand that all these issues were carefully considered by officials at the National Blood Authority in the process of drawing up their proposals.

Orthodontic Treatment

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health are the waiting times for specialist orthodontic treatment in west Oxfordshire.

Mr. Malone: Information on waiting times by specialty, district health authority and national health service trust is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Private Patient Facilities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much income has been generated by NHS hospitals, private patient facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Sackville: I refer to the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *533–34*, for the latest available information.

NHS Travel Costs

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total travel costs for NHS staff between Leeds and London in 1993–94.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr Milburn) on 21 July, *Official Report*, column *608*.

Regional Headquarters

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the total employment cost of relocating regional headquarter staff to Durham.

Mr. Malone: Relocation costs, excess travel expenses and additional redundancy costs resulting from the relocation of the regional headquarters to Durham are estimated to total £694,875 over 10 years. The relocation is expected to yield an annual saving on staff business travel of approximately £90,000 per year. In addition, the running costs of accommodation will be reduced by £438,000 per year, compared with the current two sites, and the reduction in staff numbers to around 135 will save £4·7 million a year in employment costs.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the capital expenditure on the northern regional headquarters in Newcastle in each of the last five financial years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Greetham CBE, chairman of Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority, for details.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the total cost of relocating staff to Quarry house, Leeds and *(b)* the total cost of relocation.

Mr. Sackville: The total cost of relocating national health service executive and NHS Estates staff to Leeds was £11·76 million. The total cost of relocation was £74·02 million.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the estimated employment costs of reducing 200 jobs at Quarry house, Leeds.

Mr. Sackville: Costs will depend on the level of staff turnover over the next two and a half years and on the number and characteristics—age, grade, length of service—of staff who volunteer to take early retirement or early severance. They will be more than offset by the resulting savings.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate her Department has made of the likely costs of the new regional head office in Durham; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The precise cost of a new office in Durham for Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority is currently under negotiation. The regional health authority expects this to be more than offset by the sale of the existing headquarters building in Harrogate.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the charging policy of her Department and the agencies for which she is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Sackville: No charge has been made so far for requests under the code of practice. Where a charge is made, this will be currently based on the formula of one hour free and £20 per hour thereafter. People will be given an estimate before work begins. They can ask for this to be reviewed. They can also complain about charges to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. We have aimed to strike a reasonable balance between the interests of taxpayers and the interests of people seeking information under the code of practice.

The Medical Devices Agency, NHS Estates and the NHS Pensions Agency have the same policy. The Medicines Control Agency is currently considering its arrangements for charging.

Air Pollution

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to make public the recent report by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Air Pollution Episodes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: A report covering the work of the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants and the advisory group on the medical aspects of air pollutions episodes is to be published in December.

Salmonella

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the incidence of salmonella in each county in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available in the form requested.

For information on the number of cases of reported salmonellosis by national health service region in England and Wales for 1992 and 1993, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 25 April, *Official Report* columns, *61–64*.

In 1992 there were 31,355 cases of human salmonellosis confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Service and in 1993, 30,653. This represents a decrease of over 2 per cent. Figures to September 1994 compared to the same period in 1993 show a further decrease of nearly 3 per cent. Figures for 1993 and 1994 are provisional.

Deaths

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures she has on the numbers of deaths from suicide and undetermined injury in each county among *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Bowis: This information will be placed in the Library.

Tranquillisers

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures are available on the incidence of tranquilliser prescribing among *(a)* men, and *(b)* women in each county in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Herbal Remedies

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health upon what basis she established her policy that herbal remedies are manufactured other than by an industrial process; upon what legal arguments she reached the conclusion that such a policy would protect the continued availability of herbal remedies; what assessment she has made of legal protection which would prevent future court decisions, both domestic and European, or future European directives from establishing a definition for the term industrial process which threatened the continued availability of such products; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: European Community legislation requires herbal medicines to be licensed if they are industrially produced. Certain herbal medicines, which are currently exempt from product licensing requirements under section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968, are produced by a number of traditional processes. While courts of law are independent bodies, whose decisions cannot be fully predicted, we have concluded that the traditional processes in question fall outside the meaning of "industrially produced". The position of herbal medicines in the United Kingdom is therefore safeguarded under EC law.

We will continue to work with other EC member states and the European Commission to ensure that herbal medicines remain available to the many people in the Community who use them and to maintain existing public health safeguards.

Patient Lists

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the number of patients removed from general practitioners' lists in 1992–93 and 1993–94, by family health service authority.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. member to the reply I gave him on 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1269*.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistical information her Department maintains

about the reasons for patients being removed from general practitioners' lists.

Mr. Malone: We maintain statistical information under the following headings:

Patients who opt to register with another doctor
Bulk transfers on resignation or death of doctor
Patients who die or emigrate
Patients removed at request of doctor
Other causes

Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation she has had with the World Health Organisation concerning the acceptance or rejection of the term Munchausen's syndrome by proxy to refer to induced illness, fabricated illness stories in children, non-accidental injury to children or suffocation of children by parents.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations she has had in relation to medical research work carried out in Cardiff and Leeds studying information provided by the British paediatric surveillance unit on the epidemiology of induced illness and fabricated illness stories of children; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The Department is contributing to the funding of this study of incidence and outcome of Munchausen syndrome by proxy which is due for completion in September 1995.

Health Authorities (Staff)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many managers and administrative staff were employed by each regional health authority in 1993–94.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table. Figures given here for Northern, Yorkshire and South Western regional health authorities differ from those given in the *Official Report*, 24 October, column *452*. A processing error, now corrected, affected the earlier figures.

Administrative and clerical staff and general and senior managers within regional health authority headquarters or headquarters units—30 September 1993

Whole-time equivalents	*Administrative and Clerical*	*General and Senior Managers*
Northern	210	60
Yorkshire	380	190
Trent	300	90
East Anglian	480	70
North West Thames	380	[1]—
North East Thames	320	170
South East Thames	310	110
South West Thames	410	110
Wessex	260	120
Oxford	500	150
South Western	490	70
West Midlands	340	70
Mersey	300	60
North Western	650	130
Total	5,330	1,400

[1] An estimated 90 managers in North West Thames RHA HQ are employed on administrative and clerical terms and conditions, and are therefore classified as administrative and clerical staff.

Note:

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

Teaching and Research

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will announce the outcome of her Department's analysis of hospital costs associated with teaching and research; and how she intends to bring about the separation of the research element of service increment for teaching and research recommended in the Culyer report.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A statistical analysis of hospital costs found that national health service spending in association with teaching and research is higher than the service increment for teaching and research. The excess costs which SIFTR does not cover are in general indirectly funded through contracts for health care.

To address this, in 1995–96, as an interim measure, the SIFTR allocation will be increased by £40 million in 1995–96 by transferring funds from the purchasers of hospitals receiving SIFTR. I have also said that I will look sympathetically at ring-fencing more money in subsequent financial years to help build up the new funding system for research.

For 1995–96, the whole SIFTR amount will be allocated on the same principles as in 1994–95. The increased allocation will enable hospitals receiving SIFTR to reduce their contract prices for health care, while overall levels of activity remain the same. That will help put teaching and research hospitals on a level playing field with other hospitals and help purchasers make sound decisions about the use of their funds.

The analysis of hospitals costs did not find a convincing basis for separating the NHS costs associated with teaching and research by statistical methods. Previous studies have suggested the research element is about 25 per cent. From 1995–96, the NHS costs associated with teaching and research in England will nationally be attributed 75 per cent. to teaching and 25 per cent. to research.

The separation of the research element of SIFTR helps prepare the way for an improved system for supporting research in the NHS. When the Culyer report was published in September, I welcomed the proposal for a single funding stream for research—one of Culyer's key recommendations. This means that it would be possible to target more precisely the money available for research to support high-quality projects.

We are working in partnership with the universities, the research councils, charities and other organisations which support research in the NHS to take this forward. Work is in hand on the future arrangements for allocating funds and contracting for NHS support and facilities for undergraduate teaching.

Family Health Services Appeals Unit

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for the family health services appeals unit.

Mr. Malone: Arrangements are to be made for a special health authority to be created to undertake the functions of the family health services appeals unit. Further details of the unit's location and new members will be announced in due course.

PRIME MINISTER

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Office and Government agencies answerable to his Office; and of this sum how much will be spent in his private office and official residences including No.10 Downing street and Chequers.

The Prime Minister: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. However, entertainment figures for my office are included in the running costs figures which appear in the Government's Expenditure Plans 1994–95 to 1996–97 for the Cabinet Office (Cmd. 2518), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister how many official Christmas cards he intends to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

The Prime Minister: The information as requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. It is not my intention to place a sample Christmas card in the Library.

Al-Yamamah Military Sales Agreement

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will examine the allegations made in a document, a copy of which has been sent to him, on the use to which commissions paid in respect to the Al-Yamamah military sales agreement with Saudi Arabia were put.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the letter I sent to the hon. Member on 15 November, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent evidence he has received on Libya's responsibility for the Lockerbie crime; and if he will now seek to remove United Nations sanctions against Libya.

The Prime Minister: We have received no recent evidence on Libya's involvement in the Lockerbie bombing. My right hon. and learned Friend, the Lord Advocate, continues to believe that the evidence supports the charges against the two accused, who are Libyan nationals. In order for sanctions against Libya to be lifted, the Libyan Government must first comply in full with the United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Cabinet Committees

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish an updated list of the ministerial Committees of the Cabinet.

The Prime Minister: An updated list of the ministerial committees of the cabinet, giving their composition and terms of reference, is given below. Copies of this list are available in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Committee on Economic and Domestic Policy (EDP)
Composition
Prime Minister (chairman)
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for the Environment
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Wales
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister without Portfolio
Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.
Terms of reference
"To consider strategic issues relating to the Government's economic and domestic policies"

Ministerial Committee on Science and Technology (EDS)
Composition
Prime Minister (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for Defence
Secretary of State for the Environment
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Health
Secretary of State for Education
Secretary of State for Transport
Chief Secretary, Treasury
The Chief Scientific Adviser is in attendance. The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of reference
"To review science and technology policy".

Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (OPD)
Composition
Prime Minister (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Chancellor of the Exchequer
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for Defence
Attorney General
The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Lord Privy Seal also receive papers and may be invited to attend as necessary.
The Chief of Defence Staff will attend as required, as will the Chiefs of Staff when necessary.
Terms of reference
"To keep under review the Government's Defence and Overseas policy."

Ministerial Committee on Hong Kong and Other Dependent Territories (OPDK)
Composition
Prime Minister (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for Defence
Lord President of the Council
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Others, including the Attorney General, the Governor of Hong Kong and the British Ambassador in Peking may be invited to attend as appropriate. The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of Reference
"To keep under review the implementation of the agreement with the Chinese on the future of Hong Kong and the implications of that agreement for the Government of Hong Kong and the wellbeing of its people; and to keep under review as necessary the Government's policy towards other Dependent Territories."

Ministerial Committee on Nuclear Defence Policy (OPDN)
Composition
Prime Minister (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for Defence
Terms of Reference
"To keep under review the Government's policy on nuclear defence."

Ministerial Committee on Northern Ireland (NI)
Composition
Prime Minister (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Secretary of State for Defence
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Lord Privy Seal
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Attorney General
Other Ministers are invited to attend as the nature of the business requires.
Terms of Reference
"To oversee the Government's policy on Northern Ireland issues and relations with the Republic of Ireland on these matters."

Ministerial Committee on the Intelligence Services (IS)
Composition
Prime Minister (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Secretary of State for Defence
The Lord President of the Council and the Attorney General may be invited to attend as appropriate.
Terms of Reference
"To keep under review policy on the security and intelligence services."

Ministerial Committee on the Environment (EDE)
Composition
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Chancellor of the Exchequer
President of the Board of Trade
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for the Environment
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Secretary of State for National Heritage
Lord Privy Seal
Chief Secretary, Treasury
The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of reference
"To consider questions of environmental policy"

Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (EDH)
Composition
Lord President of the Council (chairman)
Lord Chancellor
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for the Environment
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Secretary of State for Social Security
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Health
Secretary of State for Education
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Secretary of State for National Heritage
Lord Privy Seal
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister without Portfolio
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury
The Attorney General, the Lord Advocate and the Captain of the Gentlemen at Arms also receive papers and are invited to attend as necessary.
Terms of Reference
"To consider home and social policy issues"

Ministerial Committee on Industrial, Commercial and Consumer Affairs (EDI)
Composition
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (chairman)
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for the Environment
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Lord Privy Seal
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister without Portfolio
The Attorney General also receives papers and may be invited to attend as necessary.
Terms of Reference
"To consider industrial, commercial, and consumer issues including questions of competition and deregulation"

Ministerial Committee on Local Government (EDL)
Composition
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (chairman)
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for the Environment
Secretary of State for Social Security
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Health
Secretary of State for Education
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Secretary of State for National Heritage
Lord Privy Seal
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister without Portfolio
Minister of State, Department of the Environment (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration)
Terms of reference
"To consider issues affecting local government, including the annual allocation of resources"

Ministerial Committee on Regeneration (EDR)
Composition
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Chairman)
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for the Environment
Secretary of State for Education
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Transport
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister without Portfolio
Minister of State, Department of the Environment (Minister for Local Government, Housing, and Urban Regeneration)

The Secretaries of State for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are invited to attend as appropriate.
Terms of Reference
"To consider regeneration policies and their coordination".

Ministerial Committee on Public Expenditure (EDX)
Composition
Chancellor of the Exchequer (chairman)
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Lord President of the Council
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Chief Secretary, Treasury
The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of Reference
"To consider the allocation of the public expenditure control totals and make recommendations to the Cabinet"

Ministerial Committee on the Queen's Speeches and Future Legislation (FLG)
Composition
Lord President of the Council (chairman)
Lord Chancellor
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Lord Privy Seal
Minister without Portfolio
Attorney General
Lord Advocate
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury
Financial Secretary, Treasury
Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs may be invited to attend or be represented for discussion of The Queen's Speeches.
Terms of reference
"To prepare and submit to the Cabinet drafts of the Queen's Speeches to Parliament, and proposals for the Government's legislative programme for each Session of Parliament".

Ministerial Committee on Legislation (LG)
Composition
Lord President of the Council (chairman)
Lord Chancellor
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Wales
Lord Privy Seal
Attorney General
Lord Advocate
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury
Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Minister of State, Home Office
Financial Secretary, Treasury
Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland also receives papers and is invited to attend as necessary.
Terms of reference
"To examine all draft Bills; to consider the Parliamentary handling of Government Bills, European Community documents and Private Members' business, and such other related matters as may be necessary; and to keep under review the Government's policy in relation to issues of Parliamentary procedures".

Ministerial Sub-committee on Health Strategy (EDH(H))
Composition
Lord President of the Council (chairman)
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for the Environment
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Secretary of State for Social Security
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Health
Secretary of State for Education
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Minister of State, Home Office
Paymaster General
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Employment
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of National Heritage
The Chief Medical Officer is in attendance. The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of reference
"To oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the Government's health strategy, to coordinate the Government's policies on United Kingdom-wide issues affecting health, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs"

Ministerial Sub-committee on Public Sector Pay (EDI (P))
Composition
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (chairman)
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for Defence
Secretary of State for the Environment
Secretary of State for Social Security
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Health
Secretary of State for Education
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Transport
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science
The Lord Chancellor also receives papers and may be invited to attend as necessary. The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of reference
"To coordinate the handling of pay issues in the public sector, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Industrial, Commercial and Consumer Affairs"

Ministerial Sub-committee on European Questions (OPD(E)
Composition
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (chairman)
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for Defence
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for the Environment
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Minister without Portfolio
Attorney General
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury
Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
The Lord Advocate also receives papers. He and other Ministers will be invited to attend as the nature of the business requires.
The United Kingdom's Permanent Representatives to the European Union is also in attendance.
Terms of reference
"To consider questions relating to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy"

Ministerial Sub-committee on Terrorism (OPD(T))
Composition
Secretary of State for the Home Department (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
President of the Board of Trade
Secretary of State for Defence
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Transport
Attorney General
Terms of reference
"To keep under review the arrangements for countering terrorism and for dealing with terrorist incidents and their consequences and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee of Defence and Overseas Policy".

Ministerial Sub-committee on Drug Misuse (EDH(D))
Composition
Lord President of the Council (chairman)
Solicitor General

Minister of State, Home Office
Paymaster General
Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence
Minister of State, Scottish Office
Minister of State, Department for Education
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Others, including the Minister for Overseas Development and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State from the Departments of the Environment and Employment, may be invited to attend as appropriate and receive all papers.
Terms of reference
"To coordinate the Government's national and international policies for tackling drugs misuse, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs"

Ministerial Sub-committee on Women's Issues (EDH (W))
Composition
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (chairman)
Secretary of State for Education
Minister of State, Home Office
Paymaster General
Minister of State, Department of the Environment (Minister for Construction and Planning)
Minister of State, Scottish Office
Minister of State, Department of Employment
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Transport
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
The Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence, and Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, also receive papers and may be invited to attend as necessary. The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of reference
"To review and develop the Government's policy and strategy on issues of special concern to women: to oversee their implementation; and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs".

Ministerial Sub-committee on London (EDL(L))
Composition
Secretary of State for the Environment (chairman)
Minister without Portfolio
Minister of State, Home Office
Financial Secretary, Treasury
Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Minister for Industry and Energy)
Minister of State, Department of the Environment (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration)
Minister of State, Department of Health (Minister for Health)
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Employment
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of National Heritage
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Transport (Minister for Transport in London)
Terms of reference
"To coordinate the Government's policies on London"

Ministerial Group on Sanctions Against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Gen 27)
Composition
Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (chairman)
Paymaster General
Minister of State, Treasury
Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Minister for Trade)
Minister of State for Defence Procurement, Ministry of Defence
Minister of State, Department of Transport
Terms of Reference
"To keep under review the implementation of the sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia imposed under United Nations Security Council Resolutions 757, 787 and 820, and to report to the Ministerial Committee on Overseas and Defence Policy as necessary."

Ministerial Group on Competitiveness (GEN 29)
Composition
President of the Board of Trade (chairman)
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Environment
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Education
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Representatives of other Departments may be invited to attend as necessary. The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of Reference
"To keep issues affecting the United Kingdom's competitiveness under review; and to update, in whole or part, as appropriate, from time to time the White Paper on Competitiveness for consideration by the Ministerial Committee on Economic and Domestic Policy."

Ministerial Group on Card Technology (GEN 34)
Composition
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (chairman)
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Secretary of State for the Home Department
President of the Board of Trade
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for Social Security
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Health
Secretary of State for Employment
Secretary of State for Wales
Secretary of State for Transport
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science
The Minister without Portfolio also receives papers.
Terms of Reference
"To consider the developing technology of card systems, and the potential demand for such systems from Government Departments, to ensure a co-ordinated approach across the Government taking account of the impact on the individual citizen".

Hillsborough Castle

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he, or the Cabinet Secretary, was consulted and gave prior approval to the making available of Hillsborough castle for an event organised by the Conservative Political Centre on 4 November.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Advice from officials is confidential. The use of Hillsborough castle for this event was in accordance with the conventions governing the use of ministerial residences.

Student Maintenance Awards

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the latest available figure for the total assessed parental contribution to student maintenance awards.

Mr. Boswell: The total assessed parental contribution to mandatory awards made by local education authorities in England and Wales for the academic year 1992–93 was £208 million in respect of partial maintenance grants and £392 million in respect of nil maintenance grants.

Access Funds

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will publish the results of the monitoring returns from higher education institutions on their use of discretionary access funds in 1993–94.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. However, if the hon. Member has particular questions about the returns, I shall see whether we can answer them.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what guidelines her Department issues to institutions of higher education regarding their responsibility to notify the Students Loans Company Ltd. of students who have ceased attendance on a course;

(2) what provisions exist for notifying the Student Loans Company of the circumstances of students who have temporarily withdrawn or deferred attendance on a higher education course but who have not permanently ceased to attend.

Mr. Boswell: Under the Education (Student Loans) (No.2) Regulations 1993, higher education institutions have a duty to notify the Student Loans Company promptly if a borrower ceases to be an eligible student before the end of his course. The guidelines issued to institutions state that when considering whether a student has ceased to attend a course, an institution should have regard to any internal regulations governing attendance. Institutions therefore have discretion to decide when a student has permanently ceased to attend.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action she is taking to ensure the ongoing educational value of section 11 activity now that much of the funding is contained within the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend will continue to monitor, through Ofsted, the standard of educational provision in all maintained schools, including provision for those pupils for whom English is not their first language. Additional support for the latter category through section 11 and single regeneration budget grants is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, respectively.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what moneys are allocated within grants for education support and training to provide for the needs of those teaching bilingual pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds; and what monitoring is planned on how it is spent.

Mr. Robin Squire: The size of the grants for education support and training—GEST—programme for 1995–96, and the grants within it, will be considered in the light of decisions on education standard spending generally following the unified budget on 29 November. The GEST programme will include a new grant to provide in-service training for mainstream teachers of bilingual pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. LEAs will be required to report by 30 June 1996 on the training provided under this activity. In addition, Ofsted will be invited to inspect a sample of courses and report to the Department.

Higher Education Review

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the terms of reference of her Department's review of higher education.

Mr. Boswell: The review of higher education is part of the normal programme of reviews which the Department undertakes from time to time. It has no formal terms of reference, but will begin by looking at the aims and purposes of higher education with a view to determining its appropriate size and shape at the turn of the century and beyond. Later on, the review will address the appropriate funding and student support arrangements.

Officials wrote last week to invite views on the first of those matters from organisations with an interest in the development of higher education. I am arranging for the text of the letter and the list of bodies formally consulted to be placed in the Library.

Funding Bids

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what input she has had with regard to the bidding guidance issued for single regeneration budget bids concerning existing educational initiatives.

Mr. Robin Squire: The bidding guidance for the single regeneration budget, which was issued in April, took account of advice from the Department. Education figures prominently among the objectives.

Further Education

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will publish a table showing the number of students in each local education authority in England undertaking courses of further education *(a)* aged 16 to 18 years and *(b)* 19 years and over; and what proportion of each of these age groups was not in receipt of any discretionary award.

Mr. Boswell: The number of students in each LEA in England who are undertaking further education *(a)* aged 16 to 18 years and *(b)* 19 years and over and the estimated proportion of each of these age groups who do not receive an award under section 2 of the Education Act 1962, are shown in the following table.

Numbers of FE students by home LEA showing proportion of students not receiving grants under section 2 of the 1962 Education Act (England 1992–93)

	Total numbers of FE students by LEA of domicile		*FE students not in receipt of section 2 discretionary awards Percentage of age group*	
LEA	*Aged 16–18*	*Aged 19+*	*Aged 16–18*	*Aged 19+*
Corporation of London	24	147	96	99
Camden	1,051	7,494	100	100
Greenwich	1,812	2,751	76	93
Hackney	2,228	4,325	69	98
Hammersmith	1,093	3,712	68	97
Islington	1,224	3,487	47	98
Kensington	694	6,346	100	98
Lambeth	2,493	6,811	100	99
Lewisham	2,157	4,690	85	100
Southwark	2,082	4,393	98	99
Tower Hamlets	2,583	3,981	100	98
Wandsworth	2,245	5,794	48	100
Westminster	1,028	3,897	100	100

Numbers of FE students by home LEA showing proportion of students not receiving grants under section 2 of the 1962 Education Act (England 1992–93)

	Total numbers of FE students by LEA of domicile		FE students not in receipt of section 2 discretionary awards Percentage of age group	
LEA	Aged 16–18	Aged 19+	Aged 16–18	Aged 19+
Barking	1,344	1,657	71	97
Barnet	2,736	12,827	85	97
Bexley	2,258	2,247	90	86
Brent	2,519	7,642	99	98
Bromley	2,228	2,768	91	98
Croydon	2,893	4,271	72	98
Ealing	3,894	5,942	93	95
Enfield	2,695	9,830	91	98
Haringey	2,052	7,338	100	100
Harrow	3,628	8,749	100	100
Havering	2,724	3,215	65	93
Hillingdon	2,379	3,842	100	100
Hounslow	2,041	3,282	76	100
Kingston upon Thames	1,123	1,868	84	99
Merton	1,584	3,041	75	96
Newham	2,738	6,119	100	100
Redbridge	2,207	4,257	100	99
Richmond upon Thames	2,154	12,901	86	100
Sutton	1,684	9,227	84	98
Waltham Forest	2,065	4,733	83	94
Birmingham	10,133	22,910	100	92
Coventry	3,381	7,820	83	98
Dudley	4,752	12,614	72	99
Sandwell	3,221	5,931	97	95
Solihull	2,240	5,434	100	95
Walsall	2,569	5,238	63	89
Wolverhampton	2,716	6,878	100	100
Knowsley	1,965	3,581	40	85
Liverpool	3,954	14,704	79	93
St Helens	2,231	5,803	57	96
Sefton	3,411	8,690	84	99
Wirral	3,068	11,676	80	95
Bolton	2,723	4,257	61	88
Bury	2,715	3,095	62	82
Manchester	3,787	9,922	56	87
Oldham	2,313	2,460	70	87
Rochdale	2,903	4,776	71	76
Salford	1,633	7,030	83	97
Stockport	2,200	4,159	64	81
Tameside	2,350	6,446	82	95
Trafford	2,760	9,393	76	97
Wigan	4,541	6,715	46	97
Barnsley	3,372	4,961	32	65
Doncaster	2,827	12,114	72	94
Rotherham	2,954	11,039	62	95
Sheffield	6,806	21,729	79	97
Bradford	4,786	21,092	100	95
Calderdale	2,148	4,103	95	97
Kirklees	4,931	15,486	43	94
Leeds	7,530	19,318	98	91
Wakefield	3,313	9,803	29	99
Gateshead	2,107	4,515	97	97
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,079	4,428	77	93
North Tyneside	1,726	3,456	68	85
South Tyneside	2,325	3,660	100	95
Sunderland	4,290	7,076	100	100
Avon	9,994	28,355	72	94
Bedfordshire	5,980	13,260	93	92
Berkshire	8,060	23,794	99	99
Buckinghamshire	6,627	9,960	96	98
Cambridgeshire	7,234	12,063	100	97
Cheshire	11,094	29,702	90	91

Numbers of FE students by home LEA showing proportion of students not receiving grants under section 2 of the 1962 Education Act (England 1992–93)

	Total numbers of FE students by LEA of domicile		FE students not in receipt of section 2 discretionary awards Percentage of age group	
LEA	Aged 16–18	Aged 19+	Aged 16–18	Aged 19+
Cleveland	6,743	16,134	84	98
Cornwall and IoS	6,040	4,919	71	85
Cumbria	5,117	8,794	82	100
Derbyshire	12,438	20,284	33	93
Devon	11,989	16,421	100	68
Dorset	7,131	9,763	78	84
Durham	6,803	15,031	100	89
East Sussex	5,922	22,689	63	94
Essex	15,906	24,038	64	91
Gloucestershire	6,495	19,123	80	95
Hampshire	18,111	30,650	100	94
Hereford and Worcester	7,597	23,326	100	98
Hertfordshire	11,032	40,626	98	99
Humberside	9,856	21,461	72	87
Isle of Wight	1,467	4,268	85	95
Kent	15,611	14,574	59	78
Lancashire	21,166	60,468	100	86
Leicestershire	8,313	17,532	80	79
Lincolnshire	7,255	8,579	94	87
Norfolk	7,460	8,537	77	86
North Yorkshire	7,617	22,480	59	89
Northamptonshire	6,689	17,099	100	98
Northumberland	2,419	3,666	69	72
Nottinghamshire	11,265	42,538	87	89
Oxfordshire	6,282	13,752	100	98
Shropshire	5,178	15,328	92	96
Somerset	6,708	13,801	88	93
Staffordshire	12,731	27,327	87	98
Suffolk	6,270	18,242	90	96
Surrey	8,710	10,137	95	92
Warwickshire	6,479	16,441	100	100
West Sussex	6,458	7,602	71	81
Wiltshire	7,932	22,567	85	96

Student Loans Scheme

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she now expects total levels of borrowing and repayments under the student loans scheme to be brought into balance.

Mr. Boswell: It has been understood from the outset that repayments will never equal loan outgoings. That would assume no deferment of repayments or cancellation of debt, as concessions allowed under the scheme, and no default.

The loans scheme produced public expenditure savings, when compared with previous policies, in the first full financial year of its operation. On present estimates, the effect of the loan scheme will be to produce public expenditure savings again as from the academic year 2001–02 and annually thereafter.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the charging policy of her Department and the agencies for which she is responsible in respect of inquires under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Forth: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, the Department for Education and the Teachers Pensions Agency are operating the following scheme of charges for information under the code of practice on access to government information:

no charge for requests estimated to take up to three hours work

a flat rate of £50 for requests estimated to need from three to eight hours work

a flat rate of £150 for requests estimated to take from eight to 13 hours work

any request requiring more than 13 hours work to be charged at a further £20 for every additional hour worked.

No charge is made for information which was previously provided free or for the categories of information listed in paragraph 71 of the OPSS guidance on the interpretation of the code.

School Performance Tables

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will place in the Library copies of the school performance tables, grant-maintained schools, further and higher education charters, educational provision for under fives and updated parents charter surveys referred to in her answer of 25 October, *Official Report*, column *525*.

Mr. Forth: I will arrange for copies of the titles listed by the hon. Member to be placed in the Library where available, along with a summary of the updated parents charters pre and post-campaign public opinion surveys.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the amount spent in each of his Department's regions on training in each of the last 10 years; and what that figure represents per unemployed person.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is not available at a regional level.

Industrial Tribunals

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what plans he has for restructuring the composition of industrial tribunals;

(2) what discussions or consultations he has had *(a)* within and *(b)* outside his Department about the size and composition of industrial tribunals.

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Employment announced on 29 April that she had asked officials to review the operation of the industrial tribunals. Ministers are considering the recommendations arising from the review, and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans or proposals he has for restructuring or otherwise altering the system of expense allowances available to members of industrial tribunals.

Mr. Oppenheim: None.

Occupational Accidents

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has taken to monitor the effects on both the numbers and the levels of occupational accident compensation awards of the decision of the Association of British Insurers to recommend a standard maximum of £10 million cover as announced on 5 September; what representations he has received on this matter and from whom; and what discussions about this matter he has had or is planning to have with the ABI.

Mr. Oppenheim: Officials from the Department recently met representatives of the Association of British Insurers to discuss the implications of the decision by the United Kingdom insurance market to cease issuing policies on an unlimited liability basis from 1 January 1995. I understand that policies will normally provide cover of at least £10 million per event, and that higher levels of cover will still be available for those employers who need it. Officials will continue to keep in contact with the insurance industry to monitor developments.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to encourage the Association of British Insurers to establish a parallel scheme for occupational accidents to that already in operation under the auspices of the Motors' Insurers Bureau for motor accidents where the party liable for injury is either uninsured or inadequately insured.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have no plans to encourage the establishment of such a scheme.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what total resources have been provided to each TEC in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* the last year; and how much has been allocated for next year.

Mr. Paice: Total 1993–94 and 1994–95 budgets for each training and enterprise council are shown in the following table. Budgets for 1995–96 will be negotiated with TECs after the outcome of the public expenditure survey is known.

TEC Budgets—1993–94 and 1994–95

	1993–94 Total	*1994–95 Total*
Hampshire	37,183,108	35,514,386
Heart of England	12,889,535	13,328,501
Isle of Wight	4,794,027	4,547,500
Kent	41,172,116	37,302,093
Milton Keynes and N. Bucks	10,737,441	10,536,159
Surrey	15,177,344	14,716,308
Sussex	28,518,637	28,400,387
Thames Valley Enterprise	29,216,940	31,902,455
Aztec	15,757,575	13,926,782
Centec	31,301,452	28,362,483
Cilntec	29,243,921	24,776,751
London East	47,730,672	42,697,819
North London	23,954,675	22,538,039
North West London	14,816,505	13,547,054
Solotec	24,119,939	20,718,815
South Thames	47,259,640	41,801,662
West London	21,708,398	20,393,169
Bedfordshire	14,373,960	14,885,900
Cambstec	8,659,944	10,234,756
Essex	37,650,059	36,135,275

TEC Budgets—1993–94 and 1994–95

	1993–94 Total	*1994–95 Total*
Greater Peterborough	12,009,480	12,651,573
Hertfordshire	27,975,122	27,596,617
Norfolk and Waveney	27,480,024	27,008,834
Suffolk	18,153,786	20,133,763
Avon	34,261,426	32,835,172
Devon and Cornwall	63,142,291	52,270,158
Dorset	20,714,700	17,865,216
Gloucestershire	16,491,120	14,640,405
Somerset	15,355,040	14,522,239
Wiltshire	17,216,049	14,747,808
Birmingham	51,892,786	41,561,980
Central England	12,900,634	12,352,083
Coventry and Warwickshire	32,875,066	29,881,193
Dudley	13,965,570	12,122,013
Hawtec	14,656,120	13,614,301
Sandwell	14,521,215	14,035,745
Shropshire	16,037,663	13,827,392
Staffordshire	40,036,710	33,065,880
Walsall	11,487,834	9,371,849
Wolverhampton	13,592,895	11,677,769
Greater Nottingham	25,639,731	22,420,148
Leicester	28,836,939	25,268,893
Lincolnshire	28,458,098	25,756,946
North Derbyshire	12,922,903	11,905,576
North Nottinghamshire	18,739,393	18,002,803
Northamptonshire	15,535,089	14,453,531
Southern Derbyshire	20,496,766	18,680,189
Barnsley and Doncaster	33,008,794	27,576,617
Bradford and District	23,766,641	19,207,246
Calderdale and Kirklees	30,746,002	23,311,143
Humberside	42,395,837	37,282,628
Leeds	27,475,716	22,408,167
North Yorkshire	20,211,490	17,959,338
Rotherham	15,112,558	12,371,627
Sheffield	30,897,859	25,346,791
Wakefield	15,392,939	12,719,996
Bolton and Bury	16,895,173	15,311,817
Cumbria	20,332,946	19,129,895
Eltec (East Lancs)	23,182,628	20,941,866
Lawtec (Lancs West)	33,693,134	30,759,096
Manchester	45,995,812	41,373,910
Metrotec Ltd (Wigan)	13,010,667	12,411,609
Normidtec	17,627,457	15,907,805
Oldham	10,595,828	9,620,658
Rochdale	11,087,880	10,335,677
South and East Cheshire	16,118,001	14,857,176
Stockport/High Peak	12,822,480	11,515,242
Cewtec	26,452,409	22,854,525
Merseyside	68,487,846	53,286,232
Qualitec	12,714,419	9,375,979
County Durham	36,032,589	29,223,002
Northumberland	18,084,128	15,133,832
Sunderland City	24,225,705	20,024,174
Teesside	40,997,285	34,502,405
Tyneside	52,458,903	45,189,731

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) which training and enterprise councils assist childminders undertaking the national vocational qualification course in child care and education at *(a)* level 2 and *(b)* level 3;

(2) what guidance is issued by his Department to training and enterprise councils about grant aid for childminders undertaking the national vocational qualification course in child care and education at level 2 and level 3;

(3) if he will list, by training and enterprise council, the amount of funding allocated to childminders undertaking the national vocational qualification course in child care and education.

Mr. Paice: The Employment Department does not fund training and enterprise councils specifically for training childminders, but TECs may provide childcare training through Government-funded training programmes. No information is held centrally on which TECs choose to do so.

Gas (Safety)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects an interim British Standard, in the absence of European Union standards, to be introduced for carbon monoxide detectors in respect of domestic gas appliances.

Mr. Oppenheim: A draft British standard is currently being developed. This is being considered for possible adoption as a European standard. Discussions will take place between the Health and Safety Executive, the British Standards Institution and United Kingdom manufacturers to consider whether an interim British standard is desirable.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many Health and Safety Executive enforcement officers have as their specific responsibility the enforcement of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994.

Mr. Oppenheim: There are approximately 150 inspectors in the Health and Safety Executive whose duties include enforcement of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994.

Construction Industry

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, when he will introduce the regulations covering health and safety conditions in the construction industry.

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope to announce the final content and timetable for these regulations shortly.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what assessment he has made of the effect on construction costs of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations.

Mr. Oppenheim: Taking into account both quantifiable and unquantifiable benefits, it is estimated that there will be a net benefit of around £580 million per year.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the need for additional training in the construction industry to enable people to fulfil the responsibilities of the new health and safety supervisors; and what estimate he has made of the cost of that training.

Mr. Oppenheim: The assessment of the effect of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations has shown that there will be training needs of those likely to fulfil the role of planning supervisor. It is estimated that there will be a one-off cost of up to £150 million in the first year and up to £7·5 million per year thereafter.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to government.

Miss Widdecombe: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structures across the range of bodies implementing the code, the Employment Department group has developed a number of schemes of charges for information under the code of practice on access to Government information. I will write to the hon. Member shortly with details.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Western Sahara

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on support for self-determination of western Saharans.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We fully support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General and his staff to bring about an early referendum on the future of western Sahara.

Ukraine

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the Ukraine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our policy is to promote Ukraine's development as a stable, independent, democratic, market-orientated, non-nuclear weapons state of undisputed territorial integrity, having good relations with its neighbours and the west, and playing a full part in the international community.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those developing countries that are signatories of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. David Davis: There are 165 states party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. A list of these has been placed in the Library.

V-4 Group

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on whether applications for EU membership from the V-4 group of central European nations would be considered by the Union simultaneously.

Mr. David Davis: The Copenhagen European council—June 1993—agreed that associated countries of central and eastern Europe that so desired shall join the European Union when they are ready to assume the obligations of membership. We expect applications for European Union membership to be considered on their merits. So far, only Poland and Hungary have formally applied to join the European Union.

Panama

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards Panama; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We have excellent diplomatic and trade relations with Panama which we aim to develop. We will support President Perez Balladares's policies to consolidate democracy and to tackle social and economic problems.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to promote inward investment to the Turks and Caicos islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Inward investment in the Turks and Caicos islands is the responsibility of a newly created statutory body, TCInvest, whose chief executive officer has just been appointed. It is hoped that TCInvest, which has been supported by the United Nations development programme as well as by Her Majesty's Government, will be the catalyst in attracting substantial private and corporate investment into the territory.

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to promote economic self-sufficiency in the Turks and Caicos islands; over what time-scale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In October 1994, Her Majesty's Government and the Turks and Caicos islands Government signed a country policy plan. The country policy plan is designed to set a number of objectives for the TCIG to meet in terms of economic management, good government practice and administrative reforms. It is linked to an aid programme funded by Her Majesty's Government.

Part of the country policy plan deals with the need to set reasonable economic targets. Combining these targets with inward investment and an expanding service and offshore finance industry based on sound regulation, should produce substantial progress towards economic self-reliance over the three-year period of the country policy plan.

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes he plans to the present powers and the role of the Governor of the Turks and Caicos islands.

Mr. Baldry: There are no changes planned to the present powers and role of the Governor of the Turks and Caicos islands.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government's ambassador to the United Nations made to the resolution A/C.1/49/L.25 of 2 November on a step-by-step reduction of the threat from nuclear weapons tabled by Brazil and eight other nations at the UN General Assembly.

Mr. David Davis: Her Majesty's ambassador to the United Kingdom delegation to the conference on disarmament joined other European Union and western states in voting against the resolution.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for publication in the *Official Report* of a copy of the letter on Pakistan's nuclear weapons status, sent to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, referred to in his answer of 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1383*.

Mr. David Davis: The text of the letter is as follows:

"You ask about Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. We have no independent evidence that Pakistan possesses a nuclear weapons capability. We share the concerns of others on this matter however, and continue to lobby Pakistan and India to engage in dialogue on regional security which we hope will enable both countries to allay international concern by acceding to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapons states."

Syria

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding the export of military equipment to Syria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We observe the arms embargo imposed by the European Union on Syria.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a copy of the letter on the Foreign Affairs Council paper on plutonium sent to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, referred to in his answer of 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1383*.

Mr. David Davis: Yes, the text of the letter was as follows:

There has already been extensive consultation between government departments and with European and other partners over the issues of Nuclear Smuggling. Work on the report to be presented to the Foreign Affairs Council is now well advanced. The Foreign Affairs Council is, of course, an inter governmental body and we have no specific plans to consult non-governmental organisations on the question of nuclear smuggling in preparing our contribution to the report. However, while we know of no non-governmental bodies working specifically on this issue, we would naturally consider any views that were put to us.

It has been agreed that the Foreign Affairs Council will present its report to the European Council to be held in Essen in December. The Council's conclusion will be deposited in the Library.

Applications for Residence

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many outstanding applications for leave to reside in the United Kingdom there are at each of the British high commissions and embassies overseas.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to my written answer to him of 17 October in which I said that I would arrange for the information required to be placed in the Library of the House shortly, in view of its length. I can now confirm that the information requested has indeed been placed in the Library of the House.

Asil Nadir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had, and with whom, as to the possible extradition of Asil Nadir.

Mr. David Davis: I have had no recent discussions about the possible extradition of Asil Nadir.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom voted at the United Nations on resolution A/C.1/49/L22 of 1 November calling for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty; and what discussions the British ambassador had with his counterparts from the signatory nations.

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom co-sponsored the resolution, which was passed by consensus. The British ambassador was in close contact throughout with his counterparts, including the sponsors of the resolution.

Gibraltar

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy as to the future of Gibraltar airport after 1997.

Mr. David Davis: The policy of Her Majesty's Government on Gibraltar airport remains unchanged. Once the 1987 airport agreement is implemented, the European Community single market in air transport will apply to Gibraltar.

Burma

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the EC is following a common policy towards human rights in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes. The situation in Burma remains of great concern to the European Union.

Together with our European Union partners we continue to press the ruling military regime in Burma, the state law and order restoration council—SLORC—to improve its human rights record and institute democratic and economic reforms. Progress in these areas will help the resumption of normal relations between the European union and Burma.

Cyprus

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to hold a conference to try and make progress on an agreement over the Cyprus situation.

Mr. David Davis: The focus of the international community's efforts to resolve the Cyprus dispute is the UN Secretary-General's good offices mission. He currently has no plans to hold an international conference.

Drugs

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will put in the Library written and oral warnings relating to controlled drug delivery channels transiting the United Kingdom's airports received by his Department from September to December 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No such warnings were received.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies

for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Baldry: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, my Department has adopted the following policy on charging for information under the code of practice on access to government information.

Straightforward inquiries made to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under the code of practice may attract a flat rate fee of £15. If extensive work which would not otherwise be done is necessary to provide the information required, a higher charge would be made, but an estimate of the cost would be given before any work was undertaken. Practically all enquiries received by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration are made without reference to the code and continue to be answered free of charge.

In cases where the Overseas Development Administration—including the Natural Resources Institute—make a charge, it did so on the basis of an individual assessment, in which cases an estimate of the cost would be provided in advance.

Departmental Wine Expenditure

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much each Government Department consumed in wine purchases made as a result of recommendations from the Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine in each of the last five years.

Mr. Goodlad: The Government hospitality fund provides official ministerial hospitality centrally for all Ministers irrespective of Departmental portfolio. Purchases of wine are made in response to the needs of official ministerial hospitality as a whole and not on behalf of Departments. Stocks are issued as necessary for each function. There is no relationship between the Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine and Departments.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total wine bill for Foreign Office events *(a)* in the United kingdom and *(b)* abroad in each of the last five years.

Mr. Goodlad: This information is not available and cannot be extracted without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average price of a bottle of wine purchased on the recommendation of the Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine.

Mr. Goodlad: The average price of a bottle of wine purchased on the recommendation of the Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine as at 31 July 1994 was £5·93.

Government Hospitality Fund

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the annual budget and staffing levels of the Government hospitality fund.

Mr. Goodlad: The Government hospitality fund employs 24 staff. The operational budget to cover the cost of guest of government visits and ministerial hospitality is £1·5 million.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the members of the Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine are selected; and by whom.

Mr. Goodlad: All members of the Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine are masters of wine—a qualification to which only 160 people world wide are entitled.

New members would be expected to have similar qualifications and to be senior and respected doyens of the wine trade.

When a vacancy occurs potential new members are identified from the small number of those qualified by other members of the committee and a recommendation for appointment is made to the Minister by the Secretary of the GHF.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of expenditure incurred by the Government hospitality fund for each of the last five years.

Mr. Goodlad: The expenditure incurred by the Government hospitality fund falls broadly into two headings: hospitality, being the cost of all official lunches, dinners and receptions hosted by Ministers anywhere in the United Kingdom, and visits, being the cost of all state and guest of government visits made to the United Kingdom. The cost of visits in 1993–94 rose as a consequence of visits made by Ministers from the new nations emerging in the former Soviet Union.

Year	*Hospitality* £	*Visits* £	*Total* £
1989–90	437,635	652,761	1,090,396
1990–91	363,825	593,862	957,687
1991–92	321,527	718,410	1,039,937
1992–93	428,125	635,168	1,063,293
1993–94	395,545	1,014,795	1,410,340

Consular Fees

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase any of the consular fees.

Mr. Baldry: An Order in Council—the Consular Fees Order 1994—was made on 2 November which provides for increases of around 50 per cent. in certain consular fees with effect from 24 November 1994. Passport—save for emergency passports—and visa fees are not included. It is Government policy that the cost of consular services should be borne by the users as far as possible.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sports Clubs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to the awarding of charitable status to voluntary sports clubs as part of his review of sport for the 21st century.

Mr. Sproat: The granting of charitable status is a matter for the Charity Commissioners and was not

therefore covered by my review. However, my Department was closely involved in the preparation of a Sports Council leaflet last year, which stresses the benefits of charitable status for voluntary sports clubs and offers advice on achieving this status.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department, which was established in April 1992, has not yet abolished any public bodies.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* on 1992 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department was established in 1992 and took on responsibility for 53 non-departmental public bodies and four public corporations. Channel 4 became a public corporation on 1 January 1993 and the Millennium Commission was created earlier this year. The Department is therefore now responsible for 54 NDPBs and five public corporations.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National heritage (1) how many people in his Department are working on the Internet pilot information service.

(2) what kind of official information he contemplates will be available to citizens through the pilot information project over the Internet;

(3) what discussions his Department has had with the private sector in relation to the Internet pilot information service;

(4) what studies his Department has conducted into the Internet pilot information service.

Mr. Dorrell: I am aware of the Internet pilot information service. My staff are monitoring its development with interest, and considering using it to disseminate information, such as press notices and public inquiry points. They are also exploring the issues surrounding information provision on the Internet with a number of organisations, both private and public sector. A broad cross-section of people from across the Department contribute to this work, but it does not constitute the main work of any of them.

Sports Council Funds

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what funds have been made available from the Sports Council to the English karate board of control since 1991; and what assessment he has made as to the adequacy of accounting for these funds.

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council provides grant aid to karate in England through the English Karate Governing Body. The EKGB was established in 1991 by merger of the two then governing bodies—the English Karate Council and the English Karate Board. Since its inception, the EKGB has received the following grant aid:

1991–92: £6,900 for international competition
1992–93: £5,000 for administration and equipment cost
1993–94: £90,000 based on its four year development plan.

The EKGB has so far received £45,000 of the grant towards its development plan, and an additional grant of £40,000 towards the cost of staging the European championships.

Each grant has been subject to conditions which are consistent with the requirements of the financial memorandum between my Department and the Sports Council, which governs the terms of Government grant in aid. These conditions include the provision by the EKGB of audited accounts and balance sheets and certified statements of income and expenditure. Payment of further instalments of the EKGB's planned 1994–95 grant will continue to be dependent on its compliance with the grant conditions.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department between 1 January and 30 June those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place;

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Between 1 January and 30 June, Ministers in my Department made seven overseas visits in their official capacity. Fundraising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

Arts Sponsorship, Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will set up an inquiry into the grant from his Department under the business sponsorship of the arts scheme to the Welsh Rock and Folk Music Council, matching the grant from the Pengwyn Pinc Cyf Company and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority, S4C; what consultation with the chairman of S4C and the director of the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts he has had concerning this grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* In response to recent media reports, and having consulted my Department, the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, which administers the business sponsorship incentive scheme on my behalf, is undertaking an urgent review of the circumstances in which an award was made to the Welsh Rock and Folk Music Council. I will consider what further action my Department might take in the light of the outcome of that review. I will also be taking account of the findings of an inquiry that is being conducted by S4C.

SCOTLAND

Boundary Commission

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names for the 72 Scottish parliamentary constituencies as proposed by the Boundary Commission and the names of the new local authority areas which each constituency will be part of from April 1996.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not yet received the report from the Boundary

Commission for Scotland containing its final recommendations for parliamentary constituency boundaries in Scotland.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Lang: My Department charges for information only in cases where a request received under the code of practice causes additional work which it would not have been necessary to undertake if the request had not been made. The charges are based on the actual cost of the extra work carried out but are levied only when the cost of such work exceeds £100. There is no charge where provision of information is necessary to the fair and accountable performance of the Department's functions. Most information is, therefore, provided free of charge. The agencies for which I am responsible operate similar schemes of charging to that of my Department.

Disport Monkland

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Strathclyde regional council concerning the reduction in funding for Disport Monkland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following notification of approved urban programme expenditure of £25,900 for the Disport project in 1994–95, Strathclyde regional council submitted a written appeal on 27 September 1994. The council had sought £49,000 but the approved expenditure was reduced to reflect the extent to which the project was targeted on the residents of areas eligible for urban programme support. The points made in the letter of appeal were fully considered but the original decision was upheld.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to fulfil the undertakings in "The Structure of Local Government: Shaping the Future—The New Councils" to consult on the future structure of lieutenancies in Scotland after 1 April 1996.

Mr. Lang: I intend to consult Lord-Lieutenants and other interested parties on the proposals for lieutenancies in Scotland after 1 April 1996 which are set out in a consultation paper being published today. Copies of the consultations document are available in the Library.

Forestry Authority

Mr. Kynoch : To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the review of the Forestry Authority.

Mr. Lang: I announced on 19 July, *Official Report*, column *185*, that I was asking the director-general of the Forestry Commission to look at all aspects of the work carried out by the Forestry Authority with a view to improving the performance and efficiency of the organisation. This will involve a "prior options" study. I would welcome comments from interested parties. Those should be sent to "The Director-General, Forestry Commission, 231 Corstorphine road, Edinburgh, EH12 7AT", by 21 January 1995.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fisheries

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what fisheries protection cover operates in the North sea normally to assist British fishing vessels; what was in operation on the night of 10–11 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: British sea fishery limits adjacent to England and Wales are patrolled by vessels from the Royal Navy's fishery protection squadron. At any one time there will be between two and four vessels on task to this Ministry.

On 10 to 11 November, four vessels were on patrol, in the North sea, the East English channel, the Bristol channel area and in the south-west approaches.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the number and scale of incidents between British fishing vessels and French vessels in each of the last five years in *(a)* the North sea and *(b)* other British waters; and what action the Government took in each case.

Mr. Jack: The Ministry does not keep comprehensive records of incidents involving gear disputes either between United Kingdom fishing vessels or between United Kingdom fishing vessels and those from other countries. Any action taken by the Ministry would depend on the particular circumstances of the incident.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement about the incident between the fishing vessel Breydon Warrior and a French trawler on the night of 10 to 11 November in the North sea when fishing gear was damaged;

(2) if he will make a statement on what compensation is available to British fishing vessel owners who have fishing equipment damaged by French vessels; and what are the procedures for addressing compensation claims.

Mr. Jack: The Ministry has not received any detailed account of the incident from the owners of the Breydon Warrior. I understand, however, from local press reports and a summary report provided by the coastguard that the Breydon Warrior's fishing gear was lost following an incident involving a French trawler. Incidents of this sort are regrettable and the Ministry encourages those concerned to co-operate and to reach agreements aimed at minimising conflict between different methods of fishing. Compensation is normally a civil matter for resolution between the parties concerned but, if requested, the Ministry is prepared to advise on the procedures to be followed.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science,

which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, the charging arrangements developed by my Department can be summarised as follows:

(i) there will continue to be no charge for the provision of information necessary to the fair and accountable performance of the Ministry's functions;

(ii) a standard charge of £15 will be made for additional work needed to provide information over and above (i) in the case of simple requests, defined as those requiring less than two hours work at higher executive officer grade or below. This sum equates to about half the marginal cost of two hours work;

(iii) an additional charge will be made, above the standard charge, for the provision of information in response to more complex requests. This will be calculated at marginal costs and will be related to the amount of time needed to complete the tasks.

The Ministry has always made a great deal of information available to the public on all aspects of its policies and procedures. No charges have yet been raised by the Department or its executive agencies for information requested under the code of practice. That is not expected to change significantly in the future.

A copy of MAFF's explanatory leaflet on charging for information provided under the code has been placed in the Library of the House.

Milk

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what percentage milk production in the EU now exceeds consumption; and how the surplus is disposed of.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* According to the European Court of Auditors' Report for 1993 surpluses of milk products amount to the equivalent of approximately 10 per cent. of Community consumption.

Community intervention stocks of butter have been reduced from 1,283,303 tonnes in 1986 to 81,249 tonnes now. Over the same period, intervention stocks of skimmed milk powder have been reduced from 959,865 tonnes to 82,942 tonnes now.

The Government have pressed successfully for reductions in support prices. For example, since 1989 the intervention price for butter has been reduced from 306·94 per 100 kg to 265·17 per 100 kg for 1994.

There are several subsidised disposal schemes for surplus dairy products. For butter they include sales at a reduced price for the manufacture of bakery products, sugar confectionery and ice cream and the subsidised use of butter in the manufacture of concentrated butter for cooking. There are also subsidies for the use of skimmed milk in the manufacture of animal feed and for processing into casein and caseinates. In addition, subsidies are available for the consumption of milk and certain milk products in schools.

WALES

Industrial and Commercial Projects

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list new industrial and commercial projects in Wales since May 1992, indicating the number of jobs promised and safeguarded and the kind of Government assistance given when appropriate.

Mr. Redwood: Information in the form requested is not available centrally. However, details of companies receiving regional selective assistance offers of £75,000 or more are published quarterly in the *Employment Gazette*, while summarised information relating to regional assistance is published each year in the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual reports. Summary information on all Welsh Office assistance is contained in the Department's annual reports—"The Government Expenditure Plans: A Report by the Welsh Office". Copies of those publications are available in the Library of the House.

University Hospital of Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the terms of reference of the post-implementation review into the £5 million expansion project of the adult cardiac surgery unit at the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff; when he expects the review will be completed; if he will then place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I expect the post-implementation review of the expansion of adult cardiac services at the University Hospital of Wales to report in January 1995. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the report in the Library of the House when it has been finalised. The terms of reference for the review are set out as follows:

Terms of reference

In respect of the first year of full operation of the expanded capacity of specialist adult cardiac services at the University Hospital of Wales described in the Coopers and Lybrand, Deloitte and South Glamorgan Health Authority reports of June and July, 1991:

A. Planning

(i) to describe how the project was planned and implemented and explore any difficulties:

(ii) to consider whether the project was implemented within the parameters identified in the 1991 reports and, in particular, to report on the effect of the expansion on the cardiac services unit and on other hospital services and any unforeseen external influences affecting the expansion, including new developments in clinical practice.

B. Operational

(i) to establish the effective capacity of the Unit;

(ii) to identify any service developments—physical or operational—introduced in parallel with the expansion programme;

(iii) to establish current quality levels and monitoring arrangements, taking into account quality standards obtaining in other comparable centres;

(iv) to review and report on changes in waiting times pre and post-implementation.

C. Lessons for the Future

(i) to identify the lessons to be learnt from the planning and implementation process.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible

in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to my reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 21 November 1994.

National Blood Transfusion Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he is undertaking in relation to the future status and management of the National Blood Transfusion Service, Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The National Blood Transfusion Service Wales is currently preparing a report on the future management arrangements. The question of consultation will be considered when the report is received.

Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to transfer resources from the Health Promotion Authority for Wales to the health promotion units of the Welsh health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I will decide about any transfer of money once the present review of health promotion has been completed.

TRANSPORT

Traffic Director

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost to public funds of the Traffic Director and his office.

Mr. Norris: Around £1·6 million for the current financial year.

Smoky Vehicles Telephone Hotline

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost of promoting the smoky vehicle telephone hotline.

Mr. Norris: The cost of printing and distributing leaflets informing members of the public about how to report smoky vehicles through the telephone hotline has been £13,771 to date. The annual cost of operating the hotline is in the region of £5,500.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many calls have been made to date to the smoky vehicles hotline; how many resulted in action being taken against the operator concerned; and what has been the total cost to public funds to date of the hotline.

Mr. Norris: Since 1 April 1991, a total of 8,258 reports of excessively smoky vehicles have been received by the Vehicle Inspectorate.

Action is taken in all cases where sufficient information is reported, about 75 per cent. Operators are asked to have their vehicle checked and are warned that continued use of an excessively smoky vehicle could be in contravention of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986.

Since 1 April 1991, the total cost of operating the hotline and of printing and distributing promotional leaflets has been in the region of £30,000.

Tolls

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to submit any proposals for introducing or varying tolls for a road, bridge or tunnel to an environmental assessment.

Mr. Watts: Proposals for new tolled trunk roads, bridges and tunnels are already subject to environmental assessment. Variations in toll are covered by the relevant legislation.

Learning to Drive

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he is giving to the planned revisions to the driving test to establish appropriate links with the Department for Education and Department of Employment in order to incorporate learning to drive in the GNVQ programme.

Mr. Norris: We are currently discussing with the Department for Education how best to incorporate road safety, including aspects relating to new drivers, into the GNVQ programme.

Cycling

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what performance indicators are being used to measure the success of the blueprint for cycling set out in the June cycling statement.

Mr. Norris: The statement aims to create the conditions in which more people will choose to cycle. Increases in cycling will be monitored through the national travel survey and the national traffic census. We are considering with other organisations whether this could usefully be augmented by more detailed information on the characteristics of cycle journeys.

Vehicle Emissions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what extra resources he has given to the Vehicle Inspectorate to increase the number of vehicle smoke emission tests.

Mr. Norris: The level of resources devoted to emission checks has been steadily increased over the past few years. We have asked the Vehicle Inspectorate to use excessive smoke emission as one of the main indicators for targeting vehicles for roadside enforcement checks and to concentrate on emissions standards in its enforcement on private vehicles.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to study which categories of vehicles not designed to the latest standards justify retrofitting with catalysts or particulate traps.

Mr. Norris: Research undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory on behalf of the Department has supported similar conclusions reached in the USA that retrofitting catalysts or particulate traps is not feasible on many types of vehicle. The environmental benefits are difficult to assess, and the costs, given their present state of the development are high. However, as the technology develops, especially that for controlling particulate

emissions, this is an area which I intend to keep under review.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to introduce an obligatory emissions test for all cars a year after registration, as part of the annual MOT test.

Mr. Norris: No. Such a measure would be unjustified. Most new cars are covered by manufacturers' warranties until they are two or three years old and excessive emissions should not be a problem.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will support more stringent standards being applied for the emissions element of the annual MOT test.

Mr. Norris: More stringent standards will be introduced into the MOT test for existing vehicles from 1996. However, it would be unreasonable to expect a vehicle to comply with more stringent in-service emissions levels than it was originally designed to meet.

Used Tyres

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that used tyres are subjected to safety testing before re-sale;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that suppliers of used tyres can be readily identified in cases of tyre failure.

(3) what additional measures he is considering to protect motorists from the sale of unmarked, untested and potentially unsafe used tyres.

Mr. Norris: On 24 October, the Government went out to consultation on draft safety regulations to be made under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 which will supplement that Act by making it an offence to sell or otherwise supply in the course of business any part-worn tyre that is defective. Enforcement against suppliers will be by trading standards officers at point of sale, and the onus will be on dealers to comply.

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take measures to ensure that imported used tyres conform to the appropriate EU safety levels.

Mr. Norris: There are no EU standards for part-worn tyres.

Seat Belts

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice his Department gives to users of lap style seat belts in order to promote their safe utilisation.

Mr. Norris: Our advice is contained in the departmental publication "Choosing Safety".

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the figures, for the years since compulsory wearing of rear seat belts was introduced, for the rate of injury to passengers wearing lap style seat belts, where it has been shown that injury was occasioned or worsened by the seat belt.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce more bus lanes and to ensure they are policed effectively.

Mr. Norris: The implementation of bus lanes is a matter for the local highway authority, and their enforcement is a matter for the police. My Department has issued comprehensive advice to local authorities to encourage them to consider introducing more bus priority measures.

Clean Fuels

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to co-operate with the oil industry and vehicle manufacturers to develop specifications for cleaner fuels.

Mr. Norris: Research on emissions, fuels and engine technologies—the EPEFE programme—is being undertaken by the European oil and motor industries in conjunction with the European Commission. This is looking extensively into the potential benefits that future vehicle and fuel technology can play in reducing vehicle pollution. It includes an examination of a range of different fuel types. The results, which are due in 1995, will provide an authoritative basis for European discussions for determining future EU fuel and engine requirements.

Portland House

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities for disabled access exist at Portland house; what measures he is taking to improve facilities for disabled access; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Ramps suitable for wheelchairs are available at the Stag place entrance and at changes in floor levels within the building. Suitable parking facilities are also available.

Blue Circle Industries

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial gain he estimates will accrue to Blue Circle Industries as a result of his decision to locate the intermediate station for the channel tunnel fast rail track at Ebbsfleet.

Mr. Watts: I have made no such estimates.

Staff Dismissals

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last five years the number of staff dismissed with regard to *(a)* reason for dismissal, *(b)* grade, *(c)* gender and *(d)* ethnic origin.

Mr. Norris: The numbers and grades of staff dismissed, and the reason for dismissal, over the past five years is set out below:

Year	*Grade*	*Inefficiency*	*Misconduct*
1990	AA	—	1
	AO	—	5
	TE	1	—
	DE	1	—
	BAND 4	—	1
1991	AA	—	[1]1+1
	AO	—	[3]3+1
	DE	—	3
	TE	—	1

Year	Grade	Inefficiency	Misconduct
1991	SSO	—	1
	G7	1	—
	SH/SURV	1	—
1992	AA	2	5
	AO	1	2
	EO	1	1
	PTO	1	—
	DE	—	1
	SSO	—	1
1993	AA	—	3
	EO	1	—
	PTO	2	1
	HPTO	1	—
	BAND6	—	1
	CGWO	1	—
	DE	—	1
	AVE	—	1
	SEN.CRAFT	1	—
1994	AA	3	—
	AO	[1]	1
	TYPIST	—	1
	DE	—	1

[1] Not recorded.

The further information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Secret Files

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Norris: The answers are:

(a) 25

(b) approximately 1,200

Occupational Health

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the measures he is taking to implement the recommendations given in the occupational health notice received by his Department in respect of the Whitehall II study.

Mr. Norris: Occupational health notice 93/3 gave advice on approaches which Departments and agencies might address in dealing with sickness absence. The Department of Transport continues to be committed to the "Look After Your Heart" programme, to which it signed up to 1989. Smoking policy in the Department has recently been reviewed and revised. In addition, the Department has recently offered its staff a free medical examination in a nationwide health screening programme.

Red Routes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State fo Transport what has been the cost of introducing the Archway road red route.

Mr. Norris: The cost of the eight mile red route pilo scheme was about £5 million.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State fo Transport what has been the total cost so far o introducing red routes in London.

Mr. Norris: About £16 million including works on the red route pilot scheme and preparation for the introductio of red routes elsewhere.

Bypasses

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of Stat for Transport if he will make it his policy to introduc design standards for the construction of new bypasses tha provide only for the traffic flows which will be diverte from the town or village bypassed, not for further larg growth of traffic.

Mr. Watts: To achieve the planned environmenta benefits, bypasses must be designed in accordance wit the best available assessment of future traffic flows.

Vehicle Spot Checks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State fo Transport (1) how many spot checks have been carrie out, how many heavy goods vehicles and public servic vehicles were inspected and how many defect an prohibition notices were issued in the north-west regio in the last two years;

(2) how many vehicle spot checks were carried out b the Vehicle Inspectorate in *(a)* the north-west region an *(b)* the Cheshire region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for th Vehicle Inspectorate. The Chief Executive has written t the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwood dated 21 November 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questio about vehicle spot checks in the North West region and in the coun of Cheshire. Unfortunately the Inspectorate cannot provide data o a county by county basis because the Road Transport Enforcemen division is organised into 23 area groups—these do not correspon with county boundaries. However, regional data is available.

Table 1 gives a breakdown of the total number of roadworthine spot checks of heavy goods (HGVs) and public service vehicl (PSVs) in the North West region. Vehicles are subject to spot chec at the roadside and, in the case of HGVs and PSVs, at operato premises.

Table 1

Year	HGV and PSV roadside spot checks	Operator licensing fleet check	Car and LGV spot checks	Tot
1989–90	16,296	9,442	[1]—	25,73
1990–91	17,890	9,671	[1]—	27,56
1991–92	21,762	12,658	5,680	40,10
1992–93	29,127	13,852	5,341	48,32
1993–94	27,919	13,008	10,309	51,23

[1] This information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The hon. Lady asked a further question on the total number of spot checks carried out on HGVs and PSVs in the north west region, and the number of prohibition and defect notices issued. The information is summarised in table 2 below.

Table 2

Vehicle type and year	*Number of spot checks*	*Number of prohibitions*	*Number of defect notices*
HGVs			
1992–93	36,889	3,902	7,376
1993–94	34,087	3,634	7,273
PSVs			
1992–93	6,090	507	1,289
1993–94	6,840	658	1,389

I hope this information is sufficient, but if the hon. Lady has any further questions about the inspectorate's operations please contact me at the above address.

Health and Safety Committees

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many health and safety committees there are *(a)* in each executive agency of his Department and *(b)* the Department as a whole.

Mr. Norris: A number of such committees exist; but my Department does not keep a central record of the safety committees in each executive agency or in the Department as a whole. Where requested, safety committees are established in accordance with legislative requirements.

Cycling

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes there have been over the last 10 years regarding requirements to fit bicycle bells on push bicycles; and what are the current legal requirements.

Mr. Norris: None. It is not mandatory to fit bicycle bells at present, but we shall be reviewing the situation shortly when we update the relevant safety and construction and use regulations.

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to adopt Sustrans national cycle network as part of the Government's sustainable transport policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I recently attended the launch by Sustrans of its proposals for a network of recreational cycle routes. Routes of this kind will open up opportunities for people to use bicycles both for leisure and to keep fit—as well as for utility journeys. Sustrans has offered me a detailed presentation shortly; I shall then be able to see how its project could help our objectives.

A1

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has received, and from whom, to increase safety on the A1 southward from Blaydon bridge to the Washington service area.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what expenditure his Department has incurred in testing and development on his Department's proposals to produce a new route for the A1 between the Washington service area and Blaydon bridge.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to the hon. member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. John McWilliam, dated 22 November 1994:

You tabled two questions about the A1 between Washington Service Area and Blaydon Bridge.

As this is an operational matter relating to the Highways Agency I have been asked to reply.

The Agency constantly monitors conditions on the A1 Trunk Road and improvement schemes are brought forward when necessary in conjunction with the Local Highways Authorities who act as our Agents.

As part of these procedures our agents Gateshead MBC produced a safety report on the A1 in their area. Subsequently a number of short and medium term schemes to improve safety have been completed. These are lane drop/merge signs, temporary warning signs, central safety fence, northbound third lane and a lighting scheme.

For the longer term schemes under consideration are junction improvements the introduction of a sign gantry at the MetroCentre, the provision of a third lane southbound at Dunston and a queue detection variable message sign system over the route.

Expenditure incurred to date on the proposed A1 Gateshead Bypass improvement scheme is £2·3 million. This figure includes the costs of working up all the route options taken to public consultation and the suggested alternatives including the Gateshead MBC proposal.

Petrol

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the difference in benzene emissions between leaded petrol, premium unleaded petrol and super premium unleaded petrol; and what is the source of the figures.

(2) if he will make a statement on the difference in the aromatics content of leaded petrol, premium unleaded petrol and super premium unleaded petrol; and what is the source of the figures.

Mr. Norris: Benzene in petrol is controlled at 5 per cent. maximum by EC directive and data from the Associated Octel Company show that United Kingdom fuels average some 2 per cent. to 3 per cent. with no significant trends between the various grades. The same data show that the average aromatic content of unleaded petrol in the United Kingdom is slightly higher than of leaded petrol although, in many cases, samples of leaded petrol may have a higher armomatic content than samples of unleaded petrol.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department carries out independent analyses of the contents of leaded, unleaded and super premium
unleaded petrol.

Mr. Norris: No.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what respects the contents of petrol supplied from refineries in different areas of the United Kingdom differ; and what statistics the Government maintain on the source and content of petrol.

Mr. Norris: Information regarding the content of petrol from different refineries is not available. The Government do not routinely maintain statistics on the source and content of petrol.

Pilotage Act 1987

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he or his predecessors have exercised their powers under section 5(8) of the Pilotage Act 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Yes. The Pilotage Act (Cessation of Temporary Arbitration Arrangements) Order and Regulations 1991—SI 1991 No. 1959—was made under section 5(8) of the Pilotage Act 1987, to have effect from 1 October 1991.

Benzene Emissions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement indicating what is the total annual weight and volume of benzene emissions from petrol-driven vehicles for the latest period for which statistics are available; and what percentage of total atmospheric benzene such emissions represents.

Mr. Norris: The latest available figures from 1991 show that benzene emissions from vehicle exhausts account for some 39,250 tonnes per year, or 78 per cent. of total atmospheric emissions. Evaporative emissions of benzene from petrol vehicles accounts for some 3,350 tonnes per year, or 7 per cent. of total atmospheric emissions.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Norris: In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, my Department has developed the following scheme of charges for information under the code of practice on access to Government information.

Requests which require less than half a day's work to answer are dealt with free of charge. Where a request involves more extensive work, a charge is set based on the hourly rate for the grade of officer responding and the additional time dedicated to the response.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to open a channel tunnel to Scotland route for piggy-back rail freight.

Mr. Watts: The development of piggy-back rail freight routes is a matter which potential operators are taking forward with Railtrack.

Rail Industry

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to ensure that the structure and operation of the privatised rail industry leads to a much greater use of rail by passengers and freight;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that sales of British Rail freight subsidiaries to the private sector take place on terms which create the most favourable prospects for increasing rail's share of the freight market.

Mr. Watts: Open access to the rail network for passenger and freight services will enhance competitiveness. Freight facilities grant and track access grant will enhance the competitive position of rail freight over road where environmentally justified. The rail freight businesses will be privatised by means of competitive sale. Privately owned operating companies will have greater financial freedom, more incentive to improve efficiency and respond to passengers' and customers' needs, and greater opportunity to diversify into new markets.

Transport Modes (Evaluation)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to broaden the role of the standing advisory committee on trunk road assessment to include the development of appropriate appraisal techniques to ensure consistency of evaluation methods as between the different transport modes.

Mr. Watts: The standing advisory committee on trunk road assessment's role is reviewed from time to time.

Electric Vehicles

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to promote the development of electric power for public transport or fleet vehicles which operate in urban areas.

Mr. Norris: The Department is leading a collaborative programme of trials involving electricity and other popular alternative fuels as announced by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) to my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 21 March, *Official Report*, column 9.

Driving Tests (Accidents)

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the information available to him regarding the numbers of accidents involving vehicles during the driving test giving details of vehicles written off, injuries to driving examiners and absence from work of driving examiners as a result of accidents while carrying out a driving test for the latest convenient period.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Urban Road Pricing

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that any revenue raised from urban road pricing schemes is used to finance the enhancement of public transport.

Mr. Watts: This is one of many issues which my right hon. Friend will consider before reaching any conclusions on urban road pricing.

Post-privatisation Services

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure the continued availability of integrated travel information and timetables after the privatisation of rail and bus services.

Mr. Watts: Station operators are required by their station operators licence to provide impartial information about all services using their station. Passenger service operators will be required by their franchise agreements to

provide information about other operators services which interconnect with theirs.

Railtrack is responsible for producing a working timetable and to secure the publication of a national timetable.

The provision of bus timetables and travel information after the privatisation of London Transport's bus operating companies will remain the responsibility of London Transport. Outside London, local authorities have powers to provide co-ordinated timetables.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure the continued availability of through-tickets and travelcards after the privatisation of rail and bus services.

Mr. Watts: The continuation of through-ticketing after rail privatisation is ensured through provisions in section 4 of the Railways Act 1993. The Franchising Director will require franchisees to participate in multimodal travel schemes such as travelcard so long as he is satisfied that participation will result in no new net cost falling on his budget.

The overall structure of fares and ticketing on London's buses will remain the responsibility of London Transport after privatisation, thus ensuring the continued availability of London travelcard. Outside London, bus operators are free to introduce multi-operator tickets so long as they do not amount to anti-competitive price fixing arrangements. Local authorities and passenger transport authorities also have powers to organise multi-operator travelcard.

High Vehicle-occupancy Lanes

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has made of the desirability of high vehicle-occupancy lanes.

Mr. Norris: I have noted experience overseas, including the United States of America and the Netherlands. I am considering the scope for introducing a trial here.

Catalysts

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage European vehicle and catalyst manufacturers to pool their research on DeNOX—removal of nitrogen oxide—catalysts.

Mr. Norris: The development of the DeNOX catalyst, for controlling oxides of nitrogen from diesel engines and lean-burn petrol engines, is a major research project to which United Kingdom and European companies are devoting substantial resources. There are already a number of collaborative programmes between catalyst and vehicle manufacturers. The Government see no need, at present, to encourage further European collaboration.

Driving Instructors

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to improve the standard of light goods vehicle driving instructors; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will now make it his policy to bring in a registration scheme for light goods vehicle instructors and driving schools similar to that governing car driving instructors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Government have no plans to introduce a statutory register of goods vehicle driving instructors. Industry bodies are, however, considering a voluntary scheme with the Driving Standards Agency, the official body with expertise in driver testing and training matters, offering a standards assurance service on a cost recovery basis. In addition, the agency published earlier this year a comprehensive manual for learning to drive all types of goods vehicles.

Vehicle Registration Offices

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to reduce the number of vehicle registration offices.

Mr. Norris: Fundamental changes to the way in which vehicles are registered and licensed locally by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's vehicle registration offices and the London enforcement office were announced by the DVLA's chief executive on 12 August. These changes mean that the current network would be gradually reduced and eventually closed by 1997. A DVLA press notice—No 23/94—was issued containing the details.

Ports Office for Scotland

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what annual savings he expects to achieve for his Department if the proposal to close the Ports Office for Scotland and relocate its functions in London is implemented;

(2) what is the estimated cost of implementing the proposal to close the Ports Office for Scotland in Edinburgh and relocating its functions and staff in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: If the closure takes place we would expect initial annual savings of at least £44,000. The savings could be larger in later years. The total associated costs will depend upon the net costs of redundancies that may result from the closure of the office and consequent changes.

New Roads

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to confine expenditure on new roads to the construction of new bypasses for local traffic, and on the maintenance of existing roads.

Mr. Watts: Expenditure on trunk roads is targeted carefully on maintaining and upgrading the existing network. Urgently needed bypasses for towns and villages are a priority and form about a quarter of the programme. We also encourage local authorities through their investment programmes to provide relief for communities on the more important local roads.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken for or by his Department on the generation of additional traffic by the construction of new roads.

Mr. Watts: The Department commissioned its standing advisory committee on trunk road assessment to report on that issue. The report together with the Department's formal response, will be published in due cause.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to promote the use of natural gas-powered vehicles in urban areas.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) to my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 21 March, *Official Report*, column 9.

Air Filtration

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to study the case for requiring filtration of the air supply to vehicle interiors.

Mr. Norris: None. In terms of emissions from traffic, there is no evidence to show that filtration devices have any effect on the health of drivers or other vehicle occupants.

Light-rail Systems

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to encourage the development of new light-rail systems in conurbations.

Mr. Norris: The Government have funded the Docklands light railway, the Greater Manchester metrolink and the South Yorkshire supertram and have given development funding to the Midland metro project. We are continuing our discussions with promoters of other light-rail schemes and we will consider funding these projects when resources allow.

Public Transport

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase investment in public transport over the next 10 years.

Mr. Watts: Details of our plans for investment in all forms of transport will be announced as part of the unified Budget on 29 November.

A417/A419 Link

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his plans to upgrade the A417/A419 link between Swindon and Gloucester.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Simon Coombs, dated 22 November 1994:

I am writing in response to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Transport about the A417/A419 trunk road between Swindon and Gloucester. This is a matter for which the Highways Agency is responsible.

The A419/417 Swindon to Gloucester road has been named as one of the first four projects to be designed, built, financed and operated (DBFO) by the private sector. This will include the management of the road and the construction of the Latton Bypass, the Cirencester and Stratton Bypass and the north of Stratton to Nettleton Improvement. The Secretary of State announced on 9 November the names of the consortia who are to be invited to bid for the contract.

On the same route there are three national trunk road schemes which will not initially form part of the DBFO contract: the Blunsdon Bypass, for which the Secretary of State is currently considering the response to public consultation and the next stage will be announcement of the preferred route: the Nettleton to Crickley Hill Improvement—our first task will be to appoint a design agent to identify possible routes for an improved road: and Brockworth Bypass, which is under construction and should be completed in autumn 1995. The future progress of the Blunsdon Bypass and Nettleton to Crickley Hill schemes depends no the satisfactory completion of the statutory planning procedures and the continuing availability of funds. If and when these other schemes are completed, the relevant sections of the A419/417 trunk road could be added to the DBFO contract for operational and maintenance purposes.

National Air Traffic Service

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to proceed with the privatisation of the national air traffic services; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Following consultation earlier this year, the Government continue to favour privatisation of the National Air Traffic Services. Privatisation would provide a number of significant benefits to both National Air Traffic Service and its customers. It would offer the opportunity for improved standards of service and increased efficiency; it would expose National Air Traffic Service to commercial incentives and the prospect of increased competition—especially in the airports sector; it would free National Air Traffic Service's investment and management decisions from the constraints of Government ownership; and it would facilitate greater transparency in charges and the separation of regulation from service provision.

A number of concerns were expressed by those who responded to the recent public consultation, and I wish these concerns to be properly considered before I put proposals before Parliament. I am today publishing a report on the outcome of the consultation, and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

RAF Runways

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the runways at those Royal Air Force stations scheduled for closure or which have been closed recently will be retained for training or relief landing purposes; and at how many former stations this facility has been retained.

Mr. Soames: Of this category of stations, only RAF Church Fenton will be needed for training or relief landing. In addition, four other former stations are currently used as relief landing grounds.

Army Training Facilities

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had recently concerning training facilities for the Army.

Mr. Soames: My Department has regular consultation with planning authorities and other statutory bodies in connection with any development proposals for the Army's training facilities.

On the more significant developments, independent consultants have been appointed to carry out environmental impact assessments during which the view of the local planning authorities, statutory bodies and interested parties are sought.

VSEL

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments he has made of the effect on competition in warship building of a successful bid by GEC for VSEL.

Mr. Freeman: My Department has, in the usual way, given and will continue to give views to the regulatory authorities on the competition and any other relevant aspects of the possible takeover on VSEL. These views are confidential.

Horshoe Barracks

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Horshoe barracks in Shoeburyness.

Mr. Soames: This matter is still under consideration.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers.

Mr. Freeman: As we have previously made clear, the Royal Navy will maintain three Invincible class aircraft carriers, with two operational at any one time. In accordance with this long standing practice, HMS Ark Royal entered a state of extended readiness in September at Portsmouth.

Defence Accounts Agency

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a final decision will be made on the review of technology and staffing in the Defence Accounts Agency.

Mr. Freeman: I expect to take a decision on the Defence Accounts Agency mainframes rationalisation project, which will shortly be submitted for MOD and Treasury approval, early in the new year.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which consultants were commissioned to undertake the recent study into the feasibility of rationalising the Defence Accounts Agency's mainframe computers at Cheadle Hulme, Bath and Liverpool; what assessment they made of the suitability of each of those three locations; and which of those three locations, if any, they nominated as a preferred location for the concentration of computing facilities.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* The commissioning of this study is within the delegated responsibility of the agency's chief executive and I have asked him to reply.

Letter from M. Dymond to Mr. Nicholas Winterton, dated 22 November 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence which consultants were commissioned to undertake the recent study into the feasibility of rationalising the Defence Accounts Agency's Mainframe Computers at Cheadle Hulme, Bath and Liverpool; what assessment they made of the suitability of each of those locations' and which of those three locations, if any, they nominated as a preferred location for the concentration of computing facilities. As Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency I have been asked to reply.

The DAA Mainframes Rationalisation Project was undertaken mainly by an in-house team. Consultancy assistance was obtained as required for specific elements of the project, such as communications network design and business risk assessment.

There was no consultancy assessment of the suitability of the three locations as part of the Project and no nomination by consultants of a preferred location.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role, structure, and current membership of the Defence Accounts Agency information technology board; and what information he has concerning the numbers of the members of the board who reside in or around *(a)* Bath, *(b)* Liverpool, or *(c)* Cheadle Hulme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* This is a matter for the agency's chief executive and I have asked him to reply.

Letter from M. Dymond to Mr. Nicholas Winterton, dated 22 November 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role, structure, and current membership of the Defence Accounts Agency's Information Technology Board; and what information he has concerning the numbers of members of that Board who reside in or around:

(a) Bath

(b) Liverpool or

(c) Cheadle Hulme;

and if he will make a statement. As Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency I have been asked to reply.

The DDA's IT Board sets its IT strategy, within MOD's corporate IT strategy, and oversees major IT plans and projects. The Board comprises myself as Chief Executive, my three operational Directors, and my Assistant Directors responsible for Finance and IT at the corporate level, together with a senior representative from the Ministry's central IT support organisation. Apart from one operational Director, based at Liverpool, and the central MOD representative, based at Swindon, all members of the Agency's IT Board are based at the Agency's Corporate headquarters in Bath.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has concerning the potential cost savings offered by the choice of *(a)* Cheadle Hulme, *(b)* Liverpool and *(c)* Bath for the location of Defence Accounts Agency computing facilities.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* This is a matter for the agency's chief executive and I have asked him to reply. I understand he has already written to the hon. Member stating that on cost comparison the advantage lay narrowly with Bath.

Letter from M. Dymond to Mr. Nicholas Winterton, dated 22 November 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has concerning the potential costs and savings offered by the choice of:

(a) Cheadle Hulme

(b) Liverpool

(c) Bath

for the location of the Defence Accounts Agency's computing facilities. As Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency I have been asked to reply.

The DRA Mainframes Rationalisation Project has just completed its full study stage and will shortly be submitted for approval. Ultimately the decision on this major project rests with Ministers.

The project team's assessment showed that compared with separate replacement of the computers the rationalisation approach would save some £3 million per annum. The comparison of costs made in the Agency's study narrowly favoured Bath. The other factors tended to favour either Bath or Cheadle Hulme, the collective balance of these other factors being narrowly with Cheadle Hulme.

These differences were seen to be too marginal to support a recommendation for a specific choice of site by the study team. The

decision by the Agency's IT Board to seek approval for the Bath location was based on wider corporate and strategic implications, particularly the Department's IT strategies for Finance and Civilian Pay/Personnel.

Support Helicopters

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that Britain's need for support helicopters will meet requirements for the year 2000 and beyond.

Mr. Freeman: We plan to procure additional medium support helicopters to enhance significantly the RAF's current fleet. As stated in this year's statement on the Defence Estimates, only the Chinook and the Utility EH101 are capable of meeting our particular requirements. We are currently assessing price and performance data received for these helicopters.

Indonesia

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice or support he has given to the Government of Indonesia in the last year.

Mr. Freeman: The Chief of the Defence Staff and the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff have visited Indonesia during the last year to discuss defence matters. The United Kingdom also provides training for Indonesian students.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work is currently being carried out for Indonesia by the Defence Research Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the agency's chief executive and I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. John Chisholm to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 22 November 1994:

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to your question concerning work being carried out for Indonesia by the Defence Research Agency.

The Defence Research Agency is not currently undertaking any work for Indonesia.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the training provided over the last 10 years in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in defence-related matters for Indonesia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom has provided training assistance, including developmental and technical courses, for Indonesia over the past 10 years. Details of training, including the numbers involved, are not normally disclosed as they are regarded as confidential between the Governments concerned.

Naval Replacement Programmes

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the replacement programmes for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

Mr. Freeman: Invitations to tender for the design and build for the replacement of the assault ships HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid were issued on 16 August 1994. All United Kingdom warship building yards that have expressed an interest have been invited to compete for this requirement. Tenders are due for return in March 1995 and, subject to a successful competition, we hope to place an order towards the end of next year.

Service Housing

Mrs. Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with local authorities concerning the transfer of MoD housing stock.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 17 November, *Official Report*, column *1*.

Warship Construction

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on maintaining a competitive market for warship construction within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department recognises the importance of a healthy and competitive defence industry. The Ministry's procurement policy is based on competition wherever practicable.

Germany

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on military co-operation with the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom attaches great importance to the strong defence links it enjoys with Germany. United Kingdom and German views are close on a range of important issues. We have regular defence contacts with Germany at all levels, and there is an extensive programme of exchanges between the British armed forces and the Bundeswehr. We have also recently exchanged staff officers between the two Ministries of Defence, and are involved in several collaborative equipment projects.

Defence Cost Study

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the study groups established as part of the defence costs study will continue to meet.

Mr. Freeman: All the study teams set up as part of the defence costs study have submitted their final reports, which have been considered by Ministers and decisions taken on recommendations to be pursued. There is no requirement for the teams to continue to meet and they have been disbanded. The proposals being taken forward following the defence costs study are being pursued with vigour by the relevant budget holders. Central arrangements have also been established, with direct ministerial involvement, to oversee the implementation process.

Defence Industries

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on supporting the actions of local authorities in assisting defence industries to adapt to reduced defence expenditure levels.

Mr. Freeman: My Department is in close contact with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Employment, and we participate in local liaison groups which include representatives of local authorities and other Government Departments.

Air Cadets

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that any further cuts over those already agreed for the Air Cadets budget, with particular reference to cuts which, if implemented, would impact on the number of cadets, cadet activities, including flying and gliding, or the well-being of cadets, will require category 1X ministerial approval.

Mr. Soames: I can assure the hon. Member that any such measures would require ministerial approval.

Overseas Suppliers

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Department monitors the observance of DEF 05/21 or equivalent NATO standards by his Department's suppliers from Europe and other overseas countries;

(2) what procedures his Department follows to ensure that DEF 05/21 or equivalent NATO standards are observed by his Department's suppliers from Europe and other overseas countries.

Mr. Freeman: Defence standard 05/21 was superseded by NATO allied quality assurance publications—AQAPs—in 1985.

My Department checks that contractors, wherever they are based, have appropriate quality assurance procedures in place before we place a contract. In other NATO countries, this may be done under the NATO mutual co-operation agreements; the defence ministry in the country in question is asked to confirm that the company does work to the appropriate standard and that the defence ministry will carry out contract surveillance on my Department's behalf on request. However, the terms of our contracts do allow us to send MOD representatives into suppliers premises—and those of sub-contractors—if we deem it necessary. Similar arrangements exist in memoranda of understanding with a number of countries outside NATO.

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by his Department in market testing.

Mr. Freeman: The total cost of external consultancy fees incurred by the MOD in support of competing for quality activities during the period April 1992 to June 1994 is £3·5 million. Full details of costs incurred up to September 1994 are not yet available.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* all of his Department's activities which have been contractorised or market tested, *(b)* the date of contractorisation and market testing and *(c)* the overall costs.

Mr. Freeman: Details of individual contracts remain commercial-in-confidence. However, in the 30-month period since the onset of the competing for quality programme to September 1994, some 82 support activities worth of the order of £600 million were examined, embracing in excess of 13,500 posts. It is anticipated that this exercise will result in gross savings of approximately £104 million.

European Union Legislation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's efforts to set up a unit to monitor European Union legislation and its implications for his Department.

Mr. Soames: My Department has a wide range of responsibilities which are affected by a growing range of regulatory legislation. Much of this is driven by European Union directives, particularly on environmental and health and safety issues, and it is clear that we need early information about work in the European Commission and its implications. My Department is therefore setting up this month a co-ordinating unit to monitor such work, which will perform a similar function to the equivalent units in many other Government Departments.

Dog Handlers

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those countries for which his Department provides specialist dog handler training.

Mr. Soames: During the financial year 1993–94 a total of 10 foreign and Commonwealth students attended the defence animal centre at Melton Mowbray for specialist dog handler training from the following countries:

USA: 7 students

Hong Kong: 2 students

Guernsey Customs and Excise: 1 student

Animal Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any tests are carried out using animals at his Department's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down—CBDE—under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 22 November 1994:

Question 10, Order Paper Dated 17 November 1994

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence seeking if any tests are carried out using animals at his Department's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; and if he will make a statement has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. It is an essential but relatively small part of the work of CBDE that a small number of experiments with animals, mainly mice, rats and guinea-pigs are carried out in order to ensure that the protective measures provided to the Armed Forces are effective and are safe. No animals are used to practice surgery or in work to improve weapons or ammunition performance. It should be recognised that the total number of all animal experiments carried out at CBDE in any one year is less than one half of one per cent. of all the animal experiments conducted in the United Kingdom.

4. The United Kingdom does not possess chemical or biological weapons and abandoned its capability relating to such weapons in the late 1950s. Consequently, there is absolutely no use of animals to develop or improve chemical or biological weapons. We have to recognise, however, that a number of countries do possess such weapons and it is essential that our Armed Forces are provided with adequate protection against their use and against the use of

biological weapons. There is evidence of proliferation around the world in the availability of such weapons and the recent hostilities in the Gulf have demonstrated the reality of that threat which our Armed Forces have to be prepared to face.

5. Animal experiments are carried out at CBDE Porton Down only when careful consideration of alternatives to the use of animals has shown that there is no adequate substitute and where it is judged essential to use animals for this purpose. It is, important to recognise that there is no population suffering from chemical or biological warfare agents in the population at large and consequently the effectiveness of medical countermeasures cannot be evaluated, as can drugs developed against naturally occurring illness or disease, using human beings. It is consequently necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of medical countermeasures against chemical and biological weapons using an animal model for man.

6. The experiments carried out at CBDE involving the use of animals fully meet the spirit and letter of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act of 1986. CBDE is a registered place under the Act and all animal experiments and all the staff involved in them are licensed by the Home Office. Unannounced visits are made by Home Office inspectors to satisfy themselves that the requirements of the Act are met.

7. All work at CBDE is carefully controlled and monitored and is conducted by appropriately qualified personnel to the highest standards. It is vital that the protection provided for our Service personnel against the threat that they may be exposed to chemical or biological weapons should have been developed and tested to ensure safety and efficacy. Our role is to save the lives of the members of the British Armed Forces and this work is of continuing importance to the nation.

Animals (Ceremonial Dress)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the items, with costs, of ceremonial dress for animals purchased in each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: Items of ceremonial dress for animals include headpieces, reins and browbands. Many of these items are purchased locally by establishments under delegated financial arrangements. No central record is maintained of this expenditure and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Items of ceremonial dress for regimental mascots are not purchased from public funds.

Counselling

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on counselling for service and ex-service personnel in each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Soames: Information on the overall cost of counselling, which in its broadest sense takes many forms, is not held by my Department and could not be determined.

Lobbying

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his Department's rules in relation to lobby firms.

Mr. Soames: Firms and individuals are free to approach my Department with questions, information or opinions at any time. Defence policy and individual decisions are, however, developed in the light of the full range of relevant considerations.

Army Base Repair Organisation

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who from Coopers and Lybrand visited the Army Base Repair Organisation Old Dalby site for the purposes of preparing the study to recommend its closure; when they visited; and for how long they visited.

Mr. Freeman: Coopers and Lybrand assisted the ABRO rationalisation study team with the investment appraisal element of the study; it was not part of the consultancy contract for it to make recommendations on any closures. During the study, the consultant accountant provided by Coopers and Lybrand made a familiarisation visit to Old Dalby on 26 May 1994 and visited as part of a larger team on 11 June 1994. The latter visit included a lengthy discussion with the ABRO Old Dalby accountant on the requirements for financial information. Once this liaison visit had been made, the detailed investment appraisal information from all workshops was received by fax at HQ ABRO Andover, where the study team was based. It is not departmental policy to release the names of individual consultants employed under contracts with consultancy firms.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the level of expenditure on the Army Base Repair Organisation in Old Dalby, Leicestershire, in each of the last five financial years; what further expenditure is planned; and what was the date and value of the final payment for the work on building No. 1.

Mr. Freeman: The level of expenditure at the Army Base Repair Organisation workshops at Old Dalby is given in the attached table. Some £600,000 further expenditure is planned for fire protection work, but this is dependent on the future of the workshop. The final payment on building No. 1 will be made in January 1995 at a value of £85,000. It should be noted that a new repair facility was opened at Old Dalby in 1992. This was originally required to meet a pre-options for change work load; the current and predicted work load is much lower.

Expenditure at ABRO Old Dalby 1989–90 to 1993–94

Financial Year	*Major Works £000*	*Running Costs £000*
1989–90	200	18,377
1990–91	23,000	10,162
1991–92	100	10,202
1992–93	571	12,118
1993–94	522	12,312

Lockheed

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by grade, those members of his Department who have left the Ministry of Defence in the last two years to join Lockheed.

Mr. Freeman: Applications were approved for the following: two Squadron Leaders, two Wing Commanders and one Air Vice-Marshal; of these the Air Vice-Marshal, at least, did not take up appointment.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list how many officials in his Department have visited the Lockheed base at Georgia, United States of America over the last 12 months.

Mr. Freeman: My Department does not keep a central record of visits made to companies overseas.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the representations which he

has received and *(b)* the meetings which he has held with Market Access International regarding the Lockheed C130J.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has neither received representations from Market Access International, nor met any of its personnel in connection with the Hercules rolling replacement programme.

Asbestos

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of suppliers of asbestos and asbestos products, to his Department, between 1964 and 1975.

Mr. Freeman: I regret that this information is not held centrally and cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Arms Sales

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by his Department to promote the sale of arms to *(a)* Indonesia, *(b)* Nigeria, *(c)* Malaysia, *(d)* Saudi Arabia, *(e)* Jordan *(f)* the United Arab Emirates, *(g)* Qatar, *(h)* Oman and *(i)* Turkey, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: It is not possible to break down the cost of sales promotion in individual countries. The net cost of the Defence Export Services Organisation in 1993–94 was £16·02 million. Changes in accounting conventions make exact comparison with earlier years difficult.

Hercules

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards the replacement of the Hercules transport plane.

Mr. Freeman: My Department's policy regarding the Hercules rolling replacement programme is to satisfy the Royal Air Force's operational needs in the most timely and cost-effective way possible.

Private Firms (Charges)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what charges are made by his Department to private firms for *(a)* delivery of goods/supplies and *(b)* stockpiling of goods for sale by private companies.

Mr. Freeman: In general, surplus goods are collected from MOD establishments by private companies that have either purchased them outright or that are contracted to sell them on behalf of the MOD. The question of charges does not therefore arise. Exceptions to this general rule may arise from negotiations on particular contracts.

Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what charge his Department makes to Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd. for *(a)* delivery of supplies *(b)* stockpiling of goods for sale to Leafield Logistics on Government premises.

Mr. Freeman: The contract with Leafield Logistics and Technical Services, in its profit-sharing arrangements, encompasses any accumulation of stock and delivery and they are not the subject of a charge.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many bidders Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd, beat to win the contract to dispose of Navy surplus spares in 1992.

Mr. Freeman: Sixteen.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of the spares bought from his Department by Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd; and what is the total income gained by his Department from the sale of spares to Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd.

Mr. Freeman: No spares have been sold by my Department to Leafield Logisitcs and Technical Services Ltd. The contract with Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd. is based upon a profit-sharing arrangement.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimate of the net gains or losses, in terms of cost, to his Department, of awarding the contract to supply spares for Oberon submarines and Leader class frigates to Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd.

Mr. Freeman: My Department has gained considerable benefits from the contract with Leafield Logistics and Technical Services Ltd.

They are described at paragraph 3.25 of the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General—disposal by sale of defence surplus equipment and stores, HC 557 dated 14 March 1993.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Freeman: In general, my Department's policy is to defray the marginal extra costs of answering inquiries under the code of practice on access to government information. No charge is made if these amount to less than £50. Above that sum charges may be imposed up to a maximum of £200. Agencies with their own budgetary arrangements for which my Department has responsibility generally follow this policy but have freedom to seek my Department's agreement to develop their own charging policies, within the spirit of the code, according to their own particular requirements. A copy of my Department's internal instructions in relation to the open government initiative—including charging policy—was placed in the library of the House when the code of practice came into force.

King's Royal Horse Artillery

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which hunts the King's Royal Horse Artillery has hunted with in 1992,1993 and to date in 1994; and if he will list the details and dates.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Salisbury Plain

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to mitigate the environmental impact of increased military activity on the Salisbury Plain training area.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. member to the publication "Army Training and the Natural and Human Environment on and around the Salisbury Plain Training Area", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. This publication explains fully the present position and sets out the measures being implemented by the Army in the light of the environmental impact assessment which was completed last month.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 23 November 1994

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what arrangements are being made for the future appointment of permanent secretaries following the White Paper, "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change".

Mr. David Hunt: The White Paper made clear in paragraph 4.24 that, as vacancies arise at this level, the arrangements for identifying candidates, either through internal procedures or by open competition, will be considered on a case by case basis by addressing a number of "prior questions". Appointments to a number of permanent secretary vacancies which will arise next year have now been addressed in this way. Those in the Department of Employment and the Central Statistical Office will be made following open competition. The appointment of the Permanent Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science will be made following consideration of candidates across the civil service as a whole.

Large Hadron Collider Project

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the amount of the French contribution to the large hadron collider project at CERN which is in dispute; and what impact this amount makes on the project.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The United Kingdom and German Governments, with the support of other CERN member states, are seeking an appropriate additional contribution to the large hadron collider—LHC—project from France which properly reflects the considerable benefits they derive from hosting CERN. A host state contribution of 10 per cent. of a project's cost is the norm for such large international facilities such as CERN.

Accordingly we have asked the host states, France and Switzerland, to consider making an additional contribution of 290 million Swiss francs towards a construction cost of 2.9 billion Swiss francs. At present the sum offered by the host states falls significantly short of this amount. Negotiations are continuing to find a satisfactory settlement.

Detailed analysis, endorsed by CERN management, suggests there is a significant funding gap if the LHC is to be completed by 2005. Any shortfall in the contribution from host states would have to be made up by further cuts at CERN or increased contributions from other sources.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the reasons why the decision on the large hadron collider project at CERN is being held up; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The Government believe that, in principle, the large hadron collider project is the right next step for particle physics and for CERN. However, before giving formal approval for the project to go ahead, a fair and sustainable financial framework must be established. Such a framework must include the acceptance of tight cost control mechanisms and an appropriate additional contribution from the host states, France and Switzerland, in recognition of the considerable benefits which they have derived, and will continue to derive, from the location of CERN at Geneva.

Negotiations with CERN management and other member states have been progressing and in the last few months good progress has been made. We hope to be able to secure the basis for agreement before the next CERN Council meeting in December.

DEFENCE

Defence Agencies

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Defence Clothing and Textiles Authority.

Mr. Soames: The Defence Clothing and Textiles Authority became Defence Agency of the Ministry of Defence on 22 November 1994. The DCTA, although an organisation with tri-service responsibilities, is presently part of the Quartermaster General's department within the Army. It comprises a small headquarters at Andover and a number of interlocking business functions across the country; it employs a total of 447 staff comprising 13 military and 434 civilian staff.

The primary role of the DCTA is to provide an agreed range of clothing and textile products to meet the operational needs of the MOD and other defined customers within agreed standards, and in the most cost effective manner.

As the first chief executive, Brigadier R. H. T. Kirby CBE will be offered new opportunities to build on the current organisation's professional expertise and high performance standards. Through a more commercial approach, the chief executive will actively seek to improve the efficiency and value for money of his organisation and thereby fulfil the agency's aim of providing its customers with an efficient service which offers the best value for money.

The chief executive has been set the following key targets for financial year 1994–95:

1. To achieve 80 per cent. availability of stock from shelf.
2. 80 per cent. of research and development milestones to be met by the due date and within budget.
3. 80 per cent. of procurement to meet total planned lead time for delivery.
4. To develop the framework for a full customer satisfaction survey.
5. To establish the mechanisms required for full cost accruals accounting system.
6. Initiate action to formulate and develop plans for restructuring and collocation of the agency.
7. Complete national measurement accreditation service NAMAS of DCTA laboratories.
8. To remain within financial year 1994–95 cash allocation, incorporating current efficiency assumptions.
9. To initiate a review of the scope for further private sector involvement, aiming to complete implementation by April 1998.

I have arranged for copies of the agency's framework document to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Royal Air Force signals engineering establishments.

Mr. Soames: The Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment—RAFSEE—became an agency of the Ministry of Defence on 22 November 1994. RAFSEE is based primarily at Royal Air Force, Henlow, with one division currently located at Royal Air Force, Wyton and due to move to Royal Air Force, Waddington in 1995. The establishment belongs to the Signals Units group which is part of Logistics Command, the headquarters of which is at Royal Air Force, Brampton.

The role of RAFSEE is to provide a quick reaction signals engineering capability for military operations worldwide. This work includes design, manufacture, installation and recovery for the full range of strategic and tactical communications, radar and information and electronic systems. It also extends to providing special signals equipment for the Royal Air Force's electronic reconnaissance squadron, and special avionic equipment for aircraft of the three services.

As the first chief executive, Air Commodore P. C. Ayee will be offered new opportunities to build on the current organisation's professional expertise and high performance standards. In maintaining RAFSEE's operational capability, the chief executive will actively seek to improve the efficiency and value for money of his organisation.

The chief executive has been set the following key targets for financial year 1994–95:

1. To deliver 100 per cent. of operational tasks to time.
2. To maintain 100 per cent. of core skills needed to support likely operations.
3. To deliver 70 per cent. of all tasks to time, an improvement of 10 per cent. over the previous year.
4. To put in place a system to monitor and report on the on the quality of delivered tasks.
5. To reduce costs per task manhour by five per cent.
6. To complete a competing for quality feasibility study on £7,970,000 of non-core business by 31 January 1995.
7. To produce shadow accrual accounts by 1 April 1995.

I have arranged for copies of the agency's framework document to be placed in the Library of the House.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Army's logistic information systems.

Mr. Soames: The directorate of logistic information system—Army—was established as a Defence agency on 21 November 1994 and will now be known as the Logistic Information Systems Agency—LISA. LISA will comprise a headquarters at Andover, alongside the quartermaster general's headquarters—QMG—and two main centres of activity at Bicester and Donnington where the base ordnance depots are located. LISA's initial strength will be 46 servicemen and 351 civilians.

The role of the agency is to enhance the logistic effectiveness of the Army in peace and war by providing information systems, services and support.

As the first chief executive, Brigadier A.W. Pollard will be given the authority, responsibility and opportunities to improve the quality of information systems support to Army logistics in a comprehensive, competitive and efficient manner. Building on the Government's successful competing for quality initiatives, he will be following an innovative approach to the involvement of the private sector in the non-core aspects of the agency's work. If study work confirms preliminary assessments it is envisaged that a partnering contract with a private sector supplier will be awarded by competition towards the end of 1995. Consideration is being given, within the bounds of Government policy and without detriment to military priorities, to including some novel revenue sharing arrangements in this contract with the partner. This will be achieved by exploiting the wider market potential offered by partnering and any under utilised, but unavoidable spare LISA capacity. The scope for offsetting LISA costs will thus have obvious value for money benefits to the taxpayer.

The chief executive has been set the following key targets for the first year of operation:

1. Meet targets laid down by QMG for the timeliness, cost and planning effectiveness of projects. Projects should be delivered within planned time and cost tolerance without adjusting the project plans.
2. By 1 April 1995, carry out a customer satisfaction survey, completeness and responsiveness of the services offered and set targets for improvement.
3. By 1 April 1995 introduce dummy invoicing for chargeable services provided by LISA.
4. Within the competing for quality framework, and in order to deliver CFQ efficiency savings, reach a decision by 1 April 1995 on a partnering agreement with the private sector or determine what other CFQ initiatives should be employed to achieve the desired savings and efficiencies.
5. By 31 December 1994 LISA will finalise its pre-CFQ initiative organisational structure and by 1 April 1995 will complete the associated internal changes.
6. LISA will introduce financial and business systems to enable the operation of a full cost accruals accounting system by 1 April 1995.
7. For financial year 1994–95 to operate within budgetary provision and achieve agreed output. By 1 April 1995 establish baselines for agency overheads and unit costs of chargeable output, as a more reliable means of measuring efficiency, and set targets for reductions.

I have arranged for copies of the agency's framework document to be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Dockyards

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the proposed sale of the royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth.

Mr. Freeman: Following invitations to tender issued by the Ministry of Defence on 14 July 1994, initial bids have been received from Devonport Management Limited, for Devonport dockyard, and from Babcock International Group, for Rosyth dockyard. No other bids have been received to date. We are currently evaluating these bids and negotiations will take place with each of the companies, but outcomes other than sale cannot be ruled out.

Gordon Foxley

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the report of his Department's internal investigation into the activities of Gordon Foxley and others.

Mr. Freeman: It will, in due course, be necessary to report to the House on my Department's investigations into recent corruption cases. At present, however, the investigations are still in train and, in the case of Gordon Foxley, are closely integrated with a civil action which

has been launched against Foxley, members of his family circle and the companies involved.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if all facilities which comprise the Trident works programme at CSB Faslane and RNAD Coulport will have received a full complete safety case before HMS Vanguard goes out on operational patrol; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if all new construction at CSB Faslane and RNAD Coulport has now been completed; whether all facilities have now received a full and complete nuclear safety case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: All major new construction at CSB Faslane and RNAD Coulport in support of the Trident programme is complete. Clearance of all facilities necessary to support HMS Vanguard's first operational patrol has been given or is in hand. Work to achieve the full safety clearance of all facilities is progressing as planned and is due to complete next year.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the first two lifts of a Trident submarine in the shiplift at CSB Faslane;

(2) if the shiplift at CSB Faslane will have achieved unlimited safety clearance before HMS Vanguard goes out on operational patrol;

(3) what progress has been made in obtaining a full and complete nuclear safety case for the shiplift at CSB Faslane; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: HMS Vanguard was lifted fully on the Faslane shiplift during the week commending 24 October, following a partial lift to establish the fit between the submarine and its supporting cradle. Work towards achieving full through-life safety clearance of the shiplift is progressing as planned and is due to complete next year.

HMS Vanguard

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's progress towards achieving HMS Vanguard's first patrol by the end of December.

Mr. Freeman: HMS Vanguard remains on course to start her first operational patrol around the turn of the year.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement of reported problems with HMS Vanguard's reactor.

Mr. Freeman: It is not our practice to comment on the material state of individual submarines.

F3 Tornados

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the date of commencement of legal action against the Bricom group in relation to damage caused in the course of the Airwork contract for modifications to F3 Tornados at RAF St. Athan.

Mr. Freeman: We hope to be able to complete the preparation of the claim against Bricom by the end of financial year 1994–95 when it will be raised against the company. Whether or not specific legal action has to be taken will depend on the company's response to the claim.

Future Large Aircraft

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the decision on FLA C130J can be delayed until the feasibility studies on the future large aircraft are completed in the first quarter of 1995.

Mr. Freeman: Our objective is to meet the operational air transport requirements of the armed forces. FLA is already being taken into account in our assessment.

Wegberg Hospital

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has already been spent on the proposed market testing of RAF hospital Wegberg in Germany; what is the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It would not be possible to identify separately the cost of market testing the RAF hospital at Wegberg from the overall study of health provision for British forces Germany. The additional cost of the market test was some £100,000 in financial year 1993–94 and is estimated to be £600,000 this financial year and £160,000 next year. As a result of this project, we expect to make substantial savings against the current cost of this activity which is currently in excess of £30,000,000 per annum.

Operation Seafire

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the distance flown by helicopters from RAF Chivenor to the rendezvous with West Glamorgan firefighters during Operation Seafire on 17 October off the west Wales coast; what was the distance flown from that rendezvous to the Stena Sea Lynx; and what was the average speed (i) over each leg of the journey from Chivenor to the Sea Lynx separately and (ii) over the whole journey, excluding the stop in west Glamorgan.

Mr. Soames: The distances flown by, and average speed of, the RAF search and rescue helicopter involved in Exercise Seafire on 10 October 1994 are shown in the table:

	Distance nm	*Average speed kts*
RAF Chivenor to rendezvous point	86	110
Rendezvous point to Stena Sea Lynx	51	125

The average speed over the whole journey, excluding the stop in west Glamorgan, was 118 kts.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Mr. David Hart was last employed by his Office and for what reason he left; what role Mr. Hart played in providing written or oral advice in the defence costs study initiative; and what access he had to official information concerning the replacement programme for the Hercules transport aircraft or information supplied by British Aerospace concerning its participation in the future large aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: Mr. David Hart is one of a number of unpaid, independent advisers who provide my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence with informal advice from time to time. At my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State's request, he was involved in the defence costs study, "Front Line First",

but he has not been involved in deliberations on the replacement programme for Hercules transport aircraft.

ENVIRONMENT

Air Pollution

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what action he proposes to take to meet World health authority health-based air quality guidelines for transport-related pollutants by the year 2005;

(2) if he will make it his policy to explore with the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, other professional bodies and local authorities how forms of collaboration similar to the London air quality network and unit can be built on and encouraged in other conurbations;

(3) what action he proposes to take to establish in appropriate areas by 2005 local air quality standards based on the critical levels required to protect sensitive eco-systems.

Mr. Atkins: These matters will be covered fully in the response to our consultation paper, "Improving Air Quality" which we expect to publish shortly.

Recycling

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to work with vehicle manufacturers and dismantlers to develop a cradle-to-grave strategy for recycling.

Mr. Atkins: Currently 1·5 million vehicles are scrapped in the United Kingdom each year and in the process 75 per cent. by weight is recycled, with the remainder going to landfill. In December 1993, the Automotive Consortium on Recycling and Disposal—ACORD—which represents all sectors of the industry, presented to Government a preliminary plan which would increase the recovery of scrap from vehicles to 95 per cent. by body weight by the year 2015. This will require a cradle-to-grave approach to the manufacture of new vehicles and components in which design for recovery will play an important part. ACORD has now produced a detailed implementation plan which we will be discussing with it shortly.

Geese

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has taken prior to issuing licences for geese to be shot in London parks.

Mr. Atkins: The Government seek the advice of their statutory scientific adviser, English Nature, before issuing any licence to kill geese in London parks.

Landfill Sites

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to alter the regulations regarding the licensing of landfill sites registered for the disposal of toxic or nuclear waste.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have no plans to deregulate the disposal of toxic or radioactive waste at landfill sites. One of the proposals in the consultation document, "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy: Preliminary Conclusions". published in August, was that waste producers should be encouraged to make more use of the controlled burial of radioactive waste in landfill sites. However, this would remain subject to the same strict regulatory control as at present. The proposals in the document are being considered in the light of the responses received. The disposal of controlled wastes, including special wastes, is subject to the enhanced waste management licensing arrangements introduced under the Environmental Protection Act in May this year.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the landfill sites in the country at present registered for nuclear waste disposal and those where applications are under consideration.

Mr. Atkins: A small number if users of radioactive material are currently authorised under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 to dispose of low level radioactive waste by controlled burial at specified sites. The sites where such burial is specified in the relevant user's authorisations and which may receive waste are:

Milton Landfill, Cambridge
ICI Limited, Cowpen Bewley Tip, Cleveland
Vickers Waste Ponds, Walney Island, Cumbria
Rolls-Royce, Hilts Quarry, Derbyshire
Magnesium Elektron, Swinton, Greater Manchester
Cilgwyn Quarry, Caernarfon, Gwynedd
Braziers Landfill, Hertfordshire
SCM Chemicals, Site tip, Humberside
Clifton Marsh, Preston, Lancashire
Sefton Meadows Tip, Merseyside
Beighton Tip, Sheffield, South Yorkshire
Beddingham Quarry, Sussex
Ryton Tip, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear
BNFL, Drigg, Cumbria
BNFL, Sellafield, Cumbria

Some of the users of radioactive material are licensed under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. The sites where waste arising from such users can be buried are: Cowpen Bewley, Vickers, Hilts Quarry, Ulnes Walton, Clifton Marsh, Drigg and Sellafield. With the exception of Drigg, the wastes arise locally to the burial site.

There are no outstanding applications for authorisation under RSA 1993 which involve burial of low, medium or high level radioactive waste.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what study he has made of the consequences for the infrastructure of neighbouring areas of the initial enterprise zones.

Mr. Curry: The Department's preliminary report, "An Evaluation of the Enterprise Zone Experiment", HMSO 1987, examined a number of linkages between zones and their local areas. A further report, based on the performance of the first round zones, is due for publication early next year.

Council Tax Valuations

Mr. Kenneth Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to amend the council tax valuation orders to allow a reduction in valuations to reflect the current market value of houses affected by blight caused by the announcement of major infrastructure

projects where the time from the announcement to the payment of compensation, if a decision were taken to proceed, would be more than five years.

Mr. Curry: No.

Humber Estuary

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) for what reasons his Department referred back to the National Rivers Authority its list of areas of high natural dispersion under the urban waste water treatment directive when the Humber estuary was not included upon it; and how many other areas not originally in the National Rivers Authority list were subsequently added after the original list had been submitted to him;

(2) what discussions he or any members of his Department had with Yorkshire Water before the designation of the Humber estuary as a area of high natural dispersion for the purpose of the urban waste water treatment directive;

(3) upon what scientific basis the Humber bridge was chosen as the western end of the high natural dispersion area for the purpose of the urban waste water treatment directive;

(4) upon what environmental impact assessment he made his decision that the Humber estuary was an area of high natural dispersion;

(5) what direct consultation his Department and the National Rivers Authority had with the port health authority, the city of Hull, Associated British Ports and the public on both banks of the Humber before designating the estuary as an area of high natural dispersion;

(6) on what date his decision was taken under article 6 of the urban waste water treatment directive that the Humber estuary was an area of high natural dispersion.

Mr. Atkins: In March 1992 the Department published a consultation paper on, among other issues, the criteria and procedures for identifying less sensitive areas, high natural dispersion area—HNDAs, under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. The scientific criteria for identifying HNDAs were published in a second consultation paper in March 1993. These consultation papers were the subject of parliamentary answers and news releases and were placed in the Library of the House. They were sent to the Association of County Councils and the Association of District Councils, among others.

Discussions then took place between the National Rivers Authority, the water industry and the Department on the identification of locations meeting the agreed criteria. In July 1993, my hon. Friend, the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) announced the NRA's working list of HNDAs, which included parts of the Humber. Subsequently, in light of advice from the NRA, Ministers concluded, and I announced on 18 May 1994, that the Humber met the criteria for HNDAs.

Discharges into HNDAs must have at least primary treatment—which entails the provision or improvement of treatment at most locations. Comprehensive studies are now being carried out in respect of each HNDA to satisfy the NRA, before it issues any discharge consents, that the discharge will not adversely affect the environment. If the NRA is not satisfied in any particular case, additional treatment will be required. The NRA has a statutory duty to publish consent applications and to serve notice of its intention to issue a consent, which allows representations or objections to be made. This duty is not affected by the decision to identify a HNDA.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Kenneth Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the will list those development projects since 1964 which have involved demolishing or rendering uninhabitable more than 55 listed buildings.

Mr. Curry: The information is not held centrally in this form.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sites of prospective opencast mining which as yet do not have planning permission but have been included in the reserves listed in the portfolios of the proposed regional coal companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

On privatisation, regional coal companies will acquire exploration licences, conditional operating licences and options for leases in relation to the coal at portfolios of prospective opencast sites.

Prospective opencast sites are at different stages in the process of assembling the interests and rights in and over land and of obtaining planning and other consents, all of which are necessary for the extraction of coal. The grant of planning consents will remain a matter for the planning authorities.

A list of those prospective sites which have, as yet, obtained no planning permission, by Regional Coal Company, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any of the reserves of prospective opencast sites which have previously been the subject of unsuccessful planning applications for opencast mining have been included in the portfolios of the proposed regional local companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

A number of the prospective opencast sites included in the portfolios of the regional coal companies have, in the past, been the subject of unsuccessful planning applications. It has, however, been made abundantly clear throughout the sales process that the grant of any planning consents in the future will remain a matter for the planning authorities.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what calculation his Department has made of the effect on the purchase price of regional coal companies of the inclusion of possible but unapproved sites for opencast coal mining; and what is the difference between the purchase price of possible, but unapproved, sites and that of approved or working sites on a cost per tonnage basis.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

In submitting bids for regional coal companies, prequalifiers for the sale of British Coal's mining activities were assessing the overall value of a portfolio of assets, including prospective opencast mining sites. Bidders were not asked to provide details of their bids on

a site-by-site basis, and no such assessment has been made by my Department.

TREASURY

Pensions

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many retired civil servants, retired officers of the armed services and other retired public servants, are receiving pensions of more than 50 per cent. of the current salaries for the jobs from which they retired; and what is the annual cost to the Exchequer.

Sir George Young: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Most public service pension schemes provide a half-pay pension only after a full career, and a one-off lump sum payment of three times the annual pension. However, most public servants do not serve long enough to retire with a half-pay pension.

Taxes (Wales)

Dr. Howells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the total raised from income tax revenue in Wales, *(a)* in 1990, *(b)* in 1991, *(c)* in 1992, *(d)* in 1993 and *(e)* in the first six months of 1994;

(2) what was the total raised from income tax revenue in Scotland, *(a)* in 1990, *(b)* in 1991, *(c)* in 1992, *(d)* in 1993 and *(e)* in the first six months of 1994.

Sir George Young: Estimates of income tax liabilities for residents of Scotland and Wales are given in the table for 1990–91, 1991–92 and the latest available year for regional estimates, 1992–93. Information on income tax receipts has not been provided for Scotland and Wales as they merely reflect administrative arrangements for the collection of tax.

Estimates of income tax liabilities for residents of Scotland and Wales

	£ million		
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Scotland	5,070	5,170	5,130
Wales	2,370	2,500	2,330

IMF

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom's annual contribution to the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom makes no direct annual contribution to the International Monetary Fund. As a member of the IMF, the United Kingdom maintains a reserves position with the IMF. Of this SDR 700 million—equivalent to £653 million—is unremunerated. The balance is remunerated at the fund's rate of remuneration. At end September 1994, the United Kingdom's reserve position in the IMF stood at SDR 1,354.3 million—equivalent to £1264 million.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom's annual contribution to the IMF's *(a)* structural adjustment facility, *(b)* enhanced structural facility and *(c)* other relevant facilities.

Mr. Nelson: The only specific IMF facility to which members contribute directly is the enhanced structural adjustment facility—ESAF. Over the life of the facility, the United Kingdom will contribute up to £377 million to the subsidy required for ESAF loans. This amount includes a contribution of the £50 million made earlier this year when the facility was expanded and enlarged. Over time, the United Kingdom will contribute about one-ninth of the subsidy required by ESAF. In 1993-94, a payment of £20 million was made under these arrangements.

Overseas Debt

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the non-concessional debt owed to the international multilateral financial institutions by severely indebted low income countries has been cancelled or converted to International Development Association terms.

Mr. Nelson: Debt owed to the international financial institutions is not cancelled. Under the International Development Association fifth dimension facility, complementary IDA credits, provided in proportion to interest payments due on outstanding IBRD debt, have helped ease the debt service burden of eligible IDA-only countries undertaking internationally supported economic reform programmes. I refer the hon. member to the answer which the Chancellor gave on 19 October to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) for details of proposals that he made in Malta this year to help further reduce the burden of debt owed to the IFIs by the poorest, most indebted countries, *Official Report*, 19 October column 272.

European Investment

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what amount in pound sterling the facilities of the European Investment bank were increased under terms agreed at the Edinburgh Council.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Edinburgh European Council established a special temporary lending facility, within the European Investment bank, to support capital investment in infrastructure projects. This facility amounted initially to 5 billion ecu or £3,925 million, but was subsequently increased to 7 billion ecu, or £5,495 million by the Copenhagen European Council.
All figures converted at 18/11/94 £/ecu conversion rate (£1 =1.2738 ecu).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the expenditure implications for the European Union's budget arising out of the activities of the European investment bank and European investment fund.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The activities of both the European Investment bank and the European investment fund are financed in each case largely from the resources of the institution concerned and, to this extent, impose no direct costs on the budget of the European union. However:

(i) the European union has subscribed for 600 million ecu, £471 million, worth of shares in the European investment fund, for which 20 per cent. is to be paid in. This sum of 120 million ecu, £94 million will be charged to the EU budget.

(ii) the European union has provided guarantees to the European Investment bank in respect of lending programmes

which it undertakes in eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America, and in the Mediterranean countries. These guarantees stand on the budget as a contingent liability.

All figures converted at 18/11/94 £/ecu conversion rate (£1 = 1.278 ecu).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what amount in pound sterling the establishment of the European investment fund following the Edinburgh Council is predicted to cost the budget of the European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The European Union has subscribed for 600 million ecu, or £471 million, worth of shares in the new European investment fund, of which only 20 per cent is to be paid in to the fund. This sum will be paid from the EU budget, in four equal annual tranches of 30 million ecu, or £23·5 million, over the years 1994 to 1998.

All figures converted at 18 November 1994 £/ecu conversion rate (£1 = 1·2738 ecu).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the £24 billion expenditure package referred to in the Prime Minister's statement of 14 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *36*, is affected by European Union budgets.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The package referred to by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is not affected by European Union budgets.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish any variation or extension of the text of the presidential communique of the December 1992 European Council in Edinburgh in respect of the revised arrangements for financing the European Community as now contained in the draft Council decision 9298/93.

Mr Heathcoat-Amory: Draft Council decision 9298/93 was superseded by Council decision 94/728/EC, Euratom of 31 October 1994—the "own resources decision".

The arrangements for Community own resources established by the new own resources decision do not differ in any material respect from those agreed by the Edinburgh European Council.

EC Budget

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the figures in table 11.1 of Cm. 2517 to take account of latest information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information in the accompanying table reflects the latest forecast and is consistent with the information which I will publish in next week's Financial Statement and Budget Report.

The pattern of our net contributions to the EC budget is obscured by considerable fluctuations from one year to the next. These are caused by adjustments to our payments in previous years as later information become available, differences in the level and timing of receipts, and movements in the size of our abatement. These effects are increased because we use a different financial year from the Community. Our estimate of the underlying level of the net contribution—that is, what we think the net contribution is when the various irregularities are stripped out—is as follows:

Estimate of underlying public sector net contribution to the EC Budget

	£ million
1988	1,500
1989	1,700
1990	1,900
1991	2,100
1992	2,200
1993	2,400
1994	2,500
1995	2,700
1996	3,100
1997	3,300
1998	3,500
1999	3,550

Of the increase of £850 million between 1995 and 1999, some £600 million results from the effects of Community gross national product and inflation within the present own resources ceiling which is set at 1.20 per cent. of Community GNP. The remaining £250 million is a consequence of the agreement at the Edinburgh European Council to increase the own resources ceiling from 1·20 per cent. to 1·27 per cent. by 1999.

These figures look large because they are presented in cash terms, for consistency with the rest of our public expenditure arithmetic. But the real scale of the Edinburgh settlement can be seen in the fact that it increased the own resources ceiling over seven years by 7/10,000ths of Community gross national product.

United Kingdom Contributions to and Receipts from the European Community Budget

Cash Plans *£ millions*

	1989–90 outturn	*1990–91 outturn*	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 estimated outturn*	*1995–96 plans*	*1996–97 plans*	*1997–98 plans*
Gross payments	5,804	6,411	6,129	6,970	8,407	8,308	9,943	9,910	10,552
Public sector receipts	-2,035	-2,388	-2,757	-2,810	-3,864	-3,963	-4,293	-4,441	-4,526
United Kingdom abatement	-1,317	-1,838	-2,428	-1,993	-2,350	-1,899	-2,256	-2,108	-2,744

United Kingdom Contributions to and Receipts from the European Community Budget

Cash Plans *£ millions*

	1989–90 outturn	*1990–91 outturn*	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 estimated outturn*	*1995–96 plans*	*1996–97 plans*	*1997–98 plans*
Net public sector contributions to the European Community budget	2,452	2,18	943	2,167	2,192	2,446	3,394	3,361	3,282

For domestic public expenditure planning purposes, part of the United Kingdom's contribution to the Community budget is attributed to the overseas aid programme. The net contribution to the EC budget when adjusted for this element, our payments to the European Investment bank and our receipts from the European Coal and Steel Community form the United Kingdom's net payments to EC institutions, the latest estimates for which are: 1994–95 £2,043 million, 1995–96 £2,821 million, 1996–97 £2,765 million and 1997–98 £2,639 million.

EC Expenditure

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise with the EC Commission its statement on page 13 of the draft budget for 1995 on the intention of the EC to exceed the legal limits of agricultural spending by accountancy devices.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* The agricultural guideline can be increased or exceeded only with unanimity in the Council. The Government have made it clear that they see no case for agreeing to a breach of or increase in the guideline for 1995, and that this option is therefore not available to the Council.

It is too early to tell whether spending in 1995 would, in the absence of further measures to control it, exceed the guideline. An approach to the Commission would therefore be premature.

Stamp Duty Office, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he has had in relation to the decision to close the Cardiff stamp duty office, located at Companies house, Crown way, Maindy, Cardiff; what representations he has received in relation to the closure prior to and since the announcement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* The decision to close the Cardiff stamp office was taken by the Inland Revenue on operational grounds. The closure is one of several changes taking place in the interests of making the stamp office as a whole more efficient. The stamp office is consulting the trade unions about redeployment of the Cardiff stamp office staff as the aim is to offer all staff alternative positions with the Inland Revenue. To date, I have received no representations about the closure.

Company Cars

Mr. Tyler: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to further modify the tax rules in relation to company cars, to remove the incentives for environmentally damaging behaviour.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* As with all tax issues, the Chancellor makes his decisions in the Budget. I cannot therefore comment further at this stage.

Debtor Countries

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the British Government's policy on providing direct contributions to debtor countries to assist in the settlement of arrears or debt-service to the IFIs.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom provides programme aid in support of economic reform programmes agreed with the IMF and World bank as part of a collective donor effort to help finance the country's overall external financing requirements including debt service commitments. Exceptionally, at the request of the Zambian Government, we have agreed that our programme aid for 1994–95 may be used to reimburse the government for some of its debt service commitments to the international financial institutions. This is in the context of an agreed overall government budget which provides for increased social services provision.

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Economic Area Nationals

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of EEA countries have been required to leave the United Kingdom on the basis of direct referrals from the Benefits Agency since the Income Support (General) Regulations were amended in April 1993; and, how many of these EEA nationals are lone parents.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Between April 1993 and December 1993, 183 European Community nationals, whose cases were referred by the Benefits Agency, were advised that because they were not economically active and had become a burden on public funds the Secretary of State was not satisfied that they were exercising a right of residence under European Community law and they should accordingly make arrangements to leave the United Kingdom. Since January 1994, when EC rights of residence were extended to all European economic area nationals, 393 EEA nationals have been advised in similar terms up to the end of October 1994. Information is not available as to whether any of these cases involved lone parents.

Police (Truncheons)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of

alternatives to the traditional truncheon for use by the police.

Mr. Howard: Home Office research published today, into assaults on police officers and police trials of the expandable side-handled baton, confirms that there is a need for better ways of restraining violent suspects, that the expandable side-handled baton is very good for this purpose, and that a three-piece expandable baton is acceptable to many officers. I have already given my support to police forces that are using the expandable side-handled baton. In the light of these reports and of further scientific research, I am content for chief officers, if they wish, to introduce the rigid version of that baton. I am ensuring that chief officers have available good, scientifically based information about the different characteristics of different batons as a basis for their choice.

I have also, as police authority for the Metropolitan police, agreed that they may have 24 inch and 26 inch batons in addition to the 22 inch ones already being issued. This follows satisfactory scientific evaluation of the new batons.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are planned to ensure effective co-ordination for emergency planning between any new unitary authorities established within an existing county council boundary in England.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Local authorities in England and Wales, together with the principal associations representing them, have been consulted on the delivery and co-ordination of emergency planning following the outcome of the local government review. We are considering their responses and hope to make an announcement before the end of this year.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum seekers have been detained under the Immigration Act 1971 since *(a)* 26 July 1993 and *(b)* 1 January;

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers currently held in detention by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* length of detention, *(d)* place of detention and *(e)* immigration status at the time of application.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: At 18 November 1994, a total of 654 people who had sought asylum were detained. This figure includes people awaiting the setting of directions for removal following refusal of the application, as well as those whose application was under consideration or subject to appeal. Of this figure, 167 had been in detention less than one month, 125 between one and two months, 233 between two and six months and 129 had been in detention longer than six months.

Information on the gender, immigration status, nationality and location of detention is given in tables A, B and C. Information on the numbers who have been detained since 26 July 1993 and 1 January is not available.

Table A Number of people detained on 18 November 1994, who had sought asylum, by immigration status and gender

Immigration Status	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Port case	281	24	305
Illegal entrant case	276	8	284
Deportation case	55	10	65
Total	612	42	654

Table B Number of people detained as at 18 November 1994 who had sought asylum, by nationality

	Number detained
Afghanistan	1
Albania	6
Algeria	74
Angola	11
Bangladesh	20
Bulgaria	1
Cameroon	2
Chad	1
China	10
Colombia	8
Cyprus (TRNC)	19
Dominica	1
Egypt	3
Eritrea	1
Estonia	1
Ethiopia	5
Gambia	3
Ghana	56
Hong Kong	1
India	87
Iran	4
Iraq	5
Israel	2
Ivory Coast	10
Jamaica	5
Kenya	6
Lebanon	2
Liberia	5
Libya	6
Malawi	1
Malaysia	1
Mauritius	5
Morocco	7
Mozambique	1
Nigeria	117
Pakistan	28
Peru	1
Philippines	2
Romanian	5
Russia	2
Rwanda	1
Sierra Leone	13
Slovenia	1
South Africa	6
Sri Lanka	13
Sudan	3
Tanzania	1
Trinidad and Tobago	1
Tunisia	3
Turkey	49
Uganda	5
Former Yugoslavia	6
Zaire	22
Zimbabwe	1
Nationality doubtful	3
Total	654

Table C Number of people detained as at 18 November 1994, who had sought asylum, by location of detention

	Number Detained
Immigration service establishment	
Campsfield House	154
Gatwick Beehive	16
Harmondsworth	90
Manchester airport detention suite	8
Queens building	25
Stansted	8
Newhaven	11
Dover Harbour Board	8
Glasgow	1
Prison service establishment	
Armley	14
Birmingham	40
Brinsford	6
Bristol	2
Brixton	4
Bullingdon	3
Canterbury	1
Cardiff	1
Chemlsford	3
Crumlin Rd.	2
Dorchester	1
Durham	1
Elmley	8
Erlestoke House	1
Exeter	2
Feltham YC centre	2
Greenock	2
Harwich	1
Haslar	74
Highdown	5
Hindley remand centre	1
Holloway	1
Leicester	1
Lewes	1
Liverpool	1
Norwich	3
Pentonville	5
Risley	1
Rochester	60
Saughton	1
Shrewsbury	1
Strangeways	6
The Mount	1
Wandsworth	7
Winchester	7
Winson Green	1
Wolds remand prison	3
Wormwoods scrubs	4
Police cells	55
Total	654

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost per week of detaining an asylum seeker under the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information does not identify separately those detention costs which relate to asylum seekers. However, for the year ended 31 March 1994 the average weekly cost of accommodating all categories of detainee in detention accommodation for which the Immigration Service is responsible was estimated at just over £800 per detainee.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum seekers detained under the Immigration Act 1971 have been released from detention as a result of an application to the courts for habeas corpus *(a)* in the past five years and *(b)* since 26 July 1993;

(2) how many asylum seekers detained under the Immigration Act 1971 have been released from detention as a result of an application to the High Court for bail *(a)* in the past five years and *(b)* since 26 July 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on the number of asylum seekers released from detention on bail as a result of an application to the High Court or as a result of an application for habeas corpus, is not separately identifiable in the statistics.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers granted temporary admission to the United Kingdom while their asylum claim is examined by the Home Office have subsequently absconded or otherwise failed to comply with the terms of temporary admission *(a)* in the past five years and *(b)*
since 1 January.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available.

Anti-doping Convention

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the measures that he proposed to fulfil the United Kingdom's obligations under article 4 of the Council of Europe anti-doping convention.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposals which the Government announced on 2 November for imposing controls on anabolic steroids and on which I consulted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who has overall responsibility for the Council of Europe anti-doping convention, will help restrict their availability to sportsmen and women, among others, in conformity with the principles of article 4 of the convention.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people are currently being held in adult prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter have been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Llin Golding, dated 23 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many young people are currently being held in adult prisons.

On 30 September 1994, 876 young persons (inmates aged between 15 and 20 and sentenced young offenders aged 21) were held in adult prisons (local prisons, closed training prisons and open prisons) in England and Wales.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which animals currently come under which schedule of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Schedule 1 of the 1986 Act, which lists standard methods of humane killing and the animals for which they are appropriate, has not been amended since 1986.

Schedule 2, which lists the animals which may be obtained only from designated breeding or supplying establishments, has been amended to add "any bird of the species Coturnix coturnix (quail)".

Prisoners (HIV)

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions are made to monitor routinely the CD4 cell counts of identified HIV-infected prisoners in Great Britain.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Keith Hill, dated 23 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the monitoring of CD4 cell counts.

Routine clinical and laboratory monitoring, including CD4 cell counts, is accepted practice in the clinical and medical care of HIV infected individuals in the community.

The Prison Service seeks to provide the same level of care and prison medical officers have been advised that such monitoring should form part of routine medical supervision of HIV-infected patients in prison. These guidelines have been issued on the manual 'HIV and AIDS a multi-disciplinary approach in the prison environment' which is available in all Prison Service establishments and to health care centres.

Passport Agency

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the United Kingdom Passport Agency.

Mr. Howard: A review of the work of the United Kingdom Passport Agency has now been completed. Like other reviews of executive agencies, this included an evaluation of the agency's performance, and a review of options for its future organisation.

The evaluation found that since its establishment, the agency has clearly improved the service it provides and is operating in a more efficient and businesslike way. Applications have increased from 3·3 million in 1991–92 to 3·6 million in 1993–94, but targets for turnaround times have been achieved whilst unit costs have been reduced.

As to the future of the agency, I have concluded that neither privatisation nor full contracting out of the agency's activities is feasible and that passports should continue to be issued by the United Kingdom Passport Agency. But there is scope for further improvements in efficiency and quality of service, and for further reducing unit costs. As part of this process, the private sector needs to become progressively involved in the passport issuing process.

As a first step, the agency is developing plans for partnership with travel agents and other retail outlets so that they, as well as the agency's own offices, will issue and receive completed application forms and fees from the public. The intention is that these arrangements will be in place next year.

The agency is also undertaking a review of the size and location of its offices, which will be completed early next year and will involve private sector consultants. The agency will also look at ways of involving the private sector in the issuing operation after the decision to grant a passport is taken, and in the provision of support services. It is intended to move the agency to trading fund status from April 1996.

The framework document for the agency will be revised to take account of these developments. The agency's key targets for 1994–95 are:

(i) to process properly completed, straightforward applications within a maximum of 20 working days in the periods of peak demand between January and June. 15 working days in July and August, and 10 working days at other times.

(ii) to process such application within an overall average of nine working days for the year as a whole, and

(iii) to reduce unit costs by a further 3·2 per cent. in real terms in comparison with the outturn for 1993–94.

The chief executive will remain directly accountable to me for the performance of the Passport Agency. An advisory board, including two private sector members with experience of delivering services to the public, will continue to provide me with an independent assessment of the agency's performance.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Goodlad: Since 1986 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, has abolished or de-classified 10 quangos:

1986
United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO (Advisory)
1987
Overseas Superannuation Scheme Advisory Board
Anglo-Irish Encounter
1988
None
1989
Advisory Panel on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation
1990
None
1991
Developing Countries Trade Agency
Irish Pensions Appeal Tribunal
1992
Institute of Development Studies
1993
Bureau of Hygiene and Tropical Diseases
(Managing Committee)
Commonwealth Development Corporation
Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations

To answer this question in full, that is, which quangos the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has abolished since 1979, would incur disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many quangos his

Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Goodlad: In 1979 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, was responsible for 36 quangos. In 1993 the latest year for which a number is available, it was responsible for 18.

Embassy Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff are employed full time and how many part time in each British embassy in each European country; how many staff are employed full time and how many part time in each British consulate in each European country; and how the level of staff is determined in each case.

Mr. Goodlad: The table gives details of United Kingdom-based staff slots in embassies and consulates in European countries, including service attachés and staff from other Government Departments and agencies. All are full time.

Staffing levels are assessed against the objectives and activities of posts; they are reviewed regularly by FCO inspectors.

United Kingdom based staffing levels at overseas posts in European countries

British Embassies		*British Consulates General*		*British Consulates*	
Post	*United Kingdom based staff 1994*	*Post*	*United Kingdom based staff 1994*	*Post*	*United Kingdom based staff 1994*
Ankara	26	Amsterdam	3	Florence	1
Athens	32	Barcelona	2	Malaga	1
Belgrade	21	Bilbao	1	Oporto	1
Berlin	22	Bordeaux	1	Palma	1
Berne	15	Dusseldorf	11		
Bonn	68	Frankfurt	5		
Bratislava	3	Geneva CG	7		
Brussels	30	Hamburg	3		
Brussels JMO	4	Istanbul	22		
Bucharest	25	Lille	1		
Budapest	30	Lyons	1		
Copenhagen	20	Marseilles	1		
Dublin	24	Milan	6		
Helsinki	22	Munich	7		
Kiev	19	Naples	2		
Lisbon	22	St. Petersburg	7		
Ljubljana	2	Stuttgart	1		
Luxembourg	7	Zurich	3		
Madrid	37				
Minsk	2				
Moscow	89				
Oslo	23				
Paris	89				
Prague	25				
Reykjavik	3				
Riga	3				
Rome	46				
Sarajevo	2				
Skopje	2				
Sofia	23				
Stockholm	22				
Tallinn	2				
The Hague	30				
Tirana	2				
Vatican City	2				
Vienna	29				
Vilnius	2				
Warsaw	38				
Zagreb	9				

Arms

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to *(a)* reduce and *(b)* eliminate the flow of arms to states where they are likely to be used in the repression of civilians; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: All applications for licences to export defence equipment are subject to strict controls. They are considered case by case in the light of established criteria. These criteria include the guidelines agreed with European Union partners and in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. In particular, we do not export defence equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression.

DNA Testing

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the number of children who have been DNA tested for immigration

purposes in *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* Sri Lanka, *(c)* India and *(d)* Bangladesh in each of the last three years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is given in the table. Information on the number of DNA tests on children in Sri Lanka is not collected centrally.

Number of DNA tests on children in the Indian sub-continent carried out under the Government scheme, 1991–1993

Country where application made	Number of children 1991	1992	1993
Bangladesh (Dhaka)	760	1,040	790
Pakistan (Islamabad, Karachi)	440	580	410
India (Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras)	30	20	110
Total Indian sub-continent	1,230	1,640	1,320

All figures rounded to the nearest 10.
Columns may not sum due to rounding.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for publication in the *Official Report* of a copy of the letter on plutonium smuggling sent to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent to which he refers in his answer of 3 November *Official Report,* column *1385.*

Mr. David Davis: Yes, the text of the letter was:

The British Government was represented by officials from the DTI and the FCO at the meeting called by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna on 2 and 3 November.

The meeting discussed what role the Agency might play in combating nuclear smuggling. The United Kingdom shared the views expressed at the meeting that the responsibility for preventing illicit trade lay primarily with the governments concerned. But we also feel that the IAEA has two important roles to play. Firstly, in coordinating assistance to member States to help improve national systems of nuclear material accountancy and control and of physical protection. Secondly, in developing a reliable data base of information on illicit trade in nuclear materials.

Based on views expressed at this meeting the IAEA Secretariat now intends to produce recommendations for action to be presented to the Board of Governors at its next regular meeting on 8 December. The Agency issued a press release at the end of the meeting on 3 November, a copy of which I will place in the Library of the House.

Rights of the Child Convention

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made toward meeting the terms of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom's First Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child was published in February 1994. Copies were placed in the library. The report sets out the ways in which the United Kingdom's policy, law and practice meet the provisions of the convention.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's position on a unilateral ban on the production, sale, export, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines.

Mr. David Davis: We are very much in favour of measures to regulate the production, transfer and use of anti-personnel landmines. But to be effective, such measures need to command wide international support and respect. We are working with like-minded countries to that end.

PRIME MINISTER

Court of Auditors

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Prime Minister what response he proposes to make to the latest report of the EC Court of Auditors; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom welcomes the Court of Auditors' report for 1993; its findings and recommendations will assist in the fight against fraud and financial mismanagement and in favour of better value-for-money. The United Kingdom has been in the lead in pressing the Commission and the European Parliament to attack fraud and improve financial management. We secured important improvements in the treaty on European union, including giving the European Court of Auditors enhanced status as a full Institution of the European Union. The United Kingdom has also pushed for better value for money in Community expenditure.

Following on from the Edinburgh European Council conclusions, the 1993 structural funds regulations required, for the first time, prior appraisal of expenditure, effective monitoring and evaluation of results. In March of this year, the United Kingdom proposed a joint action to ensure that member states make legally binding commitments to take tougher action against criminal fraud. The United Kingdom also supports the principles of a proposal from the Commission for a complementary framework of financial penalty rules and wants to see these principles carried through effectively. Both proposals are currently under discussion.

The European Court of Auditors' report will be considered by the Council of the Ministers early next year. The United Kingdom will urge that its findings are followed up vigorously by the Commission and member states; that appropriate action is taken; and that the Commission reports back fully on the results.

As I said last week, following the Anglo-French summit at Chartres, we shall press for the Council of Ministers to act on the court's special reports on particular areas of the Community budget and we wish to see member states co-operate in taking tougher action against criminal fraud. We also wish to see the Commission step up its spot checks for fraud and fraudsters; the European parliament as a whole, rather than just its budgetary control committee, act on fraud; and we are in touch with the German presidency to see how we can use the Essen European Council to add further momentum to the fight against fraud.

European Union (Finance)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minster what provisions exist to ensure that the obligations entered into

between European Union member states in matters related to the European Communities (Finance) Bill are honoured.

The Prime Minister: The purpose of the European Communities (Finance) Bill is to enable the United Kingdom to give effect to a new own resources decision. The British Government, and the Governments of all other member states, committed themselves politically to the financial arrangements which are the basis of the own resources decision by a settlement at the Edinburgh Council, during the British presidency in 1992.

The relevant arrangements for giving legal effect to this international agreement are set out in article 201 of the treaty establishing the European Community which states that:

> "The Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, shall lay down provisions relating to the system of Own Resources of the Community, which it shall recommend to the Member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements."

National procedures for adoption are a matter for each member state. In the United kingdom, the practice is to ask for Parliament's approval by means of a Bill adding the new own resources decision to the list of relevant "Treaties" in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972.

When all member states have notified adoption of the new own resources decision, it will enter force, retrospectively if necessary, with effect from 1 January 1995. Once in force, member states will be under a legally binding obligation to make contributions to the Community budget in accordance with the new own resources decision.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many victims of asbestos-related diseases have had benefits recouped under the compensation recovery unit powers following successful claims for damages against an employer or other party.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 22 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many victims of asbestos related diseases have had benefits recouped under the Compensation Recovery Scheme.

The full range of information you have requested is not available. The Compensation Recovery Unit's computer system records cases involving victims of asbestosis rather than asbestosis related diseases. In addition, information relating to cases settled prior to January 1993 is no longer held on the computer system and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

However, I am able to tell you that there have been recoveries in 171 cases involving victims of asbestosis where final settlement was made after January 1993.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the target time for the Child Support Agency to answer inquiries about cases; in what percentage of inquiries the target is reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Alistair Darling, dated 23 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's target time for answering written queries.

Under its current Charter Standard the Agency aims to reply to all routine written enquiries within 10 working days of receipt. Figures published for the period April 1994 to August 1994 show we replied to 29 per cent. of such enquiries within this timescale.

These results are disappointing, but the Agency is working to improve performance.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps are taken by the Child Support Agency to investigate the financial circumstances where the parent with care is self-employed.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 23 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about steps taken to investigate the financial circumstances where the parent with care is self-employed.

The formula for assessing maintenance is applied equally to both the parent with care and the absent parent. where either parent is self-employed, they will need to provide evidence to the Agency about their business. Details of the information required by the Agency and the steps taken to verify such information are contained in the Child Support Adjudication Guide and the Child Support Manual, copies of which are held in the Library.

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps are taken by the Child Support Agency to investigate cases where the parent with care is fraudulently claiming benefit; and how many such cases have been discovered since the agency was set up.

Mr. Burt: As an intermediary between two parties in the arrangement of child maintenance, the Child Support Agency has no direct role in the detection of fraud, although if social security benefits are in payment and a potential fraud against the benefits system is alleged, relevant information is passed to the Benefits Agency or the Employment Service.

Although figures are not available for the entire period since the Child Support Agency was set up, in the first six months of 1994–95, the Child Support Agency referred 5,561 cases to the Benefits Agency for investigation. In the same period, the Benefits Agency identified benefit savings on a total of 2,213 cases which had been referred by the Child Support Agency. No referrals have been made to the Employment Service.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long the Child Support Agency takes to process an assessment from the receipt of the information from all persons involved based on the child support charter.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss A Chant, the chief executive. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Iain Mills, dated 23 November 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's clearance times.

The Child Support Agency Charter Standard relating to maintenance assessments is to aim to write with an assessment within 5 working days of receiving all information needed from both parents. Figures published for the period to August 1994 shows performance as 17 per cent. but this reflects the fact that the Agency is clearing older cases.

Income Support

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much will be saved from the social security budget by reducing the entitlement of 18 to 24-year-olds from current levels of unemployment benefit to the under-25s' level of income support at current rates of youth unemployment from April 1996 for each subsequent year.

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated savings arising from reducing the entitlement to 18 to 24-year-olds from the current levels of unemployment benefit to the under-25s' level of income support based on current levels of youth unemployment are £25 million in 1996–97 and £30 million in 1997–98.

Notes:

1. Savings rounded to the nearest £5 million.

2. 1996–97 savings are in 1996–97 prices. 1997–98 savings are in 1997–98 prices.

3. Estimates assume that contributory benefit is paid for 6 months in 1996–97 and 1997–98: ie they assume that jobseekers allowance has been introduced in full.

4. Estimates use the May 1994 unemployment benefit statistics and the 1990–91–92 Family Expenditure Surveys.

Savings figures assume transitional protection in 1996–97.

National Insurance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy not to levy national insurance contributions on employer-funded meal vouchers and childcare provided outside the workplace.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Employer-funded vouchers for meals and childcare provided outside the workplace are benefits in kind on which national insurance contributions are not chargeable.

Industrial Injury Compensation

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the current system of industrial injury compensation.

Mr. Hague: We have no such plans at present but under the long-term review of social security expenditure each part of the social security programme is being examined to ensure that the objectives are right for the 1990s and beyond.

Pensioners' Incomes

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what is the latest information held about pensioners' incomes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The latest information is in the tables. This revises information given to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 19 July at columns *201-4* and on 17 October at columns *59-60*.

Table 1: The average incomes of pensioner units by source, 1974–1992

a) Pensioner couples	*Average income £ per week July 1992 prices*			*Growth*		*Average income from each source as percentage of total income*		
				Percentage	*Percentage*			
Income Source	*1974*	*1979*	*1992*	*1974–1979*	*1979–1992*	*1974*	*1979*	*1992*
Earnings	32.10	26.10	18.00	–19	–31	21	16	8
Benefit income	77.80	87.70	107.10	13	22	50	53	45
Investment income	18.40	17.50	45.40	–5	160	12	11	19
Occupational pension	27.00	32.60	65.90	21	102	17	20	28
Other income	0.50	0.90	1.40	86	65	*	1	1
Total gross income	155.70	164.80	237.80	6	44	100	100	100
Deductions	22.20	23.80	31.60	7	33	14	14	13
Total net income[1]	133.50	141.00	206.20	6	46	86	86	87
Total net income AHC[2]	116.60	122.20	190.70	5	56	N/A	N/A	N/A

[1] Median net income, at 1992 prices, was £107.60 in 1974, £115.10 in 1979 and £162.90 in 1992.
[2] Median net income after housing costs, at 1992 prices was £103.20 in 1974, £97.90 in 1979 and £145.80 in 1992.

b) Single pensioners	*Average income £ per week July 1992 prices*			*Growth*		*Average income from each source as percentage of total income*		
				Percentage	*Percentage*			
Income Source	*1974*	*1979*	*1992*	*1974–1979*	*1979–1992*	*1974*	*1979*	*1992*
Earnings	8.10	5.90	5.10	–27	–14	10	7	4
Benefit income	51.80	58.00	70.80	12	22	64	69	56
Investment income	12.00	9.30	25.20	–23	172	15	11	20
Occupational pension	8.70	10.10	24.50	16	142	11	12	19
Other income	0.70	0.60	0.70	–14	29	1	1	1

b) Single pensioners	Average income £ per week July 1992 prices			Growth Percentage	Percentage	Average income from each source as percentage of total income		
Income Source	1974	1979	1992	1974–1979	1979–1992	1974	1979	1992
Total gross income	81.30	83.90	126.40	3	51	100	100	100
Deductions	10.80	10.30	17.00	–5	65	13	12	13
Total net income[1]	70.50	73.60	109.40	4	49	87	88	87
Total net income AHC[2]	59.10	60.70	93.00	3	53	N/A	N/A	N/A

[1] Median net income, at 1992 prices, was £60.70 in 1974, £66.80 in 1979 and £86.30 in 1992.
[2] Median net income after housing costs, at 1992 prices was £48.70 in 1974, £52.10 in 1979 and £62.80 in 1992.

c) All pensioner units	Average income £ per week July 1992 prices			Growth Percentage	Percentage	Average income from each source as percentage of total income		
Income Source	1974	1979	1992	1974–1979	1979–1992	1974	1979	1992
Earnings	16.40	12.90	9.90	–22	–23	15	12	6
Benefit income	60.80	68.20	84.40	12	24	57	61	50
Investment income	14.20	12.10	32.80	–15	171	13	11	20
Occupational income	15.10	17.90	40.00	19	123	14	16	24
Other income	0.60	0.70	1.00	13	48	1	1	1
Total gross income	107.10	111.80	168.10	4	50	100	100	100
Deductions	14.70	14.90	22.40	1	50	14	13	13
Total net income[1]	92.40	96.90	145.60	5	50	86	87	87
Total net income AHC[2]	79.00	81.90	129.50	4	58	N/A	N/A	N/A

[1] Median net income, at 1992 prices, was £65.60 in 1974, £68.40 in 1979 and £93.50 in 1992.
[2] Median net income after housing costs, at 1992 prices, was £50.00 in 1974, £53.00 in 1979 and £76.40 in 1992.

Notes to table 1:
(1) Components may not sum to totals owing to rounding.
(2) '*' denotes a figure of less than 0.5 per cent.
(3) All average amounts are means unless otherwise stated.
(4) All figures are before housing costs unless otherwise stated.
(5) Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age.
(6) '1990-1' denotes estimates from the combined sample for 1990 and 1991. One quarter of the 1991 Family Expenditure Survey sample has been omitted because of problems in the collection of information on community charge payments following the delayed issue of bills in April 1991. As a result the sample size in that year is too small to provide reliable estimates of pensioner's incomes. For this reason the remaining data for 1991 has been combined with that for 1990.
(7) 'N/A' means Not Applicable.

Table 2: Proportion of pensioner units with investment income and the average amount for those in receipt

	Percentage of units with investment income			Average amount for those in receipt (£ per week, 1992 prices)			Percentage growth in average amount since 1979
	1974	1979	1992	1974	1979	1992	1992
a) All pensioner units							
Pensioner couples	58	71	84	31·70	24·50	54·30	122
Single pensioners	49	57	71	24·40	16·40	35·60	117
All pensioner units	52	62	76	27·20	19·70	43·30	120
b) Recently retired pensioner units							
Pensioner couples	60	73	83	32·10	26·00	59·80	130
Single pensioners	54	60	67	20·40	15·20	51·20	236
All pensioner units	58	68	77	28·30	22·00	56·80	158

Notes:
(1) Recently retired pensioner units are defined as: single women aged 60–64; single men aged 65–69; and couples in which the husband is aged 65–69.
(2) All average amounts are means.

Table 3: Proportion of pensioner units with occupational pension and the average amount for those in receipt

	Percentage of units with occupational pension			Average amount for those in receipt (£ per week, 1992 prices)			Percentage growth in average amount since 1979
	1974	1979	1992	1974	1979	1992	1992
a) All pensioner units							
Pensioner couples	53	65	72	51·30	52·80	92·00	74
Single pensioners	24	32	53	37·20	35·00	59·90	51
All pensioner units	34	43	60	44·80	44·40	71·70	61

Table 3: Proportion of pensioner units with occupational pension and the average amount for those in receipt

	Percentage of units with occupational pension			Average amount for those in receipt (£ per week, 1992 prices)			Percentage growth in average amount since 1979
	1974	1979	1992	1974	1979	1992	1992
b) Recently retired pensioner units							
Pensioner couples	63	68	73	56·20	62·10	99·90	61
Single pensioners	24	37	53	46·40	37·70	71·70	90
All pensioner units	43	55	65	54·30	55·30	91·60	66

Notes:
(1) Estimates of the percentage of pensioner units of occupational pension income are based upon data from the family expenditure survey and the GAD survey of occupational pension schemes. Due to thin use of additional information, it is not possible to derive the overall average occupational receipt from the estimates in this table.
(2) Recently retired pensioner units are defined as: single women aged 60–64; single men aged 65–69; and couples in which the husband is aged 65-69.
(3) All average amounts are means.

Data Matching

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information given to the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) on 12 July, *Official Report,* column *573,* in respect of actions taken to establish and investigate inconsistency in information given in relation to claims for different benefits made by the same person.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have authorised further exercises to extend the comparison of information held on computer files to include housing benefit; council tax benefit; retirement pensions; widow's benefit; invalidity benefit and severe disablement allowance.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons over the age of 65 years are currently receiving the mobility component of the disability living allowance; and if he will break the figure down by sex and region showing the proportion of the over-65 population in each region receiving the benefit.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is in the tables.

Number of people 65 and over receiving the DLA mobility component by sex

Females	132,800
Males	137,200
Total	270,000

Note:
The figures are based on a quarterly 5 per cent. statistical extract as at 31 August 1994 (Source-ASD).

Number of people aged 65 and over receiving the DLA mobility component by region

	Number	Population	Percentage
Northern	20,300	497,500	4·1
Yorkshire and Humberside	29,500	795,600	3·7
East Midlands	18,900	649,300	2·9
East Anglia	7,400	366,700	2·0
South East	48,700	2,668,300	1·8
South West	17,700	903,500	2·0
West Midlands	26,000	820,400	3·2
North West	47,000	1,001,000	4·7

Number of people aged 65 and over receiving the DLA mobility component by region

	Number	Population	Percentage
Wales	24,600	506,000	4·9
Scotland	29,600	777,000	3·8
All	270,000	8,983,300	3·5

Notes:
1. The Numbers of people over 65 and receiving the mobility component are estimates based on a quarterly 5 per cent. sample as at 31 August 1994 (source—ASD).
2. Population figures are 1991 based projections for mid 1994 and not actual population figures (source OPCS and GAD for Scotland and Wales).

European Economic Area Nationals

Dr. Howells: to ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy toward nationals of EEA countries who have been engaged in casual employment in relation to whether they are regarded as being within the provisions of regulation (EEC) No. 1612/68, and whether they are exempt from the habitual residence test for claims for income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: Work has been defined by the European Court of Justice as needing to be "genuine and effective" before the person performing it comes within the scope of regulation (EEC) No. 1612/68. A national of an EEA country who has been engaged in "genuine and effective" work and who claims income support when unemployed is treated as being habitually resident.

Invalidity Benefit and Reduced Earnings Allowance

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give the age and sex distribution of current invalidity benefit claimants in Mid Glamorgan at *(a)* Porth, *(b)* Tonypandy, *(c)* Pontypridd and *(d)* Aberdare;

(2) if he will give for the Porth, Tonypandy, Aberdare and Pontypridd areas the number of invalidity benefit claimants claiming for an adult dependant but no child dependants and the number of these adult dependants not working;

(3) if he will give the number of invalidity benefit claimants in receipt of state earnings-related pensions and the average amount claimed in the areas of Porth, Tonypandy, Aberdare and Pontypridd;

(4) if he will give the number of claimants in the Porth, Tonypandy, Aberdare and Pontypridd areas claiming reduced earnings allowance.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION

Head Lice

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what response she has made to the open letter sent to her on 4 October by Community Hygiene Concern on the subject of head lice in schools.

Mr. Forth: The Department has replied to Community Hygiene Concern commending its good work in providing information and advice on the problem of head lice. however, the Department for Health is primarily responsible for child hygiene. I understand that that Department is in communication with Community Hygiene Concern over its "bug busting" campaign.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration he has now given to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation report into discretionary awards provision; and what action he proposes to take in the light of its findings.

Mr. Boswell: The provision of discretionary awards is in the first instance a matter for local authorities. However, the Government are concerned by evidence in the Gulbenkian report that potential students' chances of obtaining discretionary award support depend increasingly on where they happen to live. My right hon. Friend and I have had a number of discussions with interested parties and are keeping the situation under review.

Examination Marks

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students in each of the last three years in England and Wales were dissatisfied with the advanced level grades allocated to them and asked for their papers to be remarked; and in how many cases original marks were *(a)* upgraded, *(b)* downgraded and *(c)* unchanged.

Mr. Boswell: This information is not held centrally.

Teachers

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many teachers have taken early retirement in each of the last six years; and what has been the total cost of the retirement packages, including pension enhancements.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the number of members of the teachers' superannuation scheme, together with the corresponding average lump sum and annual pension, who retired on the ground of infirmity, redundancy or organisational efficiency in each of the last six years. Employers may enhance the pension of those who retire on the ground of redundancy or organisational efficiency: the cost of this is not recorded centrally.

		Infirmity retirements			*Premature retirement*		
Financial year ended	*Gender*	*Number retired*	*Average pension*[1] £	*Average lump sum*[1]	*Number retired*	*Average pension*[2] £	*Average lump sum*[2]
31 March 1989	Male	1,241	5,704	17,085	6,313	6,213	18,552
	Female	2,182	4,667	13,944	6,034	4,618	13,734
31 March 1990	Male	1,653	6,192	18,551	6,241	6,573	19,672
	Female	2,539	5,134	15,357	6,051	4,983	14,845
31 March 1991	Male	1,821	6,530	19,735	5,669	6,993	20,938
	Female	3,117	5,442	16,298	5,952	5,284	15,767
31 March 1992	Male	1,770	7,292	21,865	5,087	7,671	22,984
	Female	2,890	5,978	17,916	5,175	5,712	17,074
31 March 1993	Male	1,960	8,181	24,542	6,364	8,392	25,108
	Female	2,937	6,737	20,201	5,843	6,401	19,158
31 March 1994	Male	2,314	8,912	26,738	6,061	8,957	26,820
	Female	3,235	7,174	21,518	6,170	6,630	19,861

[1] Including the cost of enhancement.
[2] Does not include cost of enhancement which is payable by, and at the discretion of, individual employers.
Note:
The table includes teachers in the maintained schools sector, further and higher education and certain independent schools.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average annual cost of employing a physical education teacher.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department's estimate of the average annual cost of employing a classroom teacher in England and Wales as at 1 April 1994 is around £23,800. It is not possible to estimate the average annual cost of employing teachers in specific subjects.

Graduates

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many 1994 graduates are currently unemployed *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of 1994 graduates.

Mr. Boswell: Information on 1994 graduate destinations is not yet available. Provisional figures of graduates from full-time first degree courses at English institutions in academic year 1992–93 show that 13,600—

or 12 per cent.--were recorded as unemployed approximately six months after graduation.

University Students

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will estimate the average annual cost to public funds, including Higher Education Funding Council (England) grants and the payment of college and university fees, but extending maintenance grants and loans, of a student attending *(a)* the universities of Oxford or Cambridge and tutoring (i) a fee band 1 subject and (ii) a fee band 2 subject and *(b)* the average for such students at other English universities.

Mr. Boswell: The average annual cost to public funds per student at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge is about £4,900. The cost per student at other English universities ranges from just under £1,000 for the Open university to about £4,500. Institutions with high levels of part-time participation or which place a greater emphasis on the arts and humanities tend to have lower costs. The average annual cost per student at other English universities is about £2,800.

The information required to estimate the average annual cost by fee band is not readily available.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Members' Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Dorrell: I and my hon. Friends have not yet decided how many official Christmas cards we will send this year. The card chosen will cost 20p and will be posted second class. A copy will be placed in the Library at the time the first cards are posted. The information on staff time to sign, address and place cards in envelopes is not available.

Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will place in the Library a copy of the national playing fields register, divided into parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Sproat: The "Register of Recreational Land" records information by local authority district and not parliamentary constituencies. I will, however, consider the practicalities of presenting the information in this manner and will advise the hon. member as soon as possible.

ITN

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to revise the status of ITN as the only news provider available to the ITV companies following the ITC's decision to postpone the imposition of the 20 per cent. ownership limit.

Mr. Dorrell: None. The nomination of bodies corporate as nominated news providers is entirely a matter for the ITC, in accordance with the powers set out in section 32 of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Turner Bequest

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the terms of the Turner bequest of pictures to the nation; how these are now carried out; and if he will agree to meet the editors of the "Turner Journal".

Mr. Dorrell: The terms of the bequest under which J. M. T. Turner left his pictures to the nation are both complex and, in part, contradictory. Since opening of the Clore gallery in 1987 at the Tate gallery, London, there has been almost general agreement that the main conditions of the bequest have been met. Some of Turner's works are also displayed separately at the National gallery, London.

The display of the bequest is a matter for the trustees of the Tate and National galleries and it would be inappropriate, therefore, for me to meet the editors of the "Turner Journal" to discuss this matter.

Digital Terrestrial Frequencies

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the allocation of digital terrestrial frequencies.

Mr. Dorrell: The Trade and Technology Minister announced on 19 January 1994 that the Government had decided to make available the frequency band 217.5 MHz to 230 MHz for potential terrestrial digital audio broadcasting services in the United Kingdom.

My predecessor announced on 14 July 1994 that it was the Government's intention that spectrum, including channel 35, would be made available for digital terrestrial television.

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action he is taking to ensure that residents in the Channel islands pay the television licence fee.

Mr. Dorrell: Under section 180 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, responsibility for the administration of the television licensing system passed to the BBC with effect from 1 April 1991. The day-to-day administration and enforcement of the licensing regulations in the Channel islands is carried out actively by the island post offices under contract to the BBC.

TRANSPORT

Tamar Road Crossing

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the terms of reference for the investigation by consulting engineers into the question of a possible second Tamar road crossing; and when he hopes to receive their report.

Mr. Watts: Terms of reference for the studies have not yet been agreed. We are in discussion with the local authorities. I hope that we will be able to invite bids for the working early next year.

A38

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now announce his Department's preferred routes for the A38 trunk road improvements between the Saltash-Trerulefoot and Liskeard-Bodmin sections; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: I am pleased to be able to announce today the preferred routes for improvements of these two sections of the A38 trunk road in south east Cornwall. I have sent to my hon. Friend brochures giving details of the proposals. Brochures are also being sent to all affected and interested parties.

Public Transport, Merseyside

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the deregulation of Merseyside public transport;and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Transport Research laboratory has carried out a number of studies on our behalf into the effects of bus deregulation both nationally and locally including one on Merseyside in 1989. I am kept aware of the current situation in Merseyside through visits and meetings both with the Passenger Transport Authority and the Passenger Transport Executive.

Buses (Standing Passengers)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what information his Department has on the implications of accidents as a result of standing passengers on buses; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proposals his Department has for changes in *(a)* the regulations and *(b)* bus design in relation to standing passengers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The information available on the reducing number of standing passengers killed or injured on buses, including those moving either to a seat or to alight from the vehicle, does not indicate that any change to the provisions for ensuring the safe carriage of standing passengers on buses is necessary.

Driving Tests

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to introduce some form of post-driving test compulsory motorway training with appropriate flexibility taking into account proximity of motorways to the test applicant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: We have no plans to introduce compulsory post-test motorway training. However, in the new year we shall be launching a voluntary scheme for post-test driver training which will include a session on motorway driving. This will be part of the "Pass Plus" scheme, which is one of the measures we are introducing to improve new driver safety, following our consultation paper last year.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department has on the number of drivers receiving training from a qualified driving instructor before taking their driving test; and what information his Department has as to discount on car insurance on the use of a qualified driving instructor.

Mr. Norris: About 98 per cent. of drivers take professional driving instruction prior to taking their driving test. We have no information which indicates that insurance discounts are given as a result of taking qualified driving instruction, but discounts on motor insurance will be available to those who successfully complete our post-test training course, "Pass Plus", to be launched in the new year.

Overtaking

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Transport what plans the Government have to amend current legislation to prohibit drivers from overtaking vehicles that are loading or discharging school children.

Mr. Norris: None.

Railtrack

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the firms with which his Department has consulted, or is currently in consultation with, over the privatisation of Railtrack and the costs from each firm;

(2) what has been the total cost to public funds so far for consultations into the privatisation of Railtrack.

Mr. Watts: In the period up to 31 March 1994, the Department spent about £16·5 million on external consultancy costs on the whole rail privatisation programme. Planned expenditure in 1994–95 is £12 million. It is not possible to disaggregate the costs attributable to advice on Railtrack matters.

Crewe Bridge

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if the Highway Authority has received an application for Nantwich road to be closed due to engineering work on Crewe bridge;

(2) what are his Department's plans to divert traffic in Crewe and Nantwich;

(3) what consultations he has had with local traders in the Crewe bridge area of Nantwich road over the proposals for long-term closure of the main road for engineering work;

(4) what approval the Highway Authority has given for Nantwich road area to be closed for engineering work for a period of longer than three months;

(5) if he will publish the details of any diversion in the Crewe bridge area of Nantwich road;

(6) if he will direct Railtrack to carry out urgent consultations with traders in the Crewe bridge area of Nantwich road over the proposals for long-term closure of the main road for engineering work.

Mr. Watts: The reconstruction of Crewe station railway bridge is presently being undertaken by Railtrack. Crewe and Nantwich borough council, as agents for Cheshire county council who have responsibility for the A534—Nantwich road—which is carried by the bridge, is providing traffic management while the work is carried out and will be issuing details of any diversions in the area.

One complete weekend closure is planned for 26 and 27 November to allow the installation of bridge beams and a six-week closure is proposed from 11 March 1995.

There are no plans for Nantwich road to be closed for a period longer than three months.

My Department has no plans to divert traffic in the area.

Consultation with local traders about closures on the A534 is a matter for Railtrack and Cheshire county council and their agents.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a special budget urgently available for temporary car parking in the Crewe bridge area of Nantwich road to Crewe and Nantwich borough council.

Mr. Norris: No. The resources my Department allocates for local transport infrastructure go to local highway authorities and passenger transport executives. Crewe and Nantwich borough council are not eligible.

Railway Construction (Compensation)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to modify the Railways Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 to extend the right for compensation to persons or businesses damaged by bridge engineering works over the railway;

(2) if he will institute a study of the rules of compensation given to businesses in the area of roads which are closed for engineering work with a view to amending the legislation in the Railways Clauses Consolidation Act 1845.

Mr. Watts: There are no plans to amend the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 to require compensation to be paid for loss of trade resulting from highway closure necessitated by railway bridge works. Retailers and other businesses have no legal right to any prevailing level of passing trade and temporary reductions in traffic flows have to be accepted as part of the commercial risk of running businesses.

Driving Licences

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend driving licence legislation so that United Kingdom citizens who moved abroad with short-period driving licences do not have to retake their driving tests on their return.

Mr. Norris: We plan to use the new powers under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to enable drivers who can prove that they held a full short period licence before 1 January 1976—when such licences were replaced by ones valid till age 70—to regain their full driving entitlement without having to pass a further test.

LGV Driving Schools

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what amounts of correspondence he has received on the issue or regulation of LGV driving schools.

Mr. Norris: The Department has received nine letters in the last 12 months asking about the regulation of LGV driving instruction.

Unauthorised Road Works

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the penalties for engineering work carried out on main roads for a period of longer than three months which has not been approved by the Highways Authority.

Mr. Norris: The carrying out of unauthorised works on or to a highway would constitute unlawful interference with the highway. Part IX of the Highways Act 1980 sets out the various offences of unlawful interference with a highway and specifies the penalties by way of a fine appropriate to each.

Radioactive Materials (Transport)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when Road Transport will implement the current IAEA regulations for the safe transport of radioactive materials, first published in 1985.

Mr. Norris: Most road transport in the United Kingdom of radioactive materials is already being undertaken in conformity with current IAEA regulations. United Kingdom regulations implementing those IAEA regulations should be made by March next year.

Road Closures

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are taken to avoid closing main roads in trading areas to all traffic for engineering work for the two weekends before Christmas.

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for the traffic authorities concerned.

Staff Annual Reports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will analyse the annual staff report markings for 1994 in his Department by gender, grade and ethnic group.

Mr. Norris: The Department already does so.

Road Schemes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to reassess all road schemes for which contracts have not yet been let to take into account the recommendations of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution.

Mr. Watts: Very careful consideration will be given to all of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

Railways

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to include in the criteria for public contribution to railways costs the social and environmental benefits of attracting traffic to rail from road.

Mr. Watts: It is already the Government's policy to subsidise loss-making passenger services, because they perform a valuable social service. Grants are also available to the rail freight sector to encourage a switch from road to rail in recognition of environmental and other benefits.

Cycling

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he has made to the report "Trust Pedal Power-A Review of Transport Policies and Programmes

1994–95", a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I expect to discuss aspects of this report with representatives of the cyclists' public affairs group, when I meet them soon. I am pleased that the report recognises the opportunity offered by the new package approach to local transport funding. Our circular on transport policies and programmes draws local authorities' attention to the importance of incorporating cycling provision within their package bids where appropriate. We shall give due weight to such provision in the forthcoming settlement.

Environment Action Programme

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken under the fifth environment action programme to strengthen the environmental input into the transport policies of the European Union.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I seek to ensure full consideration of environmental impacts at all appropriate stages in the development of transport policies in the European Union.

Driving Standards Agency

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the reason for the delay in settling the 1 April 1994 pay award for driving examiners and the executive and clerical support grades of the Driving Standards Agency.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* This is an operational matter for the Driving Standards Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from S.J. Ford to Mr. Jeff Rooker dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question concerning the reason for the delay in settling the 1 April 1994 pay award for driving examiners and the executive, clerical and support grades of the Driving Standards Agency.

In making any pay offer to staff for 1994–95, the Agency must be limited to what it can afford. Without ways of generating new money DSA's offer, had it been made quickly early in 1994, would have been very small, and at best no more than one per cent. The Agency has tried since then to work up the pay increase to a higher level through productivity arrangements. In an attempt to generate higher productivity, and therefore earn more fees, the Agency has made an offer of 2·5 per cent. on average payable in the form of an attendance bonus. In acknowledgement of the delay since April part of this, in the form of a lump sum bonus not linked to attendance has been offered.

Equines

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the number of equines in service in London streets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* None.

MV Norrana

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the co-ordinates of the location of the ferry MV Norrana when fire was discovered on board at 00.22 hours on 9 April 1990.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Coastguard Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C.J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as the question deals with an operational matter, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

The position of MV 'NORRANA' at 0022 on 9 April 1990 was 51 34.7N 005 44.9W.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the times at which, during the fire incident on board the MV Norrana on 9 April 1990 *(a)* the call for helicopter and firefighter assistance was received by Her Majesty's Coastguard, *(b)* Her Majesty's Coastguard requested search and rescue helicopters and firefighters from RAF Brawdy and Dyfed fire service, *(c)* search and rescue helicopters took off from RAF Brawdy, *(d)* helicopters arrived at Haverfordwest to pick up firefighters, *(e)* the helicopter took off with firefighters, *(f)* the helicopter arrived over MV Norrana and *(g)* firefighters began to be lowered.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Coastguard Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as the question deals with an operational matter, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

During the fire incident on board the MV 'NORRANA' in April 1990 *(a)* the call for helicopter and firefighter assistance was received by Her Majesty's Coastguard at 23.19 on 8 April, *(b)* Her Majesty's Coastguard requested search and rescue helicopters from RAF Brawdy at 23.20 and firefighters from Dyfed Fire Service at 23.22, *(c)* search and rescue helicopters took off from RAF Brawdy at 23.40, *(d)* not recorded, *(e)* the helicopter took off with firefighter at 00.07 on 9 April, *(f)* the helicopter arrived over MV 'NORRANA' at 00.20, and *(g)* firefighters began to be lowered at 00.25

Operation Sea Fire

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what emergency service personnel and equipment, were placed on board the Stena Sea Lynx prior to exercise Operation Sea Fire on 17 October.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Coastguard Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport had asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as the question deals with an operational matter, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

During exercise SEAFIRE on 10 October 1994 no emergency personnel or equipment, except directing staff (distaff) were placed on board prior to
exercise.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the co-ordinates of RAF Chivenor, of the position of the ferry Stena Sea Lynx throughout Operation Sea Fire on 17 October, and the pick-up point in West Glamorgan for firefighters involved in the exercise.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Coastguard Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as the question deals with an operational matter, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

The details of co-ordinates you requested are:

a. RAF Chivenor: 51 05N 04 09W.

b. Stena Sea Lynx during exercise SEAFIRE on 10 October 1994: 51 10N 005 30W - Vessel drifted during exercise.

c. Grid reference for pick-up point for West Glamorgan Fire Service: Sheet 159 672 989.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he intends to take to ensure that search and rescue helicopters respond within the one-hour limit set by his Department and the Ministry of Defence following the Operation Sea Fire on 17 October.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Coastguard Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C.J Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as the question deals with an operational matter, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

The MOD/DOT target is to locate search and rescue (SAR) helicopters in order to provide a helicopter at a range of 40 miles anywhere off the coast of the United Kingdom in 1 hour by day and 100 miles in 2 hours by night. These criteria are based on readiness states of 15 minutes by day and 45 minutes by night, timings which in normal circumstances are usually bettered.

Market Testing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are *(a)* the results of the market test of his offices in Eastcote, *(b)* the total cost to public funds of the market test to date and *(c)* his estimates for the savings per year that he expects his Department to make.

Mr. Norris: *(a)* Eastcote Office Services lost the distribution market test. Call off contracts have been set up for the supply of stationery and office equipment. Eastcote is to close on 31 March 1995; some staff will transfer to central London. *(b)* £112,100 *(c)* £655,000.

Staff Annual Reports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the reporting year 1992–93 the annual staff report box markings for female typists excluding typing manager grades.

Mr. Norris: Thirty box one, 270 box two, 211 box three, and three box four.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the percentage of *(a)* female support grades and *(b)* male grade 7s receiving box 1, 2 and 3 markings in 1992–93 on the basis of the information supplied in his answer of 18 July, *Official Report*, columns *69-70.*

Mr. Norris: *(a)* box one nil, box two 32 per cent, and box three 68 per cent.

(b) box one 5 per cent., box two 53 per cent., and box three 42 per cent.

Cycling

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has planned or already undertaken to assess the potential of cycling and walking for short journeys.

Mr. Norris: We have undertaken a review of the published literature on studies of short trips involving pedestrians and cyclists, as part of our research programme, and we expect to publish it in the new year.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what protection he intends to give to the west Dorset coast of special scientific interest affected by the A35 Chideock–Morcombelake bypass;

(2) what protection he intends to give the Roughs site of special scientific interest affected by the A259 Dymchurch–M20 junction 11 improvement;

(3) what protection he intends to give to the Combe Haven site of special scientific interest affected by the A259 Bexhill and Hastings Western bypass;

(4) what protection he intends to give to the Pevensey levels site of special scientific interest affected by the A259 Pevensey–Bexhill improvement;

(5) what protection he intends to give to the Camber Sands, Rye harbour site of special scientific interest and Walland marsh site of special scientific interest affected by the A259 Rye bypass.

Mr. Watts: These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms. Joan Walley, dated 23 November 1994:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. Watts has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the protection it is proposed to give to a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) affected by proposed schemes to improve the A259 trunk road between Pevensey and Rye in East Sussex.

The proposed A259 Pevensey-Bexhill Improvement would involve the construction of a new second carriageway generally on the north side of the existing road. The widening has been designed to minimise the impact on the Pevensey levels SSSI. The proposals include the creation of about 2·5 ha of new woodland and scrub habitat and over 5000 metres of new ditch. The new planting would increase the habitat available to reed and sedge warblers and the new length of ditch would substantially increase the aquatic habitat. Arrangements would be made to rescue and relocate, as far as possible, any important plan specimens before construction started. An improved drainage system would better control run-off from the road.

The proposals for the A259 Bexhill and Hastings Western Bypass include a high viaduct across Combe Haven, instead of an embankment, to minimise landtake and reduce the impact on the SSSI. Special measures would be taken to keep damage during construction to a minimum and to restore the area as far as possible. Large scale planting of native trees and shrubs to reflect local conditions would be carried out. Elsewhere along the scheme, the development of wetland habitats in ditches and storage ponds would help replace lost habitats.

Detailed proposals for minimising the A259 Dymchurch–M20 scheme on the Roughs SSSI have been made available to the public inquiry which is underway at present. These include measures to replicate, as far as possible, existing conditions. This would include grading the earthworks to match existing gradients and re-using soils

and local seed sources to encourage the re-establishment of a varied species rich grassland. At the top of the cutting, a near vertical rock face would be created. Rocks with a particular good cover of lichens and mosses would be set aside during the contract to be replaced on the new rock face. Translocation of tree bark would also be carried out with a view to recolonising trees in the area. Road drainage would be kept separate from ground water issuing from the cuttings. The ground water would be diverted into existing streams to help maintain their natural habitats.

The preferred route for the A259 Rye Bypass has not yet been designed in detail and will, in any event, be subject to review as part of the A259 Guestling Thorn to east of Rye Planning Conference. As presently envisaged, the route would be placed in tunnel where it crosses the Camber Sands and Rye Saltings SSSI. The salt marsh is expected to recover quickly once construction is complete. The Rye Harbour and Walland Marsh SSSIs would be affected by the route but an objective of the detailed design will be to keep its impact to the minimum possible.

Where appropriate, the proposed protection measures referred to above have been developed in consultation with English Nature and the National Rivers Authority.

On the A35 Chideock-Morcombelake Bypass, this scheme has recently been fully debated and examined at a public inquiry and it would not be proper for me to comment on the Minister's behalf at this stage. The Inspector will submit his report and recommendations to the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment in due course.

Property Purchases

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many properties have been acquired under the Department's discretionary purchase scheme since its introduction in January 1992; what was the total value; and how much money has been allocated out of the Department's budget to the scheme this year.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Geoffrey Clinton-Brown, dated 23 November 1994:

As you probably know, since the creation of the Highways Agency in April this year, it falls to me as Chief Executive to write to MPs who have tabled questions on matters which relate to operational matters of the Highways Agency and to give the information requested.

In answer to your question about the discretionary purchase scheme operated by the Agency on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport, the position is that approximately 540 properties have been acquired to date. Total purchase costs have amounted to a little over £60·0 million. Excluded from this total are legal surveyor fees, plus disturbance compensation, where payable, and also departmental handling costs. Separate provision is not made in the Department's budget for this scheme but it is covered by the overall Lands budget for 1994–95, totalling £236. million.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Norman Shaw Buildings

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what steps he takes on a daily basis to ensure that tradesmen's vehicles, refuse collection trucks, post office vehicles and other motor vehicles do not obstruct access to or prevent parking in the Norman Shaw north car park on the part of hon. Members or their staff.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The arrangements for parking are kept under regular review by the Administration Committee. If the hon. Gentleman has details of any specific difficulties being experienced I shall invite the Committee to consider them.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what consultations he has had with right hon. and hon. Members with offices in the Norman Shaw Buildings before proceeding with the redevelopment of the car park at those buildings; what was the total cost of that work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: As a consequence of work commencing on the phase 2 site the Administration Committee gave approval for the five parking spaces in Canon Row reserved for residents of the phase 1 building to be transferred to the area in the Norman Shaw car park between the main gates and the entrance barrier. In order to compensate for these spaces, an additional six spaces were provided in the inner courtyard of Norman Shaw north. Members with rooms in the Norman Shaw buildings were informed of these revised arrangements in a notice issued by the Serjeant at Arms on 2 February. The removal of the security hut at the Embankment entrance this summer has enabled the layout of the Norman Shaw car parks to be improved with an overall gain of a further six spaces. The total cost of the redevelopment work was £43,400 including VAT.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) what consultations he had with right hon. and hon. Members with offices in the Norman Shaw Buildings before proceeding with the installation of card-controlled access gates in the tunnel giving access to the Palace from Westminster underground station; what was the total cost of that work; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations he had with right hon. and hon. Members with offices in the Norman Shaw Buildings before proceeding with the provision of new security gate access facilities at those buildings; what was the total cost of that work; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what consultations he had with right hon. and hon. Members with offices in Norman Shaw Buildings before proceeding with the development of card-controlled access equipment to the rear door of the Norman Shaw North Building; what was the total cost of that work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ray Powell: The installation of automatic access controls at these entrances is in line with the policy on access to the precincts approved by the House in 1989. It is not the practice to publish details of the costs of security measures which have been implemented.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many parking spaces at the Norman Shaw Buildings are currently allocated to staff with residences within the Palace and its outbuildings; and who are the staff concerned.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Six spaces are allocated to the following: the Speaker's Secretary; the Clerk of the House; the Serjeant at Arms; the Deputy Serjeant at Arms; the Head Office Keeper and the Second Office Keeper.

Residential and Overnight Accommodation

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will give a

breakdown by building, size and location of all residential and overnight accommodation which is currently available within the Palace and its outbuildings and by whom precisely that accommodation is used; and if he will estimate the annual cost of providing that accommodation in terms of construction, maintenance, decoration, cleaning, notional lost rental value and other costs.

Mr. Ray Powell: Details of House of Commons residential and overnight accommodation within the parliamentary precincts are contained in the parliamentary space audit database. I have asked the Director of Works to write to the hon. Gentleman. Details of the annual cost could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Photocopiers

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee whether daily checks are made on the quality of the copies provided by photocopiers in the Norman Shaw buildings.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The photocopiers in the Norman Shaw buildings are monitored and serviced twice daily. In addition, the staff rely on users to report any interim faults including deterioration of copy quality.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee on how many occasions in the last 12 months for which figures are available repairs have been required to photocopiers *(a)* in the Norman Shaw North building and *(b)* elsewhere within the Palace of Westminster; on average how many calls per copier per month each of these two figures represent; and what was the total cost of the purchase, servicing and maintenance of all photocopiers in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I assume that the hon. Member's question relates to machines provided for the use of Members and their staff.

During the 12 months November 1993 to October 1994 inclusive, the number of occasions on which faults requiring the attention of a service engineer were logged for those photocopying machines supplied by the Serjeant at Arms for Members' use was 109 in the Norman Shaw North building and 390 elsewhere in the parliamentary estate. This represents an average of 0·91 calls per copier per month in Norman Shaw North building and 0·57 calls per copier per month elsewhere in the parliamentary estate. The total cost of leasing which includes the costs of maintaining the photocopiers supplied by the Serjeant at Arms for Members' use was £324,177.24 in financial year 1993–94.

Parliamentary Staff

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if he will give figures, grades, titles and ranks for all officers of the House whose salaries are higher than those of hon. Members of the House as at June 1994.

Mr. Beith: One hundred and one officers of the House in the following grades receive basic salaries above the £31,687 paid to hon. Members:

	Grade
Clerk of the House	1
Clerk Assistant	2
Clerk of Committees	2
Principal Clerks, Class I	3
Speaker's Counsel	3
Principal Clerks, Class II	4
Deputy Principal Clerks	5
Deliverer of the Vote	5
Assistant to Speaker's Counsel	5
Supervisor of Broadcasting	6
Senior Clerks	7
Deputy Deliverers of the Vote	7
Serjeant at Arms	3
Deputy Serjeant	4
Director of Works	4
Assistant Serjeant	6
Deputy Director of Works	6
Deputy Assistant Serjeant	7
Principal Building Surveyor	7
Librarian	3
Deputy Librarian	4
Assistant Librarians	5
Deputy Assistant Librarians	6
Senior Library Clerks	7
Director of Finance and Administration	3
Accountant	4
Head of Establishments Office	4
Head of Finance Office	5
Computer Officer	5
Deputy Accountant	6
Staff Inspector	6
Deputy Head of Establishments Office	6
Editor, Official Report	4
Deputy Editor	5
Principal Assistant Editors	6
Assistant Editors	6
Committee Sub-Editors	7
Director of Catering Services	5
Catering Accountant	7
Executive Chef	7
Speaker's Secretary	5

Salary scales for these grades as at June 1994 are as follows:

Grade	Pay Range £ per annum	Implementation Dates
1	95,051	1.4.94
2	65,990–79,394	1.4.94
3	56,131–66,283	1.4.94
4	47,897–57,612	1.8.93
5	39,365–57,612	1.8.93
6	30,680–49,697	1.8.93
7	29,436–44,050	1.8.93
	27,106–41,003	1.8.93

Note:
Grade 3 rates include £2,000 per annum London allowance. All rates below grade 3 include recruitment and retention allowance.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if he will give a breakdown by grades, salaries and functions of the number of people currently employed by the House.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Member to the 16th Annual Report of the House of Commons Commission (House of Commons Paper No. 602 of Session 1993–94). He will find the information that he requires in the Departmental annual reports and appendices 1 and 2, subject to the revision of the pay scales for grades 1,2 and 3 with effect from 1 April 1994 as follows:

Grade 1: – £95,051 –
Grade 2: – £65,990 – £79,394
Grade 3: – £56,131 – £66,283

Police and Security Staff

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* security staff are currently deployed within the Palace of Westminster; and what is the total annual cost of that deployment.

Mr. Beith: One hundred and sixty police officers and 205 security officers are currently deployed within the Parliamentary Precincts. The House of Commons' share of the cost of the security force was £10·317 million in 1993–94.

SCOTLAND

Council House Sales

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by region, the number of council houses sold under right-to-buy legislation in the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of local authority houses sold by region under the right-to-buy legislation for the five year period from 1989 is shown in the table:

Right to buy sales to local authority sitting tenants[1]

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	Total
Scotland	29,182	26,943	18,755	19,829	16,366	111,075
Borders	505	304	262	268	270	1,609
Central	2,132	1,568	1,091	1,247	1,184	7,222
Dumfries and Galloway	692	494	407	510	552	2,655
Fife	2,213	1,500	1,051	1,183	905	6,852
Grampian	1,635	1,540	1,272	1,985	1,998	8,430
Highland	666	584	558	672	659	3,139
Lothian	5,520	4,019	2,665	2,442	1,774	16,420
Strathclyde	13,671	13,689	9,413	9,852	7,658	54,283
Tayside	2,001	3,127	1,894	1,535	1,221	9,778
Islands Councils	147	118	142	135	144	686

[1] Includes a small number of voluntary sales.

Dentistry

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what means he has of monitoring whether NHS dental services are achieving national targets in improving dental health in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government monitor the state of dental health from the results of a range of epidemiological surveys based on the inspection of a sample of individual patients. Annual surveys of child dental health in Scotland are carried out under the Scottish health boards' dental epidemiological programme; five year-old and 12 or 14 year-old children are surveyed in alternate years. In the United Kingdom as a whole 10-yearly surveys of adult and child dental health are carried out by the Office of Population Census and Surveys; the last adult survey was in 1988 and the most recent child survey was in 1993.

Housing

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by region, the number of schemes between district councils and developers and housing associations that have been established in the last five years to build new houses to rent; and if he will list, by region, the number of new houses to rent that these schemes have provided.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on local authority joint ventures with the private sector to build new houses for rent is not held centrally.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the pupil-teacher ratios for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94 for public section (i) nursery schools, (ii) primary schools, (iii) secondary schools, (iv) non-maintained

schools, (v) special schools and (vi) all schools; and whether these figures include unqualified teachers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested for education authority schools is as follows. All teachers in Scottish schools are qualified; therefore there are no unqualified teachers included in the calculation of pupil:teacher ratios.

Pupil: teacher ratios in Education Authority schools in Scotland at September

	1992–93	*1993–94*
Nursery	25·5	25·9
Primary	19·3	19·5
Seconday	12·6	12·8
Special	4·3	4·5
All Schools	15·6	15·8

Teachers

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many newly-trained teachers had obtained employment in education by *(a)* September and *(b)* May following their qualification; and what percentage this represents of the total of newly qualified teachers for each year since 1990–91.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is collected in respect of the destination of newly qualified teachers in the September and March following graduation. The table shows in respect of each year the number who were known to be teaching in the September and March following graduation. The destination was unknown for 21 per cent. of teachers graduating in June 1991, 25 per cent. in 1992 and 34 per cent. in 1993.

Graduates known to be employed as teachers

	September		*March*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Qualifying in June of:				
1991	829	47	1,134	64
1992	920	47	1,198	61
1993	997	43	1,251	54

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many teachers were registered unemployed in Scotland in *(a)* May and *(b)* September for each year since 1990–91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the previous occupation of the unemployed is available from the labour force survey, a sample survey of households. Unfortunately, the sample size is too small to give a reliable estimate of the number of unemployed teachers in Scotland.

Nuisance Legislation

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what conclusions the Government have reached in the light of the responses to their consultation paper "Contaminated Land Clean-up and Control" and the recent consultation exercise on the revision of Scotland's nuisance legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Government intend to replace the existing Scottish nuisance provisions in the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897 with those of part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which apply mainly to England and Wales. A clear majority of the 37 responses to our August consultation paper were in favour of such a change, which will usefully strengthen controls on nuisance in Scotland.

I hope to make a further announcement on the outcome of the contaminated land review shortly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Quangos

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds have been allocated to non-governmental organisations by the Overseas Development Administration during the latest financial year; and who have been their recipients.

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Administration allocated £158,449,755 to United Kingdom non-governmental organisations in 1993–94. Details of the grants paid to recipients have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Western Saharans

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have made to finance emergency aid to alleviate the immediate crisis in the western Sahara; and what plans are being put into effect to provide resources to western Saharan refugees to rebuild the fabric of their society in exile in the medium and longer term.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom contributes to the Saharawi refugees through its regular budget payments to UNHCR and the European Union. We have no plans for any direct bilateral contribution to the Polisario-run camps following their recent devastation by rain and flooding.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the damage caused by the rains and floods in the western Saharan refugee camps of southern Algeria on 8 September and 29 and 30 October; and how many refugees are without shelter.

Mr. Baldry: Schools, hospitals and dispensaries made of compressed sand-based bricks in the camps were damaged, as were tents and food and other supplies. It is understood that the earlier wave of torrential rains left some 20,000 people without shelter; the rains at the end of October, according to UNHCR, left up to a further 30,000 people shelterless and eight died.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance will be given in the immediate future to the western Saharan refugees, to supply tents, blankets, medicines, food and fuel.

Mr. Baldry: The UN department of humanitarian affairs and UNHCR have provided cash for local relief purchases and have airlifted tents, blankets, plastic sheeting and electricity generators into Tindouf. A UNHCR and world food programme assessment mission has recently visited the affected area and arrangements have been made urgently to replenish destroyed food stocks.

Overseas Funding

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which directorates in the European Commission are responsible for funding overseas population and reproductive health activities.

Mr. Baldry: Directorate General VIII is responsible for any such programmes in countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Directorate General I is responsible for projects of this type in Asia, Latin America and Mediterranean.

China

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs if he will place in the Library copies of reports on population control in China received by his Department from the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations fund for population activities.

Mr. Baldry: Copies of the United Nations Population Fund 1993 inventory of population projects and the International Planned Parenthood Federation 1994 annual report supplement will be placed in the Library of the House, together with a copy of China's national report to the international conference on population and development.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the reasons why the Chinese Government bans the publication of official statistics on methods of population control.

Mr. Baldry: We understand that the Government of China does publish yearly statistics on the number of people using contraceptives, including information on methods used.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department had with representatives of the People's Republic of China at the international conference on population in Cairo.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom delegation participated with Chinese and other delegations to the international conference on population and development in discussions on reproductive rights and a range of other issues.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings his Department has had with the Chinese embassy to discuss Chinese population control policies.

Mr. Baldry: Officials from my Department meet on a regular basis with officials from the Chinese embassy to discuss a range of issues, including population.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the reasons for the prevalence of sterilisation as a major method of population control in China.

Mr. Baldry: Steriiisation is an important method of contraception for couples who have completed childbearing in many countries, not just China. It is one of the most popular methods of contraception in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what statistics are used by his Department to assess the effect of Chinese population control policies on the human rights of Chinese women.

Mr. Baldry: Reliable statistical data relating to alleged abuses of women's human rights in population programmes are not available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department had about Chinese population control with representatives of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations fund for population activities at the international conference on population in Cairo; and with what results.

Mr. Baldry: Officials met with staff from the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations population fund at the international conference on population and development and continue to have dialogue with these two organisations. Both organisations remain committed to promoting better reproductive health care and free choice.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those projects to which the Overseas Development Administration has provided funding under the aid and trade provision since June 1993.

Mr. Baldry: A list of aid and trade provision projects approved for funding since June 1993 is as follows:

ATP agreements concluded since June 1993

Country	*Project*
1993	
Malaysia	Railway double tracking
Morocco	Tetouan gas turbines
India	Bombay and Delhi airports
1994	
Lesotho	Muela hydropower project
China	Chicken processing plant phase II
Sri Lanka	Kundasale strategic study
Chile	Santiago traffic control
Thailand	Mini hydros

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the projects funded under the aid and trade provision in *(a)* Malaysia, *(b)* Indonesia and *(c)* Nigeria, since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: Lists of projects funded under the aid and trade provision in Indonesia and Malaysia have been placed in the Libraries of the House. No aid and trade provision projects have been funded in Nigeria.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all projects financed under the aid and trade provisions since 1984.

Mr. Baldry: A list of all aid and trade provision projects financed since 1984 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria he uses for determining whether assistance should be given to a country under the aid and trade provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Following the wide-ranging aid and trade provision review announced in June 1993, country eligibility criteria for aid and trade provision is based on credit-worthy low-income developing countries with a 1989 per capita income of under US $700.

Reproductive Health Services

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is European Union policy on funding reproductive and sexual health services for adolescents in developing countries.

Mr. Baldry: The issue of reproductive and sexual health services for adolescents is not treated as a separate policy by the European Union. Under the European Union's broader health care programme to developing countries there are projects which include the provision of improved reproductive health services to all, including adolescents.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what budget lines in which European Union directorates can be used for population, reproductive and sexual health projects in developing countries.

Mr. Baldry: The primary source of funding for such projects in developing countries is the EC's country aid programme for the state concerned. African, Caribbean and Pacific programmes are funded through the European development fund. Asian, Latin American and Mediterranean programmes are funded through the budget lines for the regions—Asia B7–3000, Latin America B7–3010, Mediterranean B7–4051 for individual Mediterranean countries and B7–4080 for Mediterranean regional programmes. Three smaller budget lines are also relevant: B7–5046—health programmes in the fight against AIDS in developing countries: B7–5047—maternal and child health care; B7–5050—aid for population policies and programmes in developing countries.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what follow-up initiatives are taking place within the European Union in the context of the Cairo programmes of action with non-governmental organisations and with officials of the European Union member states; and who is the point of contact in Brussels for an hon. Member wishing to take these matters further.

Mr. Baldry: The European Union held a co-ordination meeting of member states earlier this month to discuss action to be taken in respect of the Cairo programme of action and plans further meetings. European Union member states will be represented at the development assistance committee meeting, which is focussing on population assistance, to be held in Paris at the end of the month. The third European parliamentarians' consultation on population, reproductive health and development will be held in Brussels in May next year. If hon. Members require further information they should contact the Overseas Development Administration in the first instance.

Overseas Superannuation Programme

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the average pension payment made under the overseas superannuation programme in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1993.

Mr. Baldry: Most overseas pensions are paid monthly, though some 20 per cent. are paid at less frequent intervals. The average pension payment in 1994 is about £420, compared with £431 in 1993.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the forecast number of pension payments to be made under the overseas superannuation programme for each of the next three years.

Mr. Baldry: It is expected that the number of pension payments will decrease about 4 per cent. a year in line with the decline in the overseas pensioner population, which is at present around 34,000. The forecast number of payments for each of the next three years is about:

1995: 336,000
1996: 322,500
1997: 309,500

Withholding of Aid

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those recipients of Overseas Development Administration bilateral aid which have had aid withheld following failure to adhere to International Monetary Fund and World bank reform programmes since 1985.

Mr. Baldry: Since 1985 there have been occasions for temporarily withholding promised balance of payments aid in support of economic reform, following slippages in implementing policies agreed with the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, in Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia.

In this period, balance of payments support for reforms in Nigeria was suspended as a result of serious doubts about the direction of policy. Balance of payments support, together with other forms of development aid, was discontinued in Somalia and Sudan for wider reasons.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries to which aid has been curtailed due to contravention of the Overseas Development Administration's good government criteria since 1990.

Mr. Baldry: Significant cases of restrictions on aid, for a longer or shorter period, since the beginning of 1990 because of concerns over good government include Burma, China, The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Peru, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Zambia. In some of those cases, action reflected concern about other issues, notably economic policies, as well as good government. In addition, aid to South Africa was limited to non-government channels prior to a democratic Government taking office 1994.

African Development Bank

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the United Kingdom's annual contribution to the African development bank fund.

Mr. Baldry: In 1993–94, a payment of £1·8 million—equivalent to 1·9 million special drawing rights at the agreed rate of exchange—was made to the African development bank representing the final instalment of the paid-in element of the UK subscription to the fourth

general capital increase; and £18 million was drawn down again United Kingdom pledges to the African development fund.

World Bank

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the United Kingdom's annual contribution to the International Development Association arm of the World bank;

(2) what is the United Kingdom's annual contribution to the International Finance Corporation;

(3) what is the United Kingdom's annual contribution to the World bank;

(4) what is the United Kingdom's annual contribution to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Mr. Baldry: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Development Association and the International Finance Corporation are members of the World bank group.

In 1993–94, a payment of $19·8 million—£12·9 million at the rate of exchange on the date of payment—was made to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This was the final instalment of the paid-in element of the United Kingdom subscription to the 1988 general capital increase.

International Development Association resources are committed over three years, but donor contributions are drawn down typically over a 10-year period in line with project expenditure. International Development Association is currently drawing down resources against the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th—current—replenishments. United Kingdom payments in 1993–94 totalled $209·3 million.

In 1993–94, payments totalling £7·3 million were made to the International Finance Corporation, comprising the second of five instalments of $10·5 million—£7·1 million at the rate of exchange on the date of payment—of the United Kingdom subscription to the International Finance Corporation's 1991 capital increase; and £230,000 in support of International Finance Corporation advisory services for Africa.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the British Government's contribution to the World bank's fifth dimension arrangements for re-financing multilateral debt.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom does not contribute to the International Development Association fifth dimension, which is funded primarily by annual allocations from International Development Association loan reflows.

Multilateral Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he will *(a)* monitor Britain's contributions to multilateral aid and *(b)* ensure that those contributions are (i) well-spent and (ii) subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom participates actively in meetings at which overall policy priorities and expenditure proposals by multilateral organisations are discussed. The policies and programmes of the multilateral development banks are discussed and determined by their respective boards of directors, on all of which the United Kingdom is represented. For assistance channelled through the European Community, policy issues are discussed in the Council of Ministers of the European Union and project proposals are considered in management committees. There is frequent contact between ODA administrators and advisers with the senior management of the multilateral institutions, a major objective being to help improve the efficiency of their systems and procedures including evaluation. Contributions to multilateral organisations which are administered by ODA form part of the aid programme which is subject to scrutiny by Parliament.

Women

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government have done to provide increased opportunities for, and participation by, women in education, training, planning and work in developing countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The enhancement of the status of women is one of the Overseas Development Administration's seven priority objectives. The 1994 departmental report on Foreign and Commonwealth Office expenditure describes progress in pursuing this objective. The 1995 report will do likewise.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next plans to visit Ilford to discuss the future of manufacturing industry.

Mr. Eggar: I hope to meet manufacturers from Ilford and the surrounding area early next year in the course of a series of meetings to promote manufacturing in London.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he will take to increase investment in manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heseltine: The most important influence on investment is a stable economic climate built on low inflation. Underlying inflation is at its lowest level for 27 years. My Department is helping companies to win in world markets through improvements in their competitiveness.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were in employment in manufacturing industries in June 1979 and June 1994.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Employment in manufacturing industry—Great Britain—was 7·3 million in June 1979 and 4·6 million in June 1994. The fall in manufacturing employment since 1979 reflects structural changes and sharply increased productivity.

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve the competitiveness of United Kingdom manufacturing firms.

Mr. Heseltine: The White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" sets out the most comprehensive agenda ever to raise the competitiveness of United Kingdom manufacturing firms. The Government are committed to work with business to

create a climate in which all United Kingdom companies can compete and beat the world's best.

Small Companies

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to improve procedures to reduce the late payment of debt to small companies.

Mr. Ian Taylor: In the White Paper on competitiveness in May this year we announced a number of new measures to address the problem of late payment. The measures include:

- new prompt payment requirements for Government Departments and their agencies;
- improvements to court procedures for debt recovery and a review of the small claims limit;
- the implementation of proposals that public companies should state their payment policies in their directors' reports;
- the development of proposals for a British standard for prompt payment and
- work with trade associations, business links and others to improve credit management in small firms.

We have also announced that we will re-examine the case for legislation for a statutory right to interest in two years if there had been no significant improvement.

Domestic Utilities

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will initiate an investigation into standing charges on domestic gas, electricity, water and telephone bills.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Standing charges are a matter for utility companies and the independent regulators, and are subject to price controls. The Government see no case for an investigation.

GATT

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his latest estimate of the likely benefits to the United Kingdom of ratification of the GATT Uruguay round.

Mr. Needham: The GATT has recently estimated that by 2005 the Uruguay round will boost annual world income by at least $510 billion. For the EU, the benefit would be around $164 billion—an annual increase equivalent to more than 3 per cent. of GDP. There is every reason to believe that United Kingdom income will increase in line with that of the EU as a whole.

Manufacturing

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of output was accounted for by manufacturing in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1993.

Mr. Eggar: The share of manufacturing in GDP was 28·5 per cent. in 1979 and 21·7 per cent. in 1993. Other main industrialised countries have also seen a decline in the share of GDP accounted for by manufacturing.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table of the size of the United Kingdom's non-oil manufacturing base for each year since 1979 assuming an index of 100 in 1979.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Index of Production for manufacturing industries, expressed in terms of 1979=100 is given in the table.

Manufacturing Output (1979=100 in 1990 prices)

Year	
1979	100·0
1980	91·4
1981	85·8
1982	85·7
1983	87·4
1984	90·7
1985	93·3
1986	94·5
1987	98·9
1988	105·9
1989	110·6
1990	110·4
1991	104·4
1992	103·8
1993	105·1

Source:
Central Statistical Office.
Note:
Index includes mineral oil refining which accounted for 2 per cent. of production in 1990.

Companies House

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in the privatisation of Companies House.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with his Ministers over the future of Companies House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No decision has yet been taken on the future of Companies House.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 19 July that consultants were to explore further the possible contracting out of most of the activities of Companies House. Their report has now been received and is being considered.

VSEL

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will refer the GEC bid for VSEL to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he intends to refer the GEC bid for VSEL to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading is currently investigating this proposed merger and he will advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in due course. A decision on whether or not it should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission will be taken once that advice is received.

Solvents

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussion he has had with industry with regard to replacing dangerous solvents with safe substances.

Mr. Eggar: Restrictions on chemicals must be based on sound science and an assessment of the risks attached

to their legitimate use, and I have had no cause to discuss with industry the phasing out of any solvents. There are regulations in place which restrict the marketing and use of certain chemicals used in industrial and consumer products. Providing these regulations are observed, products should be safe in normal use.

Tameside

Mr. Bennett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department is giving to encourage firms to locate, or stay in Tameside.

Mr. Wardle: The services of INWARD, the regional development organisation for the north-west are available to Tameside as to other parts of the region. As Tameside is not an assisted area, regional selective assistance is not available. However, a business link outlet has been open in Denton since May to offer support to incoming as well as existing firms.

Stagecoach Ltd

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding anti-competitive practices by Stagecoach Ltd.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has written to my right hon. Friend President of the Board of Trade about the activities of the Stagecoach bus company. My right hon. Friend has also received several letters about the conduct of Stagecoach subsidiaries in particular areas.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the responsibilities of his Department in relation to the crash of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: There are no direct responsibilities, but my Department is contributing to research on explosion hazards to civil aircraft set up as a result of the Lockerbie incident.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the provisions made by insurance companies to meet compensation for mis-sold personal pensions.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department wrote on 25 October to all life offices asking them to provide, by the end of February 1995, revised estimates of their exposure to personal pensions misselling in the light of the criteria set out in the SIB statement.

Gas

Mr. Berry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to change the structure or remit of the Gas Consumers Council.

Mr. Eggar: The DTI/Ofgas joint consultation document published in May invited views on the future role and organisation of the Gas Consumers Council. I am still considering the issue and await the Trade and Industry Select Committee's report with interest. No decision has been taken yet.

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of gas consumers will benefit from reduced prices as a result of the deregulation of domestic supply.

Mr. Eggar: Competition will exert a powerful downward pressure on prices and provide strong incentives for efficiency and improved service. It is not possible to estimate the outcome in detail, either in terms of the precise number of people who would benefit from reduced prices, or how large those reductions might be in each case. Independent suppliers have said they are confident of being able to offer average savings of around 10 per cent. on current British Gas prices.

Insolvency Acts

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations he has received during the past 12 months on the subject of the Insolvency Acts with particular reference to bankrupt contractors' inability to pay sub-contractors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has received a number of representations during the past 12 months regarding the position of sub-contractors under insolvency legislation when their contractor becomes insolvent. This is seen to be a particular problem in the construction industry. In July a report following a review by Sir Michael Latham of contract arrangements in that industry—sponsored jointly by the Government and the industry—made a number of recommendations. An implementation forum has been established to take the issues forward.

Traditional Industries

Mr. Janner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will take steps to help the traditional industries of Leicester.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The DTI already has in place a number of schemes that are helping industries in Leicester and elsewhere.

The first business link in the country opened in Leicester on 27 September last year with £725,000 funding from my Department. Business link Leicester is part of a national network which will provide world class business support to all industries in Leicester.

Business Regulations

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what further plans he has to remove unnecessary regulations on business.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: We are continuing our efforts to reduce unnecessary burdens on business. Latest developments include:

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act received the Royal Assent on 3 November. We shall be bringing forward the first orders under the deregulation order-making power after the new special parliamentary arrangements for their scrutiny have been put in place.

The deregulation task force under Francis Maude is active on a number of fronts to reduce regulatory burdens on business.

In Europe an EC expert group is looking critically at the impact of EC and national legislation on competitiveness and employment. The United Kingdom and Germany have also set up a high-level group of businessmen to scrutinise EC regulations and to stimulate specific deregulatory measures in Europe.

Package Travel

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the operation and enforcement of the European directive on package travel.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The EC package travel directive has been implemented in the United Kingdom by the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 and, where criminal sanctions apply, is enforced by local authority trading standards departments. My Department will publish revised guidance notes to the regulations shortly.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing the number of applications for regional selective assistance which were rejected in each development and intermediate area in the last 12 months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The latest complete information is given in the table.

RSA applications rejected in the period 1 April 1993–31 March 1994

	DA	*IA*	*Total*
East Midlands	17	13	30
North East	21	3	24
North West	66	57	123
South East	—	4	4
East	—	—	—
London	—	—	—
South West	12	8	20
West Midlands	11	46	57
Yorkshire and Humberside	3	13	16
Total	130	144	274

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total amounts of regional selective assistance grants made in each development and intermediate area in the last 12 months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is published in the annual reports on the Industrial Development Act 1982, available in the Library of the House. Final figures on grants made since 1 April 1994 are not yet available.

Nuclear Review

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what form he plans to publish his response to submissions to the nuclear review.

Mr. Eggar: No decisions on either the form or the timing of the announcement of our conclusions have yet been made.

British Coal

Mr. Hanson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will make a statement about the Government's sell-off plans for British Coal.

Mr. Eggar: On 12 October the Government announced that preferred bidders had been identified for the regional coal companies and certain care and maintenance collieries. Detailed discussions with the preferred bidders are continuing, with a view to completing the sales by the end of the year.

New Investment, Hampshire

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy on attracting new investment in Hampshire.

Mr. Eggar: The Government's economic policies have been directed to creating the right environment to encourage growth and investment. The low taxation and inflation levels the country now enjoys are a direct consequence of those policies. My Department's deregulation initiative helps to remove disincentives for investment by reducing the regulatory burden on companies.

Investment from overseas companies in the United Kingdom is also a major contributor to the United Kingdom economy. My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau is active in promoting the United Kingdom to overseas investors and in ensuring, in collaboration with the Government offices in the regions, that any enquiries received are properly handled. All these activities help to attract new investment to the United Kingdom.

We look to local authorities and other local partners such as training and enterprise councils to create at the local level the infrastructure and regulatory framework which will build on the Government's activities to produce an environment which is attractive to and supportive of investment.

Steel Industry

Mr. Denis MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will veto any further applications for subsidies for European steel producers beyond those covered by the December 1993 Council of Ministers' agreement and if he will also endorse the policy of no more subsidy in the steel industry following decisions reached at the 8 November European Council of Ministers; and if he will make it his policy in future to intervene on behalf of industry.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Her Majesty's Government are committed to the December 1993 agreement and will continue to press for rigorous enforcement of the state aid rules. At the 8 November Industry Council we made clear the grave difficulties we would have in assenting to any further derogation requests. The free and fair operation of market forces is the best means of securing the long term prosperity of the United Kingdom steel industry.

Export Licences

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences were applied for under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985 *(a)* in 1992 and *(b)* in 1993; how many in each case were in respect of applications made under part III, group 1 of the order; and how many of the applications were circulated to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This question could be answered only at disproportionate cost. There will however be some details of licences issued and refused in the annual report of the Export Control Organisation to be published shortly. A copy of that report will be placed in the Library of the House and I will also arrange for the hon. Member to receive a personal copy.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when approvals were given to the British Nuclear Fuels for the acceptance by the German nuclear authorities for the return of conditioned radioactive wastes from reprocessing at Sellafield in the categories of *(a)* solid low-level residues, *(b)* MEB-Crud barium carbonate slurry, *(c)* radioactive hulls and ends, *(d)* centrifuge cake slurry and *(e)* vitrified high-level wastes; and how many further categories of waste remain to be approved for return.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This a matter for the management of British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Defence Equipment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list on a country-by-country basis the number of applications for export licences for defence equipment that were *(a)* received and *(b)* issued in 1993.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* This question could be answered only at disproportionate cost. There will however be some details of licences issued and refused in the annual report of the Export Control Organisation to be published shortly. A copy of that report will be placed in the Library of the House and I will also arrange for the hon. Member to receive a personal copy.

WALES

Flooding

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funding is available from Government Departments to combat the effects of severe flooding and the damage caused thereby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local authorities are expected to make provision for responding to emergencies such as storms and floods when setting their budgets. In addition my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may provide extra financial assistance for disasters and emergencies, such as severe flooding under the Bellwin scheme in accordance with section 155 of the Local Government Finance Act 1989.

Loans may also be available from the social fund to individuals qualifying on grounds of hardship.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many representations have been made by his Department to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the subject of the export of live animals from Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has made to the Commission of the European Union on the subject of the export of live animals from Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office is in regular contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and about the export of live animals. The Minister of Agriculture, who has been conducting the negotiations and discussions with the Commission on behalf of the United Kingdom Agriculture Departments on the issue of live animals exports, is actively seeking agreement on new European Union rules.

Arts Funding

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with local authorities regarding funding of arts provision in Wales following local government reorganisation.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None, while the Arts Council of Wales has initiated discussions with transition committees.

Minority Languages Charter

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Government will sign the European charter on minority languages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Government Departments with an interest in the European charter for regional or minority languages are still considering its implications for the United Kingdom. The decision on whether to sign the charter must take into account the situation of each of the indigenous minority languages spoken with the United Kingdom.

European Union

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has been to European Union meetings to discuss matters appertaining to Wales in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I attend European Union meetings when it is appropriate and in the interests of Wales that I should do so. In the past month, for example, I have addressed the board of directors of the European investment bank during their recent very successful visit to Wales. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) has also met Mr. Jacques Blanc, the President of the EC Committee of the Regions. I also expect to meet a number of the incoming Commissioners as soon as this can be arranged.

Acquired Rights Directive

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales following his letter dated 29 June to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, (Mr. Llwyd), what further action he now proposes to amend section 44 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 following further consideration of European Court of Justice verdicts in relation to the acquired rights directive.

Mr. Redwood: The Government are considering what changes may be necessary to legislation on redundancy as a result of the European Court of Justice's rulings. It will not be necessary to amend section 44 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 if changes are made only to the legislation mentioned in subsection (1).

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to publish a league table of TEC performances in Wales, in the form of the Department of Employment's initiative in England.

Mr. Redwood: The 1993–94 performance of the 82 TECs in England and Wales was published on 25 August 1994 in the form of inter-TEC comparisons, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House.

Health (Administration Costs)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the total spent by the family health services authorities on administration and the number of whole-time equivalents employed by the authorities in administration in the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: The amounts that family health services authorities in Wales have been authorised to spend in 1994–95 and the average number of staff employed in 1993–94 are as follows:

FHSA	*£000's*	*Staff (WTE)*
Clwyd	1,386	65
Dyfed	1,306	58
Gwent	1,494	87
Gwynedd	982	51
Mid Glamorgan	1,917	81
Powys	697	30
South Glamorgan	1,629	72
West Glamorgan	1,246	56

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the total spent by the district health authorities on administration and the number of whole-time equivalents employed by the authorities in administration in the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: The total spent by Welsh district health authorities on administration in the 1992–93 financial year—the latest year for which data is available—was £26·554 million.

As at 30 September 1994—the latest date for which data are available—a total of 3,014 WTE were employed by the authorities in administration. This does not include administration in hospitals or in other local centres.

Source:
Summarised accounts of health authorities in Wales.
NHS payroll system and associated information systems.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give *(a)* the total spent by the NHS trusts on administration and *(b)* the total number employed in administration and management, in the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is as follows:

(a) the total spent by Pembrokshire NHS trust on administration in the 1992–93 financial year—the latest year for which data are available—was £1·785 million.

(b) as at 30 September 1994—the latest date for which data is available—a total of 5,341 whole-time equivalent staff were employed in administration and management in the 24 operational NHS trusts in Wales.

Source:
Pembrokeshire NHS trust annual accounts.
NHS payroll system and associated information systems.

Badgers

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many licences have been granted by his Department for interference with badger setts following the Badgers Act 1991 and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992; and for which purpose listed in section 10 of the 1992 Act such licences were issued.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Fifty-eight such licenses have been issued: 12 for the prevention of serious damage, 39 in connection with agricultural or forestry operations, six for work associated with watercourses or drainage, and one for fox control purposes.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers in Ynys Môn have *(a)* expressed an interest in the environmentally sensitive area scheme since it was launched *(b)* signed agreements under the scheme and *(c)* have already received payments under the scheme.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is as follows:

(a) 344

(b) 81

(c) 18

Redberth-Sagerton Bypass

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost of survey work for the proposed Redberth-Sagerton bypass in each year since 1972; and what is his best estimate of the cost in this and subsequent years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Expenditure on topographical and geotechnical work for the proposed A477 Sageston-Redbeth bypass was incurred as follows:

Year	*£*
1971–72	3,400
1972–73	3,169
1988–89	2,000
1989–90	26,834
1990–91	8,881
1991–92	81,042
1992–93	23,545
1993–94	25,055
Total	[1]173,926

[1] Includes £58,369 for contractors' work.

Estimated expenditure still to be incurred on such survey work is as follows:

Year	*£*
1994–95	120,000
1995–96	8,000
Total	[1]128,000

[1] Includes estimate of £83,000 for contractors' work.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the responsibilities that his Department has lost since *(a)* 1975 and *(b)* 1979; and if he will estimate the numbers of staff or part-time equivalent who used to undertake these responsibilities.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* The functions transferred from my Department since 1975 and the estimated numbers of associated staff are:

	Number of staff
(1) Derelict Land (1975) to the Welsh development Agency	Not available
(2) Small Firms Service (1986) (to the WDA)	7
(3) Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre (1988) (to WHCSA)	52·5
(4) Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (1992) (new Government Department	74
(5) Orbital Prosthetist Service (1993) (to WHCSA)	2
(6) Dental Services (1993) (to the Dental Practice Board)	8·5
(7) Divisional Medical Office (1993) (to the Benefits Agency)	41·5

Numbers 1 to 5 were transferred to other Welsh organisations. Numbers 6 to 7 were transferred to joint England and Wales bodies.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the responsibilities that his Department has gained since *(a)* 1975 and *(b)* 1979; and if he will estimate the numbers of staff or part-time equivalent used to administer these responsibilities.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* The functions that my Department has gained since 1975 and the estimated numbers of associated staff at the time are:

	Number of staff
Industry—1975	82
Ancient monuments—1978	221
Further education policy, excluding universities—1978	24
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—1978	536
Regional development grant—1984	78
Training, enterprise and education—1992	67

The Secretary of State assumed responsibility for the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils in 1993; no additional staff are employed in the Welsh Office on these functions. Reform of the European Union's common agricultural policy has since 1992 generated substantial additional work for, and brought certain new responsibilities to, the Welsh Office's Agriculture Department. An estimated 90 staff are engaged on this work.

HEALTH

Herbal Medicines

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has concerning the extent to which herbal medicines are banned in each of the other member countries of the European community; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Like the United Kingdom, other European Community member states restrict or ban the use of certain herbal ingredients which present potential safety concerns. We keep in close contact with other countries over safety issues and take action where necessary to protect public health.

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what form, when, through what procedures, and subject to what consent by the House she proposes to bring forward the proposed Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations.

Mr. Sackville: We intend to lay the proposed regulations before the House shortly subject to resolving outstanding issues. The regulations will be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

Asthma

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of asthma cases indicated in the 1991–92 national survey of morbidity in general practice for those aged *(a)* up to four years, *(b)* five to 14 years and *(c)* 15 to 24 years; and what were the 1981–82 figures.

Mr. Sackville: The 1991–92 data are not yet available.

1981–82: Patients consulting—rates per 1,000 persons at risk

All ages	*0–4*	*5–14*	*15–24*
17·8	26·0	29·3	16·6

Rates are based on the number of patients who consulted at least once during the year for asthma.

Mental Health Units

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the urgent review of the therapeutic suitability of mental health units within district general hospitals recommended by the mental health nursing review team is now under way.

Mr. Bowis: Copies of the report of the mental health nursing review team have been sent to all provider units. It is for them to ensure that the layout and working practices of their mental health units reflect the needs of patients. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

Child Abuse

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department will publish a code of practice or protocol covering the use of covert surveillance techniques in identifying the possible abuse of children.

Mr. Bowis: The Department has no proposals to do so. The Department has, however, commended to the chairmen of all area child protection committees the high level of inter-agency collaboration demonstrated by Staffordshire Child Protection Committee in the production of a joint working protocol on covert video surveillance in hospital. Copies of this will be placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the turnover of each national health service trust in each year since its inception.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 18 May at column *517*. The figures for 1992–93 have now been finalised. We expect information for 1993–94 to become available in December.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide details of the surpluses or deficits recorded by each individual national health service trust in each year since inception.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 May at column 295. The figures for 1992–93 have now been finalised.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which quangos her Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: A list of non-departmental public bodies abolished by the Department of Health and Social Security from 1980–1988, and by the Department of Health from 1989–1993 will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many quangos her Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Sackville: In 1979 the Department of Health and Social Security was responsible for 97 non-departmental public bodies. At 1 April 1993, the latest year for which data are available, the Department of Health was responsible for 50 non-departmental public bodies.

Emergency Hospital Admissions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency hospital admissions were made by region for each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the number of non-elective admissions in the general and acute sector for each regional health authority in England, in total and as a percentage of all admissions for the last three years, from information collected by the National Health Service Executive. It is estimated that over 80 per cent. of non-elective admissions are emergencies.

Non-elective admissions (general and acute) by region 1991–92 to 1993–94: England '000 finished consultant episodes

Regional health authority	*1991–92*		*1992–93*		*1993–94*	
	*	*Per cent.*		*Per cent.*		*Per cent.*
Northern	256	47	268	47	280	48
Yorkshire	292	48	304	48	322	49
Trent	333	49	348	49	368	48
East Anglian	148	49	159	49	166	48
North west Thames	212	45	234	47	236	47
North east Thames	290	49	298	49	311	50
South east Thames	253	48	262	47	275	48
South west Thames	190	46	202	48	202	49
Wessex	199	45	214	46	232	46
Oxford	156	48	158	46	171	46
South western	239	47	241	45	261	46
West Midlands	382	48	394	48	414	48
Mersey	210	49	218	49	242	51
North western	337	46	344	45	360	45
Special HAs	24	22	24	21	25	21
England	3,521	47	3,668	47	3,865	47

Acute Nursing Care

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people over 60 years were recorded in the United Kingdom for each of the last 10 years as receiving acute nursing care in an NHS bed.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Diethylstilboestrol

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on the establishing of a national register of women who have been exposed to diethylstilboestrol between 1945 and 1975.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has no plans to establish a national register.

Homicides Inquiry

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for health what steps she is taking to ensure that inquiries into homicides by mentally ill people, independent of the providers involved, are being set up in every such case as required by circular HSG (94) 27.

Mr. Bowis: The requirement to hold independent inquiries into homicides involving mentally ill people was re-emphasised in the draft guide to arrangements for inter-agency working for the care and protection of severely mentally ill people which was issued to the national health service and local authorities for consultation on 10 October. Copies will be placed in the Library. When information about a homicide involving a mentally ill person becomes known to the Department, the NHS Executive or social services inspectorate seeks confirmation from the relevant authorities that action will be taken in line with the requirements of circular HSG(94)27, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mentally Ill Patients

Dr. Lynne Jones : To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the timetable for publication of the report by the social services inspectorate on the inspection of local authorities' arrangements to support mentally ill patients discharged from hospital.

Mr. Bowis: It is anticipated that the report will be published toward the end of the financial year.

Munchausen's Disease

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Munchausen's disease by proxy have been reported in the last year.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) on 24 February at column *353*.

Hair Dyes

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has concerning the health risks associated with the use of hair dyes; and what advice is given by her Department.

Mr. Sackville: Materials which are not permitted in hair dyes are given in the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1989 which give effect to the Cosmetics Directive 76/768/EC. The European Commission is advised on health risks associated with chemicals in hair dyes and other cosmetics by the cosmetics working party and the Scientific Committee on Cosmetology. The Department is represented on the former and other United Kingdom experts are members of the latter.

The Department is not aware of any information to indicate that chemicals in hair dyes pose any significant risk to health. Materials used in hair dyes are currently under review with the intention of producing a positive list for inclusion in the directive.

Food Handlers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how she intends to enforce the directive that requires all food handlers to be supervised and trained in food hygiene matters commensurate with their work activity; and what financial support is being provided to help industry meet any added costs of the proposals.

Mr. Sackville: Regulations to be laid in early 1995 will make clear that local authority food enforcement officers will enforce these and other food hygiene requirements. The Department has consulted on draft regulations, a draft revision to Food Safety Act Code of Practice No. 9 on food hygiene inspections, and a draft compliance cost assessment. The latter estimates costs arising from the requirement for food hygiene training, taking account of the fact that most food businesses already meet the requirement.

Anti-epileptic Drugs

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment her Department has carried out of research carried out in *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* countries of the European Union into possible side-effects in switching between branded and generic anti-epileptic drugs;

(2) what research her Department has commissioned into the side-effects of switching between branded and generic anti-epileptic drugs.

Mr. Sackville: Evidence relating to the bioequivalence of generic and brand named anti-epileptic products is assessed at the time of licensing. Before a generic product may be licensed in the Untied Kingdom the company wishing to market the product must provide evidence to the licensing authority to show that the product is bioequivalent to the corresponding brand leader. As some anti-epileptic drugs have a narrow therapeutic margin, particular attention is paid to the issue of equivalence with these drugs during the licensing process.

The Department has not commissioned any research into this issue. As with all medicines, the safety of anti-epileptic drugs on the market is monitored by the Medicines Control Agency. Relevant research concerning generic inequivalence is assessed as part of this process. Appropriate action would be taken if evidence came to light of clinically important side effects occurring on switching between branded and generic anti-epileptic drugs.

Secure Accommodation

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people in secure accommodation have been the subject of violence at the hands of other inmates in each year from 1989 to 1993.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Psychotherapy Services

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the current Departmental review of strategic policy on psychotherapy services to be completed; and if it will be published.

Mr. Bowis: The review is expected to be completed by April 1995 and a decision on publication will be made at that time.

Complementary Medicine

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the efficacy of self regulation of alternative and complementary healers; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None. Professional self regulation, through either statutory or voluntary arrangements, is widely accepted as the basis for effective regulation of professions in the health care field.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has considered implementing a national register of therapists offering alternative healing and medicines.

Mr. Sackville: No. We encourage those groups of complementary medicine practitioners not covered by statutory registration arrangements, to develop voluntary registration systems based on agreed standards of education, training and codes of practice.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what checks her Department makes upon the activities of alternative or complementary healing;

(2) what measures her Department has taken to monitor activities of alternative therapists and healers who are not governed by voluntary regulation schemes;

(3) what measures her Department has taken to ensure that any member of the public who has been mistreated by an alternative or complementary therapist has recourse to disciplinary proceedings against that practitioner;

(4) what measures are available to the public to ensure that a complementary therapist can be barred from practising if such action is necessary for the public good.

Mr. Sackville: This Department does not monitor the activities of complementary therapists. Whether on a voluntary register or not, they are at liberty to offer their services to the general public, subject only to those provisions of statute and common law which apply. For

example, there are restrictions on purporting to treat cancer and venereal disease and upon attendance at childbirth; and they are subject to relevant provisions of the Medicines Act.

The Department recognises that membership of a reputable and well regulated profession—whether regulation is by statutory or voluntary schemes—is beneficial in the maintenance of codes of ethical practice and disciplinary processes. Members of the public are advised to check that a practitioner is a current member of a reputable organisation and carries proper indemnity insurance before accepting treatment. We also advise that they seek the advice of their general practitioner before proceeding.

Where complementary therapy treatment has been provided in the national health service, dissatisfied patients may seek redress through the NHS complaints procedures. Where treatment has been obtained in the private sector, patients may pursue complaints through the disciplinary procedures—where these exist—of the professional group to which the practitioner belongs. They may also seek redress through the courts.

Blood Transfusion Centres

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will meet the chairman of the National Blood Authority to seek reconsideration of the decision to close blood transfusion centres at Brentwood, Liverpool, Lancaster, Oxford and Plymouth.

Mr. Sackville: These matters are the responsibility of the National Blood Authority, which has undertaken a thorough and widespread consultation. Full consideration will be given to the results of the consultation before decisions are made.

Respite Care

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will detail the average costs for the full time respite care provided by local councils and the health service.

Mr. Bowis: The cost for respite care varies across the country and depends on the type of care provided and it is for purchasers of this service to decide the best way of meeting individual needs in a cost effective way. Community care funding for this year included £20 million extra for respite and home care services rising to £30 million next year.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will detail the criteria and methods for assessing performance-related pay in the national health service for *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses.

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to introduce performance related pay for doctors and nurses.

Operations

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will detail, by region, for each of the last five financial years, *(a)* the number of national health service operations by clinical specialisation undertaken in the private sector, *(b)* the number of national health service operations by clinical specialisation undertaken in the private sector as a percentage of total national health service operations, *(c)* the number of national health service patients treated in the private sector and *(d)* the number of national health service patients treated in the private sector as a percentage of total national health service patients treated;

(2) if she will detail, by region, for each of the last five financial years, *(a)* the cost of national health service operations by clinical specialisation undertaken in the private sector, *(b)* the cost of national health service operations by clinical specialisation undertaken in the private sector as a percentage of the total cost of national health service operations, *(c)* the average cost per patient of national health service operations by clinical specialisation undertaken in the private sector and *(d)* the average cost per patient of national health service operations by clinical specialisation undertaken in the state sector;

(3) if she will detail by region over each of the last five financial years *(a)* the average length of stay for national health service patients by clinical specialisation treated in the private sector and *(b)* the average length of stay for national health service patients treated, by clinical specialisation, in the state sector.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the average length of stay by specialty in national health service hospitals in England is published in "Hospital Episode Statistics, Volume 1", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest published information is for 1991–92. The other information requested is not available centrally.

Carers

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the contribution that full-time domestic carers make to care in the community.

Mr. Bowis: The Government acknowledge the vital contribution to community care made by full and part-time carers. One of the key aims of our community care reforms is to ensure that service providers make support for carers a high priority. That is why community care funding for this year included an extra £20 million for respite and home care services, rising to £30 million next year. It is also why carers are involved alongside users when needs are assessed and plans made for them to be met and why we have encouraged local authorities to give carers the right to request that their own needs be assessed.

NHS Pay Arrangements

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will detail new costs associated with establishing local pay arrangements in the national health service.

Mr. Malone: A major support programme has been mounted by the National Health Service Executive to assist trusts to prepare for establishing local pay arrangements. The estimated expenditure on this support programme in 1994–95 is £500,000. Any additional costs for individual trusts and other employing authorities will be more than offset by savings which they can expect from increased flexibility in the use of staff. Local pay will enable NHS employers to target rewards more closely to improvements in the quality and quantity of healthcare.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the proportion of entrants to adult training schemes who leave the schemes to take up part-time employment; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(2) what is the proportion of entrants to training for work schemes who leave the scheme without a qualification; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(3) what is the proportion of entrants to adult training schemes who leave the schemes without a qualification; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(4) what is the proportion of entrants to training for work schemes who leave the scheme to take up part-time employment; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(5) how many places were filled on each training scheme in each of the last 10 years;

(6) what is the proportion of entrants to youth training scheme who leave the schemes early; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(7) what is the proportion entrants to youth training schemes who leave the schemes to take up part-time employment; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(8) what is the proportion of entrants to adult training schemes who leave the scheme to take up full-time employment; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(9) what is the proportion of entrants to training for work schemes who leave the scheme early; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(10) what is the proportion of entrants to adult training schemes who leave the schemes early; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(11) what is the proportion of entrants to training for work schemes who leave the scheme to take up full-time employment; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions.

(12) what is the proportion of entrants to youth training schemes who leave the schemes without a qualification; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions;

(13) what is the proportion of entrants to youth training schemes who leave the schemes to take up full-time employment; and what it has been in each of the last 10 years for each of his Department's regions.

Mr. Paice: As the information is contained in a large number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the amount spent by his Department on each training programme in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is provided in the following table:

Training, Educational and Enterprise Programme Expenditure (£ million)

	1984–85	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Job Training Programme	232·9	219·4	286·2	272·3						
Wider Opportunities Training Programme	22·2	26·0								
Other Occupational Training	4·7	7·0	16·5	24·2						
Open Tech/Learning	18·1	17·6	14·5	15·9						
New Job Training Scheme			0·9	66·9						
Adult Training					200·8	10·9				
Employment Training					419·0	1,096·6	1,76·4	737·4	629·5	
Training for Work										762·0
Learning for Work										14·0
Workstart Pilots										1·0
Skill Choice										7·0
Open Learning Credit										2·0
Youth Training Scheme	836·2	869·9	939·1	1,064·9	993·2	976·0				
Youth Training/Credits							823·4	746·4	617·0	642·0
Training and Education Support					62·5	56·4	47·2	52·3	37·1	39·0
Training Access Points							6·4			
Training of Trainers							10.7			
National Council for Vocational Qualifications (Net)			0·5	3·7	3·8	3·0	2·6	3·7	3·9	4·0
Careers Officer Training	0·4	0·7	0·4	0·5	0·5	0·4	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·1
Careers Service Strengthening	11·9	12·5	12·9	13·9	14·8	17·0	17·6	18·7	19·1	21·0
Career Development Loans			0·3	0·2	0·7	1·4	3·8	5·4	6·9	8·0
Skills Training Agency (Net)	3·6	10·8	-5·5	-6·8	10.5	19·9	4·3			
Residual Schemes						10.0				

Training, Educational and Enterprise Programme Expenditure (£ million)

	1984–85	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Technical Vocational and Education Initiatives	26·3	40.6	71·9	60·7	87·8	129·1	135·1	140·7	118·5	119.0
Non Advanced and Work Related Further Education		65·6	112·8	114·9	110·0	101·9	103.2	105.4	101.3	103·0
Special Temporary Employment Programme			5·0							
Compacts/Education Business Partnerships/Education Initiatives/Careers Service Partnerships					1·2	3·6	6·5	12·5	12·6	12·0
Enterprise in Higher Education						5·8	10·5	13·3	14·7	13·0
Careers Guidance Review Implementation									6·3	
Careers Libraries										6·0
Other Education Initiative								6·5		
National Record of Achievement									2·3	2·0
Careers Service										
Enterprise Training						4·5				
Business Growth Training/Business and Enterprise Training						21·3	48·0			
Business and Enterprise Support/Employer Investment in People								161·8	149·2	132·0
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	80·1	108·4	149·7	200·7	196·7	170·9	133·1			
Local Enterprise Agencies					2·0	1·9	1·9			
Small Firms Advisory		1·1	4·9	7·7	7·8					
Small Firms Information Service						2·9	2·8			
Small Firms Information Service								0·9		
Other Enterprise and Small Firms Initiatives			0·2	0·4	0·3	1·8	0·7	0·7	0·0	
Youth Enterprise Initiative				1·5	1·3	3·6	5·5	4·4	2·6	5·0
Local Initiative Fund							9·9	48·2	49·7	50·0
TEC Challenge										13·0
Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme (net)		10.8	11·0	3·7	3·9	5·7	16·5	27·5	1·5	
Administration	15·2	21·1	20·2	20.6	154·0	191·1	239·3	196·5	205·5	198·9

Note:
Administration costs are included. However, prior to 1988–89 costs of administration were included in the main programme costs. From 1988–89 they are shown separately.
Expenditure up to and including 1990–91 is for GB. Expenditure in 1991–92 is England/Wales and expenditure from 1992–93 is England only.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Ms Widdecombe: The following public bodies, listed in the "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies", the "Pliatzky Report", Cmnd 7797 January 1980, and editions of "Public Bodies" since its establishment in 1982, have been abolished.

Executive Bodies

Co-operative Development Agency

23 Industry Training Boards as follows:

Air Transport and Travel
Carpet Industry
Ceramics, Glass and Mineral Products
Chemical and Allied Products
Clothing and Allied Products
Cotton and Allied Textiles
Distributive Industry
Engineering (mainstream only. The Engineering Construction ITB remains)
Food, Drink and Tobacco
Footwear, Leather and Fur Skin
Foundry
Furniture and Timber
Hotel and Catering
Iron and Steel
Knitting, Lace and Net
Man-made Fibres Producing Industry
Paper and Paper Products
Petroleum (later, Offshore Petroleum)
Printing and Publishing

Road Transport
Rubber (later Plastics Processing)
Ship Building
Wood, Jute and Flax

Industrial Training Research Unit Ltd.

Manpower Services Commission (later Training Commission)

National Dock Labour Board

Underwater Training Centre

34 Wages Councils as follows:
Aerated Waters (England and Wales)
Aerated Waters (Scotland)
Boot and Shoe Repairing
Button Manufacturing
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making
Corset
Cotton Waste Reclamation
Dressmaking and Women's Light Clothing (England and Wales)
Dressmaking and Women's Light Clothing (Scotland)
Flax and Hemp
Fur
General Waste Materials Reclamation
Hairdressing Undertakings
Hat, Cap and Millinery (Great Britain)
Lace Finishing
Laundry
Licensed Non-Residential Establishment
Licensed Residential Establishment and Licensed Restaurant
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods
Made up Textiles
Ostrich and Fancy Feather and Artificial Flower
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage
Pin, Hook and Eye, and Snap Fastener
Ready-made and Wholesale Bespoke Tailoring
Retail Bespoke Tailoring (Great Britain)
Retail Food and Allied Trades (created in 1979 from the merger of 6 separate Councils)
Retail Trades Non-Food (created in 1979 from the merger of 3 separate Councils)
Rope, Twine and Net
Rubber Proofed Garment Making Industry
Sack and Bag
Shirtmaking
Toy Manufacturing
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment
Wholesale Mantle and Costume

Advisory Bodies

Advisory Committee on Homeworking

Advisory Committee on the Resettlement of Ex-regular Members of the Armed Forces

Advisory Committee on Women's Employment

Advisory Group on Enterprise Training

Advisory Panel on Deregulation

125 Area (formerly District) Manpower Boards

Careers Materials Advisory Committee

Careers Service Advisory Council for England

220 District Advisory Committees created under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944—replaced by 60 Committees for the Employment of Disabled People

Industrial Language Training Advisory Committee

Manpower Services Committee for Scotland

Manpower Services Committee for Wales

National Steering Group for Local Collaborative Projects under the Adult Training Strategy

Non-advanced Further Education Joint Consultative Group

Open Tech Programme: Steering Group

Quality Standards Group

Royal Commission on the Distribution on Income and Wealth

Services Resettlement Committee

Special Employment Measures Advisory Group

30 Special Programme Board and Area Boards

Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative National Steering Group

Training and Further Education Consultative Group

Training of Trainers Advisory Group

Tripartite Steering Group on Job Satisfaction

Youth Training Board

Youth Training Board Advisory Group on Content and Standards

Your Training Scheme Certification Board

Tribunals

Levy Exemption Referees

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Miss Widdecombe: Details of the public bodies associated with the Employment Department group in 1979 were published in the "Report on Non-departmental Public Bodies" (the "Pliatzky Report") Cmnd 7797 January 1980. In that year the Department was responsible for:

68 Executive bodies (including 34 Wages Councils and 24 Industry Training Bodies);

386 Advisory bodies (including 220 District Advisory Committees created under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944; 125 District Manpower Committees; and 28 Special Programme Area Boards);

4 Tribunals (including the Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal which was incorrectly classified as an advisory body in 1979).

The Department is currently responsible for:

11 Executive bodies;

64 Advisory bodies (including 60 Committees for the Employment of Disabled People);

4 Tribunals.

Details will be published in the 1994 edition of "Public Bodies" later this year.

None of these figures include the range of advisory committees to the Health and Safety Commission—currently numbering 22—which were incorrectly listed as advisory non-departmental public bodies in 1979. These committees do not have NDPB status and were removed from "Public Bodies" in 1991.

Skills Levels

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is Britain's position in the World Economic Forum's skills league table.

Miss Widdecombe: The United Kingdom was ranked 18th, in respect of the availability of skilled people, out of the 41 countries covered in the World Economic Forum's "World Competitiveness Report, 1994". However the forum's findings are based on limited statistical evidence and put Japan well below the Philippines.

Employers

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's estimate of the number of employers with 200 or more employees in each training and enterprise council area.

Mr. Oppenheim: The available information relates to individual workplaces, not employers. The number of workplaces in each training and enterprise council area with more than 200 employees at September 1991 is shown in the following table:

TEC	*Units*
Hampshire	364
Heart of England	121
Isle of Wight	14
Kent	308
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire	60
Surrey	215
Sussex	276
Thames Valley Enterprise	329
Bedfordshire	131
CAMBSTEC	104
Essex	277
Greater Peterborough	71
Hertfordshire	234
Norfolk and Waveney	189
Suffolk	121
Aztec	129
CENTEC	622
CILNTEC	320
London East	239
North London	134
North West London	95
SOLOTEC	223
South Thames	236
West London	276
Avon	251
Devon and Cornwall	222
Dorset	128
Gloucestershire	118
Somerset	92
Wiltshire	162
Birmingham	284
Central England	95
Coventry and Warwickshire	191
Dudley	53
HAWTEC	84
Sandwell	89
Shropshire	85
Staffordshire	216
Walsall	61
Wolverhampton	63
Greater Nottingham	160
Leicestershire	22[illegible]
Lincolnshire	90
North Derbyshire	66
North Nottinghamshire	95
Northamptonshire	145
South Derbyshire	123
Barnsley and Doncaster	102
Bradford and District	114
Calderdale and Kirklees	120
Humberside	183
Leeds	206
North Yorkshire	138
Rotherham	56
Sheffield	118
Wakefield	78
CEWTEC	100
Cumbria	91
ELTEC	126
LAWTEC	184
Merseyside	191
NorMidTEC	121
QUALITEC	37
Bolton and Bury	97
Manchester	348
METROTEC	60
Oldham	45
Rochdale	34
South and East Cheshire	79
Stockport and High Peak	73
County Durham	117
Northumberland	44
Teesside	117
Tyneside	208
Wearside	63
Gwent	91
Mid Glamorgan	123
North East Wales	70
North West Wales	45
Powys	10
South Glamorgan	130
West Wales	124

The table excludes Agriculture and Horticulture (Standard Industrial Classification 80, Activity Heading 0100).

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those parliamentary constituencies where the current level of unemployment is lower than in November 1990.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is available from NOMIS database in the Library.

Construction Site Safety

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will consider amending the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to allow the police the power to enforce its prescriptions with regard to ensuring proper supervision and securing of construction sites to ensure the safety of the general public.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am satisfied that existing arrangements for enforcement of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 on construction sites and elsewhere are adequate and efficient. I have no plans to amend the legislation.

Chemical Poisoning

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workplace incidents have resulted in death from chemical poisoning in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The following table shows the number of workplace incidents in the United Kingdom, as reported to enforcement authorities, which resulted in death from chemical poisoning:

Year (Commencing 1 April	Number of Incidents	Number of Fatalities
1988–89	13	13
1989–90	7	8
1990–91	14	18
1991–92	11	12
1992–93	7	8

These figures do not include deaths as a result of long-term exposure to chemicals, deaths arising from chemical poisoning reported to Her Majesty's inspectorate of mines, nor to local authorities in Great Britain for which figures are not readily available. Chemical poisoning is defined as exposure to, or asphyxiation by, chemicals and fumes, including natural fumes such as methane in sewers.

Compensation Claims

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in how many cases compensation claims to industrial tribunals have exceeded the upper limit laid down by the Government in the past two years; and how many have been settled at or above the limit.

Mr. Oppenheim: I regret that the information is not available.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what plans he has to review compensation arrangements for successful applicants against unfair dismissal who win their cases in an industrial tribunal;

(2) when he last reviewed the upper limit for compensation imposed on claims for unfair dismissal settled in the applicant's favour at an industrial tribunal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: Following the last review, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced on 17 October 1994, in—"Limits on guaranteed payment and limits on a weeks pay; A report by the Secretary of State for Employment", HC 664, that the limits used for calculating unfair dismissal compensation were not to be changed. The outcome of the next review will be announced next year.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many public appointments *(a)* he is responsible for making and *(b)* require his approval, including those not listed in "Public Bodies"; and if he will give this figure in terms of (i) appointments to executive bodies, (ii) appointments to advisory bodies and (iii) other appointments.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to the reply, 27 October 1994,* c. *840]:* I regret that figures quoted in my reply of 27 October 1994, were incorrect. The figures for public appointments which were stated to be taken from "Public Bodies 1993" also took account of a number of changes since its publication.

The figures listed in "Public Bodies 1993" are as follows: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Employment is responsible for 3,434 appointments, including some which require his approval. A total of 221 of these are to executive bodies, 789 to advisory bodies and 2,424 to other appointments.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Transportation

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has held and intends to hold with hauliers in relation to provisions for carrying small livestock.

Mrs. Browning: Officials have held one meeting with the various interests concerned with the carriage of small livestock by courier service. No further meetings are currently planned.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many livestock animals were classed as unfit to travel in each year since 1989.

Mrs. Browning: The available information is given in the following table, excluding 1993 when no figures were available. The figures relate to animals inspected prior to export from Great Britain.

Farm animals rejected as unfit for transport following veterinary inspection

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1994 March to September
Cattle (including Calves)	1,078	839	906	1,257	1,654
Sheep	6,950	5,527	13,722	26,813	13,083
Pigs	2	—	17	—	632
Goats	—	—	—	2	2
Totals	8,030	6,366	14,645	28,072	15,371

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by country the number of bovine spongiform encephalopathy affected herds in member states of the European Union.

Mrs. Browning: The numbers of herds affected by BSE in member states of the European Union are not available. However, we understand that the numbers of cases of the disease in each member state as at 11 November 1994, or otherwise if specified, are as follows:

Member State	Number
Belgium	—
Denmark	1
France (to 1 September 1994)	9
Germany	4
Greece	—
Ireland (to 21 September 1994)	97
Italy	2
Luxembourg	—
Netherlands	—
Portugal	10
Spain	—
United Kingdom	139,893

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether approval for a vaccine for viral haemorrhagic disease will be under consideration at the next meeting of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

Mrs. Browning: I believe that the hon. Member has in mind the Veterinary Products Committee. I announced on Friday 18 November that a provisional licence for a vaccine against viral haemorrhagic disease in rabbits had been issued the previous day, following advice from the committee.

Bovine Somatotropin

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the papers submitted to the Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products before they considered their advice to him on the use of BST.

Mrs. Browning: The EC Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products does not directly advise Ministers, but publishes formal opinions on dossiers submitted to it in accordance with directive 87/22/EEC. In the case of the two applications for BST its "Opinions and Evaluation Report" was published on 1 February 1993. Copies are available in the House Library as part of the consultation package on BST issued on 28 April 1994.

In assessing dossiers the committee considers all available information, both published and unpublished, but details of the data it receives remain confidential in accordance with article 3(1) of the directive.

Food Colourings

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what consideration has been given by United Kingdom approved authorities to bans on the use of E124 ponceau 4R in Norway and the United States for reasons of health risk to asthmatics, in relation to permitting use in the United Kingdom;

(2) what consideration has been given to bans on the use of E110 sunset yellow colouring in Norway and Finland by United Kingdom approved authorities in relation to permitting use in the United Kingdom;

(3) what consideration has been given by United Kingdom approved authorities to bans on the use of E104 quinine yellow food additive in Norway, the United States, Australia and Japan for reasons of hyperactivity, in relation to permitting use in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Browning: We are aware that the colours E104, E110 and E120 can give rise to adverse reactions in a small minority of the population. Nevertheless, each of these colours has been assessed as acceptable for use in food both by United Kingdom and by EC expert scientific committees, and they are listed as permitted colours in the EU colours directive.

As a general rule we do not ban the use of food additives which may cause intolerance reactions to a small number of individuals. But statutory ingredient labelling requires the presence of colours to be declared—and this should enable affected individuals to avoid food containing additives to which they react.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration has been given by the United Kingdom approval authorities to the use of food colourings by Messrs Mars in their food product M & Ms.

Mrs. Browning: All the food colourings used in this product have been subject to safety evaluations by expert scientific committees both in the United Kingdom and in the European Union. Such evaluations form the basis of food additive regulation.

Hill Farmers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage hill farmers under 40 years to remain on the land.

Mr. Jack: Under the EC side of the farming and conservation grant scheme an enhanced rate of grant has been payable to established young farmers under the age of 40 who have taken out improvement plans. Farmer in less-favoured areas, which cover most upland areas in England, regardless of age may be eligible for higher rates of grant under the farm and conservation grant scheme. They are also entitled to hill livestock compensatory allowances and an additional supplement to the sheep annual premium scheme.

Fishing

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing boats have been or are being decommissioned in each of the registered ports in the United Kingdom; what is the total estimated cost; what proportion this is of his targets in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The following table sets out the number of vessels decommissioned under the 1993 scheme, and those declared successful under the 1994 scheme:

Country	*Port*	*Number in 1993*	*Number in 1994*
England	Brixham	5	6
	Fleetwood	10	10
	Grimsby	13	14
	Hastings	5	10
	Lowestoft	5	12
	Newlyn	2	7
	North Shields	17	23
	Plymouth	4	7
	Poole	1	4
	Sub-total	62	93
Scotland	Arbroath	3	1
	Ayr	4	9
	Buckie	4	9
	Campbeltown	2	7
	Eyemouth	8	1
	Fraserburgh	2	2
	Lerwick	3	—
	Lossiemouth	7	5
	Macduff	—	2
	Mallaig	4	4
	Oban	—	1
	Peterhead	3	—
	Pittenweem	2	1
	Portree	—	1
	Scrabster	1	2
	Stornoway	1	2
	Ullapool	1	1
	Wick	—	1
	Sub-total	45	49

Country	Port	Number in 1993	Number in 1994
Northern Ireland	Ardglass	1	2
	Belfast	—	1
	Kilkeel	10	5
	Portavogie	17	5
	Sub-total	28	13
Wales	Caernarfon	—	2
	Milford Haven	—	2
	Sub-total	—	4
	Total	135	159

Expenditure on the 1993 and 1994 schemes is expected to total 16·7 million. I am encouraged that between them they will remove 4·8 per cent. of the fleet, assuming that all vessels successful in this year's tender are scrapped. With £8·3 million still available for next year, I am confident of exceeding my estimate of at least 5 per cent. for the whole programme to which column *417* of the *Official Report* for 7 July 1993 refers.

Timberwolf Crossbreed Dogs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many reported incidents of attacks on livestock by timberwolf crossbreed dogs there have been in each of the last four years.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* The Ministry has no records of attacks on livestock by timberwolf crossbreed dogs.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 24 November 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested for Lord Chancellor's Department existing next steps agencies is given in the table.

Agency	*Remuneration of postholder prior to chief executive* £	*End date of previous postholder's tenure*
HM Land Registry	53,420	31 December 1990
Public Record Office	49,300 plus 2,000 Inner London Weighting	31 March 1992
Public Trust Office	50,525 plus 1,776 Inner London Weighting	8 June 1994

Court Accommodation

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will bring forward proposals to meet the problems of witnesses fearing intimidation in the waiting areas of court houses.

Mr. John. M Taylor: This Department recognises the concern witnesses may have about the fear of intimidation and has taken steps to minimise the risk. The court standards and design guide makes provision for one courtroom witness suite per Crown court centre, and similar arrangements are made for new magistrates courts, with the provision of multi-purpose suites. Approximately 40 per cent. of existing Crown court centres already provide separate and exclusive witness waiting areas. Where these are not available, special arrangements can be made to ensure that, as far as possible, intimidation does not occur.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Tax

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average council tax in England and Wales for each of the property bandings.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The average council tax in 1994–95, before transitional relief and council tax benefit, for a property containing two adults, is as follows:

Band	*England* £	*Wales* £
A	387	234
B	451	272
C	516	311
D	580	350
E	709	428
F	838	506
G	967	584
H	1,160	701

Averages cannot be calculated for England and Wales combined because a different banding structure operates in each country.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against council tax valuation banding have been received; and what percentage of these appeals have been (i) resolved, (ii) withdrawn or (iii) are still outstanding *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by valuation office.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As at the end of October the Valuation Office had received 946,149 council tax banding appeals in respect of dwellings in England. Of these (i) 63·9 per cent. had been resolved, (ii) 20·7 per cent. had been withdrawn before a tribunal hearing, and (iii) 36·1 per cent. were outstanding.

The numbers of appeals received as at 31 October and the percentage for (i), (ii) and (iii) by VOA office are as follows:

Region: East Anglia Office	*Received*	*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(iii)*
Bedford	9,829	62·3	18·9	37·7
Cambridge	10,108	59·7	25·0	40·3
Chelmsford	15,805	70·9	13·8	29·1
Colchester	17,253	61·1	11·9	38·9
Ipswich	11,416	55·3	9·5	44·7
Norwich	14,421	54·8	9·5	45·2
Peterborough	11,327	58·3	8·0	41·7
St Albans	9,480	61·0	20·7	39·0
Stevenage	8,291	54·4	13·3	45·6

Region: East Midland Office	*Received*	*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(iii)*
Derby	12,654	65·6	12·8	34·4
Doncaster	6,410	71·1	9·3	28·9
Grimsby	7,295	63·7	10·2	36·3
Hull	9,459	66·4	18·5	33·6
Leicester	6,858	66·2	22·0	33·8
Lincoln	10,327	68·5	11·6	31·5
Loughborough	8,090	66·0	15·3	34·0
Mansfield	7,470	70·5	10·6	29·5
Northampton	7,811	70·5	18·6	29·5
Nottingham	8,375	72·7	11·1	27·3
Sheffield	7,942	63·6	15·9	36·4

Region: London Office	*Received*	*(i)*	*(ii)*	*(iii)*
Barking	4,175	58·1	21·1	41·9
Bromley	18,112	60·1	12·3	39·9
Camden	7,983	59·9	14·8	40·1

Region: London Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
City	224	86·2	37·9	13·8
Ealing	9,877	65·1	14·4	34·9
Enfield	20,442	58·6	21·2	41·4
Greenwich	11,788	55·1	13·2	44·9
Harrow	10,167	59·7	12·8	40·3
Islington	8,873	59·1	12·3	40·9
Kensington	16,561	60·3	13·2	39·7
Lambeth	13,354	65·0	14·8	35·0
Redbridge	6,564	61·7	23·6	38·3
Tower Hamlets	3,867	60·7	14·9	39·3
Westminster 1	3,096	61·2	13·3	38·8
Westminster 2	5,921	78·7	15·1	21·3
Wimbledon	12,850	59·3	14·2	40·7

Region: North Western Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Bolton	6,450	65·9	6·8	34·1
Burnley	8,515	63·0	8·1	37·0
Chester	7,846	61·9	8·9	38·1
Crewe	10,286	60·1	14·5	39·9
Lancaster	9,557	69·0	8·3	31·0
Liverpool	8,797	62·4	6·1	37·6
Manchester	2,509	61·4	9·6	38·6
Preston	7,629	62·1	6·5	37·9
Rochdale	3,539	76·0	13·2	24·0
Salford	6,496	73·8	6·5	26·2
Stockport	7,197	60·7	9·6	39·3
Warrington	10,042	65·0	11·3	35·0

Region: Northern Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Alnwick	7,146	68·6	11·7	31·4
Bradford	6,250	63·1	13·6	36·9
Carlisle	6,978	65·0	11·1	35·0
Durham	8,280	71·3	21·1	28·7
Halifax	11,706	72·7	9·8	27·3
Harrogate	12,538	69·3	11·0	30·7
Leeds	8,654	67·6	13·7	32·4
Middlesborough	4,935	77·8	12·0	22·2
Newcastle	4,607	75·7	21·1	24·3
Sunderland	4,971	77·5	14·3	22·5
Ulverston	6,658	60·8	16·0	39·2
York	10,688	65·7	11·1	34·3

Region: South Eastern Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Brighton	11,533	71·8	13·9	28·2
Chatham	7,610	65·2	20·2	34·8
Eastbourne	11,184	58·4	9·3	41·6
Folkestone	9,464	67·1	14·8	32·9
Guildford	12,273	59·1	9·9	40·9
Reigate	18,047	54·8	19·3	45·2
Tunbridge Wells	16,189	61·0	7·2	39·0
Worthing	15,495	60·9	12·6	39·1

Region: Southern Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Aylesbury	15,662	64·9	11·3	35·1
Basingstoke	12,280	59·5	11·6	40·5
Bournemouth	12,697	63·0	14·1	37·0
Dorchester	7,377	59·8	15·6	40·2

Region: Southern Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Oxford	14,830	72·7	14·3	27·3
Portsmouth	7,173	63·0	13·8	37·0
Portsmouth (IOW)	4,259	60·0	13·5	40·0
Reading	17,720	60·8	15·0	39·2
Southampton	16,324	64·5	8·5	35·5
Swindon	12,854	66·4	9·5	33·6

Region: West Midland Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Birmingham	8,958	69·3	17·0	30·7
Coventry	7,241	63·1	15·8	36·9
Kidderminster	7,150	62·1	13·0	37·9
Lichfield	6,082	61·4	12·6	38·6
Sandwell	1,814	75·6	22·0	24·4
Shrewsbury	11,821	63·5	11·7	36·5
Stoke	7,796	65·2	8·4	34·8
Warwick	10,319	62·5	8·7	37·5
Wolverhampton	5,870	75·8	25·3	24·2
Worcester	15,135	62·5	15·9	37·5

Region: Western Office	Received	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Barnstaple	8,704	65·7	11·7	34·3
Bath	8,889	69·8	11·3	30·2
Bristol	11,779	64·8	14·8	35·2
Exeter	14,742	63·4	16·3	36·6
Gloucester	18,140	67·7	11·2	32·3
Plymouth	13,942	64·1	10·9	35·9
St Austell	13,235	63·6	13·1	36·4
Taunton	13,902	53·2	13·1	36·8

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about delays being experienced by applicants for mandatory housing improvement grants; and what provision in the relevant regulations would prevent claims for consequential loss by households whose property suffered marked deterioration in condition between the date of initial inquiry and final grant approval which has necessitated extra works and additional expenditure.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We are aware that some applicants for house renovation grants have experienced delays in the processing of their applications by local authorities.

The grant legislation in part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 does not provide for additional claims from householders. However, authorities must ensure that a property is fit for human habitation on completion of grant-aided works. The amount of grant may also be re-determined where unforseen works arise.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Tables A and B list bodies which existed in 1979, were classified as

non-departmental pubic bodies, and have been wound-up as such bodies by the Department of the Environment since 1979. Table C lists non-departmental public bodies which have been both created and wound-up by the Department of the Environment in the period since 1979.

Table A

Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Advisory Panel on Institutional Finance in New Towns
Centre for Environmental Studies
Location of Offices Bureaux
London Housing Staff Advisory Committee
National Building Agency
English Water Authorities (9)
National Water Council
New town Development Corporations
- Aycliffe
- Basildon
- Bracknell
- Central Lancashire
- Corby
- Harlow
- Milton Keynes
- Northampton
- Peterborough
- Peterlee
- Redditch
- Runcorn
- Skelmersdale
- Stevenage
- Telford
- Warrington

New Towns Staff Commission
Water Space Amenity Commission

The above Table includes organisations, some, or all, of whose functions have been transferred to bodies other than Non-Departmental Public Bodies. It excludes organisations whose functions have largely been transferred to, or merged with, other Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

Table B

Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Advisory Committee on Bird Sanctuaries in Royal Parks
Advisory Committee on Housing Cooperatives
Advisory Committee on Local Government Audit
Advisory Committee on Protection of Birds England and Wales
Advisory Committee on Rent Rebates and Rent Allowances
Advisory Committee on Sculptures in Royal Parks
Advisory Committee on Trees in Royal Parks
Ancient Monuments Board Committee for Rescue Archaeology
Area Archaeological Advisory Committees (13)
Building Research Establishment Advisory Committee
Clean Air Council
Committee to Examine Standards of Lawn Tennis in Great Britain
Commission on Energy and the Environment
Construction and Housing Research Advisory Council
Construction Industry Manpower Board
Detergents and Allied Products - Voluntary Notifications Scheme Scrutiny Group
Economic Planning Councils (8)
Environmental Board
Hadrian's Wall Advisory Committee
Historic Buildings Council for England
Housing Association Registration Advisory Council
Housing Services Advisory Group
Hydraulics Research Station Advisory Committee
Local Government Commission for England
National Consultative Council for the Building and Civil Engineering Industries
Noise Advisory Council
Planning and Transportation Research Advisory Council
Recreation Management Training Committee
Scientific Authority for Animals
Standing Technical Committee on Synthetic Detergents

Table C

Executive

Greater Manchester Residuary Body
Merseyside Residuary Body
South Yorkshire Residuary Body
Tyne and Wear Residuary Body
West Midlands Residuary Body
West Yorkshire Residuary Body

Advisory

Committee on the Management of Privately-Owned Blocks of Flats
London and Metropolitan Government Staff Commission
Review of Rating of Plant and Machinery

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In 1979 the Department of the Environment was responsible for a total of 114 non-departmental public bodies—45 executives, 66 advisory and three tribunals. In 1993, the Department was responsible for a total of 41 non-departmental public bodies—28 executive, 10 advisory and three tribunals.

Ethnic Minorities (Education)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what amount of money was distributed to local education authorities through the standard spending assessment formula to meet the additional educational needs of those from non-English speaking backgrounds in each of the last five years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In each of the last five years the additional education needs index has contributed the following amounts to authorities standard spending assessment:

Total England contributed on the Additional Educational Needs index

	(£ million)
1994–95	3,241
1993–94	3,749
1992–93	3,986
1991–92	3,696
1990–91	3,458

The additional educational needs index is composed of indicators which measure lone-parent families, children of income support claimants and ethnic background.

Registration of Architects

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce legislation or produce the draft of a Bill for introduction by a private Member covering the registration of architects.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I hope that appropriate legislation can be introduced at an early opportunity. My noble Friend, the Minister for Construction and Planning, wrote to the chairman of the Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom on 21 November setting out our proposals for reform of the Architects Registration Acts. A copy of his letter has been placed in the library.

Construction Industry

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will respond to the Latham report on the future of the construction industry.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In common with the whole of the construction industry, the Government gave a warm welcome in the speech of my noble Friend the Minister for Construction and Planning on 25 July to the thrust of Sir Michael Latham's report. We are now supporting the review implementation forum's work. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has approved an interdepartmental scrutiny of Government's procurement of construction which will respond to Sir Michael's recommendation that Government should commit itself to being a best practice client.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the next report from Sir Michael Latham; when he expects to be able to announce his response; what provision is being made for the working parties on the Latham report while he is considering his response; and when he expects to announce whether the Government will introduce legislation to implement the Latham report.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The review implementation forum, chaired by Sir Michael Latham, is due to report on the limited range of issues within its remit to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State by the end of December. My right hon. Friend will consider the report at a meeting with industry organisations currently fixed for 2 February. Meanwhile, the secretariat of the forum and the working parties will remain in place. We have made it clear that we are prepared in principle to legislate on Sir Michael Latham's proposals subject to agreement on the need for, and form of, such legislation.

CITES

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the environment if he will make a statement to the House on the outcome of the Conference on International Trade in Endangered Species meeting in Florida.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the recent CITES meeting in Fort Lauderdale.

Mr. Atkins: The CITES conference on the parties agreed new measures to strengthen the operation and effectiveness of the convention. Twenty-seven species presently included on appendix II will be uplisted to appendix I, and 25 species presently on appendix I or II will be downlisted, including seven which will be deleted from the appendices altogether. The current listing of a further eight species will be unchanged but attached conditions will be relaxed. Thirty-seven species will be added to the convention for the first time.

The United Kingdom was instrumental in securing progress on several important issues. A new enforcement resolution identifies priorities for funding including the secondment of law enforcement officers to the CITES secretariat; the development and implementation of regional law enforcement agreements; additional training and technical assistance; and closer international liaison between CITES, national enforcement agencies and existing international bodies, particularly the World Customs Organisation and Interpol.

There was overwhelming support for a United Kingdom proposal that a group be established to find solutions to technical problems associated with the listing of timber species on CITES, and to address other related matters. The group will bring producing and importing countries together to discuss issues of timber in trade in preparation for the next CITES conference in 1997.

Through our scientific authorities, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the United Kingdom played a prominent role in drawing up new criteria to guide CITES parties in deciding what level of control to apply to species in the future. No parties voted against the new criteria which will introduce more objectivity while allowing flexibility in some cases.

There was a constructive debate on South Africa's proposal to downlist its elephant populations to allow trade in hides and meat only. The debate produced a strong commitment to continuing the dialogue among African range states begun at the recent meeting in Botswana organised by the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. In the absence of support from other African range states, South Africa withdrew its proposal.

Germany withdrew its proposals to include a number of African and one Asian timber species on appendix II, but there was a full and considered discussion of the Netherlands proposals to list American mahogany—Swietenia macrophylla. The United Kingdom voted in support but the proposal failed by a small margin to secure the necessary two thirds majority. However, a number of producer countries announced their intention to list the species on appendix III.

The conference agreed a proposal to allow trade in live white rhinos from South Africa for conservation purposes only. In addition, a resolution on rhino conservation in Asia and Africa was adopted to strengthen law enforcement co-operation and to encourage the development of recovery plans for endangered populations.

Tiger range states collaborated with countries where trade in tiger parts persists to produce a resolution call for greater co-operation and stronger legislation to combat illegal trade. On behalf of my right hon. Friend, the United Kingdom announced £50,000 to assist in the work of the recently formed global tiger forum. This is additional to the £97,500 previously announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs for a study into the Asian medicine trade to find ways of eliminating illegal trade and reducing demand for medicinal products derived from endangered species such as rhinos, tigers and bears.

The conference agreed to expand membership of the convention's standing committee to make it more representative of the 126 parties. The United Kingdom and the Russian Federation were chosen as the European representatives on the committee which is chaired by Japan. The United Kingdom and Trinidad and Tobago are vice-chairmen. The committee can expect a heavy work

load and we will play an active part in progressing key issues between now and the next conference which is to be hosted by Zimbabwe.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has on those countries currently overdue in their payments to the CITES secretariat;

(2) if he will list those countries currently in arrears with their payments to the CITES secretariat.

Mr. Atkins: At the recent CITES meeting in the USA it was reported that for the four years 1990–93, 53 parties owed a total of 530,000 Swiss francs in outstanding contributions to the trust fund. For the current year, 1994, only 34 per cent. of contributions due had been received. Details of individual parties in arrears or with contributions overdue were not made available to the meeting but only to the budget committee chaired by the United Kingdom. It would not therefore be appropriate to publish this information. The United Kingdom is not among those countries which are in arrears or whose contribution is overdue.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to send Ministers to future meetings of CITES.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend decides before each conference whether the United kingdom delegation should be led by a Minister. Ministerial representation at CITES conferences is rare among delegations from most of the parties.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what support is offered by his Department to non-governmental organisations to assist in their work relating to CITES.

Mr. Atkins: We are presently supporting three major projects at a total cost of £215,000. These are:

'Support for the implementation of CITES in the Uinted Kindom' carried out by TRAFFIC International and jointly funded with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF);

The appointment of a scientific co-ordinator for the African Rhino Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union (IUCN); and

Assistance to the IUCN's African Elephant Specialist Group for a scientific/programme officer.

In addition, we provide strategic funding to Wildlife and Countryside Link, which fields a CITES liaison group, at a cost this year of £17,450.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to promote within the European Union a funding and enforcement implementation programme for CITES.

Mr Atkins: We are keen to see enforcement and implementation issues properly addressed in the new draft regulation on wildlife trade and continue to encourage progress in the negotiating process. The European Commission helped to provide funding for the recent meeting in Botswana on the African elephant and, resources permitting, we will encourage it to consider further financial support for CITES issues, for example in assisting further dialogue on elephant issues among the range states.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to convene a donor range state liaison forum to develop mechanisms within CITES for the disposal of the elephant products currently stockpiled in African countries.

Mr. Atkins: At the recent CITES meeting in the USA there was general agreement that African elephant range states should continue their recently renewed dialogue on elephant issues within CITES and this process was set in hand by meetings of the African regional group. In addition, the CITES standing committee, of which the United Kingdom is vice-chairman, was asked to consider the issue of stockpiles in liaison with the African range states and to report to the next conference on the parties. The United Kingdom does not therefore need to take a specific initiative but expects to be involved in the relevant discussions via the standing committee.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of the infractions report from CITES.

Mr. Atkins: Copies of the report are today being placed in both Libraries.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current level of financial support provided to CITES by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Atkins: Our annual subscription to CITES is currently £130,000. In addition, we provide a contribution of £10,000 per annum to support the attendance at CITES meetings of delegates from developing countries.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect on stockpiles of vicuna products resulting from the downlisting of vicuna from A1 to A2 of CITES; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The downlisting will not take effect until 90 days after the conference of the parties. We shall be discussing with other European Union member states how the Community should implement the downlisting in so far as current stockpiles are concerned.

Recycled Waste

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proportion of recycled demolition waste is included within the concrete structures of the new Department of the Environment headquarters building in Bressenden place, London SW1.

(2) what steps his Department has taken to ensure recycled demolition waste is used in the main structure of its new headquarters building in Bressenden place, London SW1.

(3) what proportion of the concrete arising from the demolition of the building on the site of the Department of the Environment's new headquarters in Bressenden place, London SW1 has been re-used for aggregate purposes.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The redevelopment of Eland house is being undertaken by Land Securities plc. The Department has signed an agreement to take a 25-year lease with a 15-year break provision against an agreed performance specification.

The recycling of demolition waste in the construction of a building is one of the criteria of the building research establishment environmental assessment method. The developers of the new headquarters building are under contractual obligation to use reasonable endeavours to maximise its rating under BREEAM.

Uncontaminated demolition materials were specified by the developers for fill and hardcore and, where possible, used. The proportion of reuse is likely to be less than 50 per cent. by volume because concrete made from such

materials has an inappropriate strength-weight ratio in the context of this building's design.

The demolition of the building previously on the site of the new headquarters building was a matter for the developers. Figures relating to the proportion of concrete taken off site for crushing and re-use are not available but I understand from the developers that approximately 18,000 tonnes were dealt with in this manner.

National Parks

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to bring forward legislation relating to the national parks.

Mr. Atkins: The Environment Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech last week, will contain a number of environmental measures including provisions to meet our commitments to the future care and protection of the national parks.

Dumplington Shopping Centre

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what costs have so far been incurred by his Department in respect of the Dumplington shopping centre legal proceedings.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Secretary of State's current liability for legal costs arising on this case is provisionally estimated to be in the order of £150,000. This is contingent upon the outcome of his appeal to the House of Lords.

"Paying for our Past"

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusion the Government have reached in the light of responses to their consultation paper "Paying for our Past".

Mr. Gummer: The Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office have today published a paper, "Framework for Contaminated Land", which sets out the Government's proposals for the machinery for dealing with contaminated land and of liabilities and concludes the review into these subjects set up last year by my right hon. Friends and then Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales—*Official Report;* 24 March 1993, columns *633–34.*

The Government remain committed to the "suitable for use" approach to the control and treatment of existing contamination relating to any requirement for remedial work to the presence of any unacceptable risks to health or the environment and to the actual or intended use of the site. This was widely supported in the consultation responses. It provides the basis for tackling real hazards where they exist in an orderly and controlled fashion. By not imposing unnecessary financial and regulatory burdens, we will not discourage enterprise, which is itself a major contributor to the reinstatement of contaminated land.

We have already issued guidance about the treatment of contaminated land in the planning process, and shall continue to publish a series of research reports and guidance notes designed to help businesses and regulators determine when remediation is required and to what level, striking an appropriate balance between the costs and the environmental benefits of any action.

Subject to parliamentary approval, we propose that the Environment Agency should take over this programme of research and guidance, providing a nationally coherent framework for remedial action. It will also be asked to oversee progress.

We shall at the same time propose legislative amendments to the provisions whereby regulators—the Environment Agency and the borough and district councils, or unitary authorities—can require the prevention or abatement of contamination. We do not believe that there is a need for radical change to the effect of these provisions nor to the underlying incidence of financial liability. There is, however, a need for greater clarity and certainty, based on the principle that costs should as far as possible follow responsibility.

The overall aim will be for the regulatory authorities to work with private and public sector organisations to promote the treatment of contaminated land and, where possible, the productive re-use of such sites. English Partnerships and the Welsh Development Agency will continue to have important roles in tackling dereliction and the treatment of contaminated sites.

Home owners and small firms may face particular difficulties both in assessing their potential liabilities for contamination and in meeting any liabilities which they might have acquired unwittingly. We are keen, therefore to see improvements in the effectiveness of the conveyancing process. Guidance published by the Department of the Environment and the proposed agency should also make it easier for people to both predict and address their problems. Regulatory authorities will also be required to consider questions of hardship resulting from their enforcement of environmental obligations.

Financial institutions expressed concerns during our review that they might be held responsible for the actions of their clients or the companies for which they act. We have no intention of pursuing a "deep pockets" approach to liability. Whilst financial institutions should not be shielded from normal commercial risks, they should not be subject to potentially open-ended liabilities resulting from damage for which they were not responsible. To the extent that there are any uncertainties in the existing statutory provisions, we shall clarify them.

In "Paying for our Past" we said that, in the light of the emerging conclusions of the review, we would re-assess the justification for the present unique statutory exemptions in respect of water escaping from abandoned mines which pollutes controlled waters. In view of the concerns that have been expressed about water pollution from abandoned mines, we shall propose legislative amendments to remove the existing statutory defence and exemptions for mines abandoned after the end of 1999 so that the agency will have the same powers for those mines as for other discharges.

We shall also propose a duty on mine operators to give the agency six months' notice of any proposed abandonment. This will provide an additional safeguard to ensure that when mines are abandoned this is done in a responsible manner with full regard to the effects on the water environment.

These provisions on abandoned mines will end a long-standing anomaly and enhance the agency's ability to tackle and prevent pollution.

The regulatory authorities will have the task of identifying problems caused by contamination and

establishing priorities for dealing with them. In the light of this, we do not consider that a general register of land subject to potentially contaminative uses is warranted, and we propose to repeal section 143 of the Environment Protection Act 1990.

At the time that the review was announced, there were also concerns about the application of the common law to civil liabilities for contamination. Following the House of Lords judgment in the case of Cambridge Water Company *v.* Eastern Counties Leather plc we believe that the law in this area is now better understood and provides a sensible balance between the interest of all potential parties. Accordingly, we do not propose legislative amendments to the common law.

We are very grateful to the 349 individuals and organisations who responded to our consultation paper, "Paying for our Past". A summary of the responses and a list of those who agreed for their responses to be made public has been placed in the Library of the House, and reference copies of their responses have been placed in the DOE library. Responses relating specifically to Wales have been placed in the Welsh Office library.

The Government's proposals are set out in detail in the paper, "Framework for Contaminated Land", which I have placed in the Library of the House and the Vote Office. They should lead to greater certainty and confidence in the market, helping ensure that contaminated land is brought back into productive use and that environmental hazards are removed.

The necessary legislative provisions will be published shortly in the Environment Agencies Bill.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" states the general principles of conduct applying to Ministers.

Conditions of service for the staff of my Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their official duties; to be impartial in carrying out their official duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others, and not to accept favours or benefits of any kind from a third party which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity. These principles and guidance are set out in the Department's "Staff Handbook" and are in accord with the requirements of the civil service management code.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This information is not held centrally in my Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This Department has five next steps agencies—the Building Research Establishment, the Planning Inspectorate, the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, the Security Facilities Executive and the Buying Agency. The salary of the official in the post equivalent to that of chief executive in the month before the creation of each agency was as follows:

BRE (March 1990) £39,300 (+£2,000 London Allowance)
PINS (March 1992 £48,000
QEII CC (June 1989) £32,826 (+£1,750 London Weighting)
SAFE (September 1993) £45,959 (+£1,776 London Weighting)
TBA (October 1991 £39,402

All these officials were paid under the normal arrangements for their respective civil service grade, and were not in receipt of any other emoluments.

Police Budget, Merseyside

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect the cutting in the police budget will have on Merseyside council tax payers over the next five financial years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The level of the police budget on Merseyside, and its effect on council tax payers, is a matter for the Merseyside police authority.

Town Twinning

Mr. Radice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities and towns in England are twinned with German cities and towns.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department does not collect this information.

Property Valuations

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce measures to appoint the Scottish rating assessors for the purposes of valuation of properties for rating purposes in England and Wales.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Scottish Assessors Association

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has met or intends to meet representatives of the Scottish Assessors Association; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of the association, nor does he have plans to do so.

National Environmental Code of Practice

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the economic impact of the national voluntary environmental code of practice on businesses; if he will list the

businesses which have agreed to follow the national environmental code of practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The are a number of voluntary codes—promoted by, for example, individual industries, the International Chamber of Commerce, and the CBI—through which a commitment to environmental management may be demonstrated.

The Government welcome such voluntary initiatives: the more industry chooses to operate in a sustainable manner, the less need there will be for Government to regulate.

New Century House

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when New Century house on Westminster Bridge road was vacated; what has been the cost of maintenance since then; and what plans his Department has for the building.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Century house, Westminster Bridge road was vacated on 1 August 1994. Maintenance payments since that date total £47,657.38.

Negotiations with the landlord and the planning authority are in hand to enable the building to be used as an emergency shelter by the Construction Industry Relief and Assistance for the Single Homeless—CRASH—during the winter of 1994–95.

A Government Department has expressed some interest in using the building after then and refurbishment. Value for money studies are currently being undertaken. It is being offered to other Departments and will be placed on the open market if no long-term user can be found within Government.

Houses (Heating)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the percentage of extra fuel which is required to heat identical houses in *(a)* Edinburgh, *(b)* Glasgow, *(c)* Aberdeen, *(d)* Dundee, *(e)* Lerwick and *(f)* Braemar, taking Bristol as the base; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The percentage of extra fuel required to heat a typical semi-detached house with gas central heating is as follows for each of the specified locations:

(a) Edinburgh +28 per cent., *(b)* Glasgow +23 per cent., *(c)* Aberdeen +41 per cent., *(d)* Dundee +32 per cent., *(e)* Lerwick +53 per cent. and *(f)* Braemer +66 per cent.

These figures have been calculated using the Building Research Establishment domestic model, BREDEM.

English Partnerships

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on English Partnerships' role and progress.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the role and progress of English Partnerships.

Mr. Curry: English Partnerships is making excellent progress, demonstrated by the launch today of its "Investment Guide", explaining how developers, and others in the public, private and voluntary sectors can access its advice and resources to deliver effective and lasting regeneration.

English Partnerships was set up under the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. Its remit, informed by the Secretary of State's guidance issued in April 1994, is to promote the regeneration of areas of need, across England, through the reclamation and development of derelict or vacant land and buildings.

English Partnerships was formed on 10 November 1993 and immediately assumed responsibility for administering the city grant programme; but only came into full operation on 1 April 1994, when it took over, in addition, the management of derelict land grant and the English Estates development programme, previously overseen by the Department of Trade and Industry.

In that short time English Partnerships, under Lord Walker's chairmanship, has made very substantial progress. It has announced a £122 million land reclamation programme; and has already approved 285 separate regeneration projects with a total English Partnerships investment of £200 million. This includes English Partnerships' key role in facilitating Samsung's £600 million inward investment at Cleveland, which will generate 3,000 jobs.

English Partnerships has now appointed six regional directors to a network of offices covering the whole of England. They will plan and deliver support for regeneration, working closely with the private sector, local authorities and communities; and liaising with the Government offices for the regions on projects within the single regeneration budget, main programmes relevant to regeneration and opportunities for European funding.

English Partnerships' "Investment Guide", a copy of which I am depositing in the Library, builds on that foundation. The guide explains the integrated approach which English Partnerships will follow and, in particular, its new unified regime for supporting regeneration strategies and projects, which will supersede the programmes it inherited. Building on the freedoms provided by the Government's private finance initiative, the new regime ensures that English Partnerships can operate as a strategic partner and investor in regeneration through a flexible mix of instruments—including grants, loans, guarantees and joint ventures—tailored to the particular needs and opportunities each project presents. Existing city grant, derelict land grant and English Estates commitments will be met.

The guide marks an important milestone. English Partnerships will now be building on its success, working with private, public and voluntary sector partners to deliver the employment and environmental benefits flowing from successful regeneration.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Walter Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue the draft housing revenue account subsidy determinations for 1995–96.

Mr. Curry: The draft housing revenue account subsidy determinations for 1995–96 have been issued today and local authorities have been invited to let my Department have their views by 15 December 1994.

The proposed average guideline rent for 1995–96 is £33·82 a week nationally; an average increase of £2·28 a week on this year, 1994–95. Increase range between £1·82

a week in authorities with relatively low value housing and £2·82 in authorities with high value stock.

The average management and maintenance allowance per dwelling would increase by 3·75 per cent.—an extra £125 million nationally—which would take total M and M provision to £3,445 million. These extra resources would benefit 216 authorities, whose present M and M allowance is below the Government's assessment of their relative need to spend. As a result, each authority's allowance would be a minimum of 97 per cent. of their target.

These proposals strike a reasonable balance between the need to contain public expenditure and the need to ensure council tenants receive decent services at acceptable cost. The percentage increase in guideline rents is lower than in 1994–95, while the extra provision for management and maintenance expenditure means that it should be possible to improve services in many areas. Nearly 80 per cent. of tenants stand to gain from the higher management and maintenance allowances.

Local authorities determine their own expenditure and set their own rents. But I hope that they will follow the Government's lead in adopting a balanced approach, and will respond positively to our proposals.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment during how many of the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department between 1 January and 30 June 1994 those Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which those activities took place.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Between 1 January and 30 June 1994, Ministers in my Department made 21 overseas visits in their official capacity. Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

Disabled People

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he is taking of the needs of deaf people for assistance to live in the community in his consideration of legislation to assist people with disabilities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* Part M of the building regulations, which contains requirements relating to access facilities for disabled people in non-domestic buildings, was revised in 1992 and extended to cover provisions to assist people with impaired hearing. The regulations at present apply to new buildings and most extensions. The building regulations advisory committee is considering whether these provisions should be extended to include where alteration work is proposed to existing buildings.

Non-domestic Council Tax

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to relieve owners of unlet shops from non-domestic council tax to bring them in line with owners of warehouses and industrial units.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* I have no such plans.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the annual costs to *(a)* the Department of Education and *(b)* education and library boards in Northern Ireland related to the transfer procedure in each of the last three years for which records are available.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*£000 1993–94*
Department of Education[1]	143	156	246
Education and Library Boards	454	485	508

[1] Excludes teacher substitution for the completion of Transfer Report forms, which cannot be identified separately but includes the cost of appeals regarding placements in grammar and non-grammar secondary schools.

Legal Students (Exam Results)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students in Northern Ireland were dissatisfied with the advanced level grades allocated to them and asked for their papers to be re-marked in each of the last three years; and in how many cases original marks were *(a)* upgraded, *(b)* downgraded and *(c)* unchanged.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Requests for re-mark of Northern Ireland GCE A Level papers

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Total Requests	1,401	1,333	1,148
Results Upgraded	122	98	82
Results Unchanged	1,279	1,235	1,066

Note:
It is not the council's policy to reduce the grade originally awarded to an examination candidate. The information relates to examinations conducted by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (formerly the Northern Ireland Schools Examinations and Assessment Council.

Prison Privatisation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the present list of Her Majesty's prisons in Northern Ireland which are now under consideration for privatisation.

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Office has responsibility for four prisons and a young offenders centre, none of which are under consideration for privatisation.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the pupil-teacher ratios for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94 for public sector (i) nursery schools, (ii) primary schools, (iii) secondary schools, (iv) non-maintained schools, (v) special schools and (vi) all schools; and whether these figures include unqualified teachers.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*
(i) Nursery	24:4	24:7
(ii) Primary	22:2	21:6
(iii) Secondary	15:3	15:2
(iv) Non-maintained[1]	—	—
(v) Special	6:9	6:8
(vi) All schools	18:2	17:9

Note:
[1] Northern Ireland does not have any schools in this category. The figures do not include unqualified teachers.

Livestock

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the personnel licensed to export livestock from Aldergrove have previous convictions for offences relating to the welfare of livestock.

Mr. Ancram: There is no requirement for such personnel to be licensed. I am satisfied that the principals involved in the recent export of animals from Aldergrove have no past convictions for welfare offences.

Before any consignment leaves Northern Ireland the Department carries out checks to determine that the facilities for the export of the livestock are sufficient to ensure that the welfare of the animals can be properly safeguarded throughout the journey.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Sir John Wheeler: In some cases, the work currently carried out by the chief executive was not carried out by a single individual before the establishment of the agency and in these cases salaries have been estimated.

Agency	*Salary* £	*Emoluments*
Training and Employment Agency	43,100	NIL
Rate Collection Agency	28,619	NIL
Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland	46,122	NIL
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	22,761	NIL
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	34,898	NIL
Child Support Agency	[1]—	—
Social Security Agency	45,690	NIL
Valuation and Lands Agency	54,000	NIL
Compensation Agency	42,724	NIL

Note:
[1]No comparable post in DHSS (Northern Ireland)

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce a grading system to establish the quality of facilities and services in private nursing homes.

Mr. Moss: None. I am satisfied with the present arrangements under which the registration and inspection units of the four health and social services boards are responsible for setting and inspecting the standards of facilities and services provided in all residential care and nursing homes.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans exist for the reinstatement of the cross-border electricity interconnector.

Mr. Ancram: The reinstatement of the cross-border electricity interconnector is a matter for Northern Ireland Electricity and the Electricity Supply Board in the Republic of Ireland. I understand, however, that an announcement on the future of the interconnector is imminent.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average waiting period for patients needing hip replacement treatment, at each hospital where this operation is provided; and what steps are being taken to reduce the waiting period.

Mr. Moss: It is not possible to provide an average waiting period for patients still waiting for treatment. It is usual instead to refer to median waiting times, which indicate the length of time the middle person on the list has been waiting. This information is not available for the specific procedure of hip replacement but it is available for the speciality of trauma and orthopaedics and is as follows:

Hospital	*Median Waiting Time. Months*
Altnagelvin	3-5
Belfast City	6-8
Musgrave Park	3-5
Ulster	0-2

A total of £10 million was made available last year spread over three years to reduce waiting lists in all specialities. As a result, the number waiting more than 18 months in the trauma and orthopaedics speciality has reduced from 367 in September 1993 to 84 in September 1994, and we expect no patient to have to wait more than 18 months by 1 April 1995.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Sir John Wheeler: While no specific guidelines have been issued, the conditions of service for the staff of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list and date those occasions in the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a

decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

International Fund for Ireland

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during what period Mr. John McGuckian was chairman of the International Fund for Ireland; by whom he was appointed to that position; and what were his given reasons for resigning.

Sir John Wheeler: Mr. McGuckian served as chairman of the International Fund for Ireland from 1 October 1989 to 31 December 1992. The board of the fund, including the chairman, is appointed jointly by the British and Irish Governments and normally serves a three-year term. On this occasion the term of appointment for Mr. McGuckian and the other board members was extended by three months for operational reasons. A new chairman and board were appointed on 1 January 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the occasions when grant from the International Fund for Ireland was paid to a business in which *(a)* one of the fund's board members or *(b)* the spouse, sibling or son or daughter of one of the fund's board members was a shareholder or director;

(2) if he will list all grants of over £10,000 made by the International Fund for Ireland since it was established; how precisely each grant furthers the aims of promoting reconciliation between Roman Catholics and Protestants; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: The International Fund for Ireland is an international organisation established by the British and Irish Governments and administered by an independent board appointed jointly by the two Governments. All decisions on disbursements by the fund are a matter for that board and questions regarding disbursements should be directed to the fund's chairman, Mr. William T. McCarter, PO Box 2000, Belfast, BT4 3SA. I understand, however, that the fund provides full details of all offers of assistance in its annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the purpose of the International Fund for Ireland; how much money it has received from *(a)* the British Government, *(b)* the Irish Government and *(c)* other public sector sources in each year since it was established; and for what those funds were used.

Sir John Wheeler: The International Fund for Ireland was established in 1986 by the British and Irish Governments with the twin objectives of promoting economic and social advance and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Nationalists and Unionists throughout Ireland. The fund is resourced by contributions from the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, New Zealand and more recently Australia has also agreed to contribute to the fund. The British and Irish Governments do not contribute to the fund's resources nor is any funded provided from other public sector sources. Under the terms of the agreement establishing the fund, the two Governments provide the accommodation and secretarial services necessary for the proper functioning of the fund, together with its general administrative and organisational expenses.

DeLorean Motor Car Company

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums were paid and when by *(a)* the Northern Ireland industrial development board, *(b)* the International Fund for Ireland or *(c)* other public sector bodies to the DeLorean Motor Car Company.

Mr. Ancram: DeLorean Motor Cars Ltd.—DMCL—received a total of £77·3 million from the industrial development board's predecessors, the Department of Commerce and the Northern Ireland development agency, on various dates between August 1978 and April 1982. Information on training grants paid to DMCL is not readily available but my noble Friend will write to the hon. Gentleman in due course with the details.

The International Fund for Ireland was not in existence during the lifetime of DMCL.

Forensic Science Laboratory

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the prior options study of the Northern Ireland forensic science laboratory was completed; and what was the outcome of the study.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: On 18 January 1994, my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) announced that the prior options study of the Northern Ireland forensic service laboratory—NIFSL—was coming close to completion, and that if agency status were agreed for the service, a further announcement would be made, *Official Report,* columns *521–22.* The prior options study has been completed and I have decided that NIFSL should become an executive agency by 1 September 1995.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to publish the 1994 report on the Royal Ulster Constabulary by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Copies of the 1994 inspection report, which is the second RUC inspection report to be published, have today been placed in the Library.

I am grateful to Her Majesty's inspector for the report and am pleased to note that overall he regards the force as efficient. I welcome the findings and will be considering the report's recommendations carefully.

HMIC inspections offer the opportunity of professional examination of policing policies and priorities. This inspection form part of an on-going programme intended to examine over succeeding years various aspects of police management. It is the second in the series and has concentrated on a limited number of areas selected because of their contribution to the effectiveness and efficiency of operational policing.

Rail Services

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what progress has been made towards implementation of the recommendations contained in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report of December 1990 on rail services in Northern Ireland provided by Northern Ireland Railways Company Ltd. and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: I have today placed in the Library of the House the third and final response to the report which has been prepared by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland in consultation with Northern Ireland Railways and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company. I am pleased to confirm that good progress has been made on the implementation of the Monopoly and Mergers Commission's recommendations since this matter was last reported to the House in January 1993. The response now indicates that 31 of the 34 recommendations made by the MMC have been fully implemented and that the remaining three recommendations have been accepted and their implementation is ongoing.

The rail passenger's charter, first published in November 1992, reaffirms NIR's commitment to providing a quality rail service which is safe, efficient, and competitive in satisfying the needs of customers. Monitoring of the charter standards has enabled marketing efforts to be focused on those areas which can be improved as well as those which are considered most important by customers such as reliability, punctuality and cleanliness.

Considerable effort has gone into improving communications within the company and new negotiating and consultative procedures are now in operation. I am confident that the company is dedicated to achieving further improvements in standards, better value for money and the provision of a more attractive service to customers.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clerical Resignations

Mr. Byers: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners how many clerics have resigned and are claiming severance pay as a consequence of the ordination of women priests; how many resignations there have been in each diocese; and what is the cost in severance pay so far awarded and projected costs in 1995 and 1996.

Mr. Alison: As at 31 October 1994, 215 men eligible for financial provision had resigned; they have so far received a total of £1·9 million from re-settlement grants and continuing periodic payments. The following schedule gives a breakdown of numbers by diocese.

On current projections we expect the cost to be £2·3 million in 1994, about £3·5 million in 1995 and about £3·0 million in 1996.

Ordination of Women Measure

Resigners at 31 October 1994	
Bath and Wells	8
Birmingham	3
Blackburn	2
Bradford	—
Bristol	—
Canterbury	3
Carlisle	2
Chelmsford	12
Chester	2
Chichester	9
Coventry	1
Derby	4
Durham	10

Ordination of Women Measure

Resigners at 31 October 1994	
Ely	2
Exeter	6
Gloucester	3
Guildford	1
Hereford	1
Leicester	6
Lichfield	13
Lincoln	6
Liverpool	1
London	14
Manchester	10
Newcastle	2
Norwich	4
Oxford	8
Peterborough	7
Portsmouth	1
Ripon	4
Rochester	6
St Albans	2
St Eds & Ips	4
Salisbury	4
Sheffield	8
Sodor & Man	1
Southwark	6
Southwell	4
Truro	13
Wakefield	9
Winchester	3
Worcester	1
York	3
Other	6

TRANSPORT

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Norris: The non-departmental public bodies that my Department has abolished or declassified since 1979 are as follows:

Advanced Ground Transport Working Group
Advisory Committee on Motor Cycle Rider Training
Air Travel Reserve Fund Agency
Commissioners of Irish Lights
Disciplinary Inquiry under s471 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1894
Freight Integration Council
Honorary Medical Advisory Panel for Driving and Disorders of the Nervous System
Inquiry on Lorries, People and the Environment
Landscape Advisory Committee
London Rail Advisory Committee
Motor Rallies Advisory Committee
National Ports Council
Pilotage Commission
Railways and Coastal Shipping Committee
Red Sea Lights Company Limited
Road Safety Education Development Unit
Standing Advisory Committee on the Carriage of Dangerous Goods in Ships
Transport and Road Research Laboratory Advisory Committee
Working Party on Medical Standards for HGV and PSV Drivers

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Norris: *(a)* Some 15 non-departmental public bodies in 1979, as listed in "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies", Cm 7797, January 1980; and *(b)* eight non-departmental public bodies at 1 April 1993, as shown in "Public Bodies 1993".

Roads

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to subject all road construction proposals to environmental assessment.

Mr. Watts: Environmental assessment is already required by law for all proposals for the construction of motorways and for all other road construction proposals which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Sustainable Transport

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent the evaluation and assessment of highway and traffic management schemes need to be changed to meet his objectives of sustainable transport.

Mr. Watts: Existing procedures for the evaluation and assessment of highway and traffic management schemes provide for this evaluation of economic, safety and environmental factors and for an appropriate balance to be struck. These procedures are kept under review and updated as necessary.

Bypasses

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to undertake comparative studies of representative towns and villages before and after the completion of bypasses, in order to improve understanding of their environmental and other effects.

Mr. Watts: For all its road improvements, including bypasses, the Department of Transport compares forecast traffic with the actual traffic after opening.

Highways Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what level of funding has been set aside to fund *(a)* the cost to redundancies and *(b)* the restructuring of the Highways Agency.

Dr. Mawhinney: Funding for the Highways Agency's redundancy and restructuring costs will form part of its running costs and administrative capital expenditure for 1995–96 and subsequent years, subject to 80 per cent. of the cost of redundancies being met from the central civil superannuation vote as announced in paragraph 3.36 of "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change" (Cm 2627).

Part-worn Tyres

Mr Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to regulate the trade in part-worn tyres for motor vehicles.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) at column *119*.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Dr. Mawhinney: My Department employs one special adviser.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

Smart Cards

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the items of data stored on the experimental payment smart card which was used by London Transport buses in Harrow; and if holders of smart cards were informed of all these items of data and of all the purposes for which the data were to be used.

Mr. Norris: The smart cards in use on London Transport's trial in Harrow store the serial number of the card, the name of the cardholder, the validity of the card—for example travelcard for use in zones 2–5—and the date when its validity expires. LT has registered the trial in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1984.

Petrol

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the numbers of *(a)* cars and *(b)* lorries using (i) leaded petrol, (ii) unleaded petrol and (iii) diesel in (1) 1989–90, (2) 1990–91, (3) 1992–93 and (4) for the latest date information is available.

Mr. Norris: No estimates of the number of lorries using unleaded and leaded petrol are available. The number of petrol-fuelled lorries is very small—presently about 3,000 vehicles. They are usually small and account for less than 1 per cent. of petrol used.

The other data requested are in the table:

Numbers of licensed cars and lorries by type of fuel used

	cars[1]			*millions lorries*[2]	
	petrol		*diesel*	*petrol*	*diesel*
year[3]	unleaded	leaded			
1989	5·85	12·89	0·51	[4]—	0·43
1990	7·83	11·28	0·62	[4]—	0·45
1992	9·96	9·24	0·91	[4]—	0·39
1993	10·70	8·22	1·19	[4]—	0·38

[1] Cars within the private and light goods tax class.
[2] General goods vehicles with gross weights more than 3.5 tonnes.
[3] Figures relate to the 31 December of each year.
[4] Negligible, less than 5,000.
A few vehicles are not powered by petrol or diesel (ie powered by electricity, steam, gas etc) and these are excluded from the table.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department maintains strict rules on conduct and propriety which cover all external organisations. They are set out in a number of documents, notably the "Staff Handbook", "Government Accounting" and in local instructions.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Norris: The following is the information:

Agency	*Salary*[1] £
The Coastguard Agency	[2]—
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (1990)	40,900
Driving Standards Agency (1990)	37,186
Highways Agency	[2]—
Marine Safety Agency (1992)	48,856
Transport Research Laboratory (1991)	48,415
Vehicle Certification Agency (1990)	33,991
Vehicle Inspectorate (1988)	30,644

[1] No emoluments were paid.

[2] There is no direct comparison between the Current Chief Executives of the Coastguard and Highways Agencies and those civicl servants who carried out the work previously as the work and responsibilities were significantly reorganised within the Department.

Vehicles

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will take steps to amend the road vehicle construction and use regulations or the road vehicle registration and licensing regulations in order to ensure that any vehicle which has been seriously damaged in an accident will require notification to be given the DVLA concerning its drivability, and for the road licence for such a vehicle to be withdrawn pending either its certified scrapping by an authorised dealer or its certification of road worthiness by an appropriate authority; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it a criminal offence for any vehicle to be rebuilt, and to be put back on the roads without being first approved by an authorised inspector's agency following a road accident.

Mr. Norris: No. I am not aware of any evidence that rebuilt vehicles represent a particular threat to road safety.

Service Stations

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's standard for the desirable distance between service stations on M roads and other major routes.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir David Mitchell, dated 24 November 1994:

Your Parliamentary Question about the spacing of services on motorways and other major routes is a matter for the Highways Agency. It has therefore been passed to me for reply.

Until 1992 the Department of Transport was itself responsible for promoting new MSAs, and its policy was to provide them at intervals of around thirty miles, or half an hour's driving time, throughout the motorway network. Following criticism that this policy was not delivering MSAs quickly enough, particularly on the more recently completed motorways such as the M25 and M40, Ministers announced a new policy in August 1992. Under these arrangements it is now for the private sector to bring forward proposals for new MSAs. At the same time the minimum spacing has been reduced from about thirty miles to around fifteen.

The fifteen mile minimum is, however, neither a target nor an absolute limit. On the one hand we recognise that there are stretches of motorway where either demand is unlikely ever to support MSAs every fifteen miles, or where planning constraints will dictate a lesser frequency. On the other hand, we are prepared to be flexible in applying the fifteen mile minimum, for example where existing MSAs are a little less than thirty miles apart and a new one is proposed roughly half way between them.

Services on other trunk roads, for which the Secretary of State for Transport is the highway authority, have always been a commercial matter for the private sector who are encouraged to provide comprehensive facilities. Local authorities are encouraged to work with the private sector in identifying suitable locations.

There are no standard rules about spacing, though guidance has been issued to local planning authorities in Circular Roads 4/88 "The Control of Development on Trunk Roads". This is widely available to developers, a copy is also in the Library.

The Circular advises that half an hour's driving time, or 25 miles, should be regarded as the maximum which any driver should have to travel without the availability of fuel, refreshment, toilet and parking facilities. However, on trunk roads where high average speeds normally obtain, it will not in general be unreasonable to expect a driver to travel at least 12 miles before reaching petrol filling and related facilities. Shorter intervals may be warranted in other circumstances. This is also covered in the Circular.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Robert G. Jones: The information is as follows:

Agency	Salary and emoluments of civil servant immediately prior to creation of agency £	Date agency created
Chessington Computer Centre	48,646	1 April 1993
Civil Service College	42,900	6 June 1989
Occupational Health Service	50,900	2 April 1990
Recruitment and Assessment Services	53,659	2 April 1991
Central Office of Information	41,496	5 April 1990
Her Majesty's Stationery Office	48,000	14 December 1988

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Information Service

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the cost of the pilot information service the Government are currently developing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

CCTA's pilot government information service makes available a range of information about public services through the global Internet. The total cost in terms of computer hardware, software and communications infrastructure amounts to under £50,000.

Information Super-highway

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if his Department will formally respond to the European Commission's proposals for a European information super-highway.

Mr. Dorrell: Government policy in relation to the European Commission's proposals for development of the information society is being co-ordinated by the Department of Trade and Industry. My Department will, of course, continue to consider the implications of technological innovation when formulating the policies for which it is responsible.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department does not employ any special advisers.

BBC

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of state for National Heritage if his Department will consider the status of independent producers within the BBC's programme commissioning procedure in the forthcoming legislation on the future of the BBC.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the terms of the Broadcasting Act 1990, the BBC is required to commission 25 per cent. of its qualifying television output from independent production companies. There are at present no plans to change this requirement. The BBC's commissioning procedure is a matter for the BBC.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if his Department will review the need for a freedom of information Act when it decides to legislate to protect privacy.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government's proposals on access to information held by public authorities were set out in the White Paper "Open Government" (Cm 2290), published in July 1993. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has no present plans to review the need for a freedom of information Act. The Government's conclusions on protection of privacy will be set out in their response the National Heritage Committee's report on privacy and media intrusion.

Independent Television News

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to examine the procedure by which the Independent Television Commission came to its decision last week on the ownership of ITN.

Mr. Dorrell: None. The procedure by which the Independent Television Commission comes to decisions is entirely a matter for the Independent Television Commission.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

The Attorney-General: The present chief executive of the Government Property Lawyers agency, Mr. Tony Osborne, is the relevant civil servant and he was paid at the rate of £56,410 per annum immediately before the agency was established on 1 April 1993.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Pergau Dam

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal advice he was given before making the decision to approve the expenditure from the aid budget and the budget for the Pergau dam project.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) gave on 22 April, *Official Report*, column 699 to the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). No legal advice was given before my right.

hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary took the decision to support the Pergau dam project.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployed People (Qualifications)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of those unemployed for *(a)* more than one year and *(b)* more than two years who have no academic or vocational qualifications; and what was the percentage in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is available from the labour force survey and is given in the following table:

Percentage of those of working age who have been ILO unemployed for more than one and two years who have no academic or vocational qualifications
Not seasonally adjusted - Great Britain (per cent.)

Quarter	Unemployed for over 1 year	Unemployed for over 2 years
Spring 1984	58·4	62·6
Spring 1985	56·4	59·8
Spring 1986	55·8	60·6
Spring 1987	55·9	60·6
Spring 1988	58·0	62·8
Spring 1989	55·4	59·1
Spring 1990	56·2	60·3
Spring 1991	53·6	60·2
Spring 1992	45·7	54·3
Spring 1993	41·9	48·2
Spring 1994	37·7	41·8

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of those with no academic or vocational qualifications who have been unemployed for more than one year; and what was the percentage in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is available from the labour force survey and is given in the following table:

Not seasonally adjusted—Great Britain all people of working age

Quarter	Proportion of those with no qualifications ILO unemployed for over one year Per cent.
Spring 1984	6·3
Spring 1985	6·1
Spring 1986	5·9
Spring 1987	5·8
Spring 1988	4·8
Spring 1989	3·6
Spring 1990	3·2
Spring 1991	3·1
Spring 1992	4·4
Spring 1993	5·4
Spring 1994	5·7

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the rate of unemployment among those with no academic or vocational qualification for *(a)* males and *(b)* females; and what was the rate in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is available from the labour force survey and is given in the following table:

ILO Unemployment rates amongst those of working age with no academic or vocational qualifications

Not seasonally adjusted—Great Britain (Per Cent.)

Quarter	Males	Females
Spring 1984	18·2	13·4
Spring 1985	17·8	12·7
Spring 1986	17·8	12·5
Spring 1987	18·2	12·8
Spring 1988	15·5	11·0
Spring 1989	13·3	9·0
Spring 1990	12·8	8·7
Spring 1991	15·3	9·3
Spring 1992	18·8	9·5
Spring 1993	20·3	10·0
Spring 1994	21·0	9·8

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of those with no academic or vocational qualifications who have been unemployed for more than two years; and what was the percentage in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is available from the labour force survey and is given in the following table:

Not seasonally adjusted - Great Britain all people of working age

Quarter	Proportion of those with no qualifications ILO unemployed for over two years (Per Cent.)
Spring 1984	4·5
Spring 1985	4·3
Spring 1986	4·4
Spring 1987	4·4
Spring 1988	3·5
Spring 1989	2·6
Spring 1990	2·3
Spring 1991	2·0
Spring 1992	2·3
Spring 1993	3·2
Spring 1994	3·7

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the number of people in part-time jobs because they cannot find full-time work and *(b)* the number of people in temporary jobs because they cannot find permanent employment.

Mr. Oppenheim: Estimates form the spring 1994 labour force survey show that in Great Britain, 797,000 employees and self-employed people were in part-time jobs because they could not find full-time work; this was just 13 per cent. of all part-time employees and self-employed people.

In the same quarter, 587,000 employees were in temporary jobs because they could not find permanent employment; this represented 43 per cent. of all employees in temporary jobs.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of women with *(a)* working

partners and *(b)* unemployed partners are in work; and what were the equivalent figures in 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: Estimates from the spring 1994 labour force survey for Great Britain show that 73 per cent. of women with partners in employment, and 33 per cent. of women with ILO unemployed partners, were in employment. Equivalent figures for spring 1984, the earliest available, were 59 and 25 per cent. respectively.

Benefits

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many decisions on claims in 1993–94 for unemployment benefit where payment was suspended pending investigation of whether the claimant had left a job voluntarily without just cause were delayed due to the failure of former employers to respond to request for evidence within the periods specified by Employment Service guidelines.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 24 November 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of claims for unemployment benefit where payment was suspended pending a decision on whether a claimant had left employment voluntarily without just cause and where the decision was delayed due to failure of an employer to respond to a request for information within the period specified by the Employment Service.

Unfortunately we do not collect the information you have requested. We record the number of adjudication decisions not suspensions. In addition there is no time limit for employers to respond to enquiries from adjudication officers. In general adjudication officers allow employers three weeks in which to reply to requests for information. However, this will vary depending on local circumstances.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Employment Service has undertaken research into periods of disqualification from unemployment benefit following a finding of voluntary unemployment.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G Fogden to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 24 November 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about whether the Employment Service (ES) has undertaken research into periods of disqualification from unemployment benefit following a finding of voluntary unemployment.

Collection of this information would involve a special exercise which ES has historically not undertaken. However, because of the interest shown by Members and others in the length of disqualification periods, it has been decided that a limited amount of data on this issue should be collected as part of a larger project, which is currently under way. This will provide a snapshot picture of average periods of disqualification imposed during October. The results should be available by the end of 1994 and I will forward them to you.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in respect of claims for unemployment benefit, where payment was suspended pending investigation of whether the claimant had left a job voluntarily without just cause, what was the average length of time in 1993–94 and in each of the five preceding years *(a)* between the logging of the claim with the Employment Service and its referral to an adjudicator, *(b)* between the logging of the claim with the Employment Service and receiving a response from the former employer, *(c)* between the referral of the claim from the Employment Service to an adjudicator and the adjudicator's decision and *(d)* between the lodging of an appeal and the appeal hearing.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 24 November 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of claims where payment was suspended pending a decision on whether a claimant had left employment voluntarily without just cause and the times taken to refer the question to an adjudication officer, for employers to reply to enquiries, for the adjudication officer to decide the question and for an appeal hearing to take place once an appeal has been lodged.

Unfortunately we do not have all of the information you have requested. We record the number of adjudication decisions not suspensions or referrals to adjudication. We do not keep information on the time taken by employers to reply to requests for information as it has no operational value.

Because of the independence of the adjudicating authorities, and the limited use we could make of the information, we do not collect statistics on the time taken to make decisions. However, due to the interest shown in this data by various people we have recently conducted an exercise during the quarter ending 30 September to measure the time from when a referral is received by the adjudication officer to when a decision is made. The exercise monitored several different types of decisions. Of the sample of disqualifications examined, which included leaving voluntarily cases, 28 per cent. were decided within 14 days, 54 per cent. within 28 days and 88 per cent. within 56 days.

The administration of Social Security Appeal Tribunals (SSATs) is the responsibility of the Independent Tribunal Service. I am therefore unable to respond to your question about the time taken by them to list appeals for hearing. We do collect information on the time taken by adjudication officers to clear appeals. However, this information is not available specifically for leaving voluntarily questions. During the quarter ending 30 September 76 per cent. of appeals were cleared within 28 days and 93 per cent. within 56 days. This data includes appeals that were withdrawn by the claimant, reviewed and allowed by the adjudication officer and those submitted to the SSAT.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in how many of the total number of unemployment benefit claims in 1993–94 and in each of the five preceding years benefit was *(a)* suspended, *(b)* suspended but subsequently reinstated by the adjudication officer and *(c)* suspended but reinstated on appeal.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 24 November 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of claims suspended, suspended and reinstated by an adjudication officer and suspended and reinstated on appeal.

Unfortunately information is not available in the form you have requested. We record the number of adjudication decisions and opinions not suspensions. It may be helpful if I explain that a benefit suspension is not imposed in all cases referred to adjudication for a decision. In addition not all adverse decisions and opinions result in a loss of benefit.

The only data held on appeals is: the number received, the number reviewed and revised by an adjudication officer and the number submitted for determination by a Social Security Appeal Tribunal.

The attached table gives details of the number of decisions made in the year ending 30 March 1994, the five preceding years and appeals data for the same period.

I hope this is helpful.

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*Quarter ending 31 March 1991*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Total Decisions/Opinions	1,642,021	1,284,482	1,326,016	40,203	1,930,676	2,203,816	2,138,936
Appeals Received	30,339	24,152	19,493	5,860	27,942	23,601	20,311
Appeals Reviewed and Revised	8,066	5,157	3,792	1,188	6,440	5,336	4,456
Appeals Submitted to Tribunal	20,375	17,554	14,506	3,703	17,953	16,539	13,978

For 1988, 1989 and 1990 the statistical year ended on 31 December.
From 1 April 1991 the statistical year was amended to coincide with the operational year end of 31 March.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people were refused benefits, and for what reasons, in each of the last five years.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 24 November 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of claimants refused benefits and the reasons for these refusals.

It may be helpful if I explain that decisions on entitlement to benefit are made by independent adjudication officers. Employment Service (ES) adjudication officers only determine claims for unemployment benefit. Decisions on other benefits are the responsibility of my colleagues in Benefits Agency.

The statistics your asked for on ES adjudication officers' decisions for each region and for Great Britain as a whole are contained in the quarterly summary entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions". Copies are held in the Library of the House. The latest available information relates to the quarter ending June.

I hope this is helpful.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Miss Widdecombe: The work broadly comparable to that of the chief executive of the Employment Service was undertaken by a civil servant who received a salary of £49,600—including the grade 3 London allowance of £2,000—in the year to March 1990. The Employment Service was established as an executive agency in April 1990.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Miss Widdecombe: Conditions of service for the staff of the Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Workplace Incidents

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees were *(a)* killed or *(b)* injured at work in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Oppenheim: Provisional figures for the year commencing 1 April 1993, published today in the Health and Safety Commission's annual report, show a total of 235 fatal injuries, 16,326 major injuries and 132,343 other injuries to employees causing incapacity for normal work for more than three days reported to enforcing authorities across Great Britain.

Training

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money he plans to spend on training for unemployed people in the next financial year; and what has been the spending on training for the unemployed in each of the last five years.

Mr. Paice: An announcement about the resources the Department plans to devote in the next financial year to training unemployed people will be made after my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget announcement.

The following table provides details of how much the Department has spent on training through employment

training, training for work and learning for work in each of the last five years.

Year	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1989–90	1,097
1990–91	1,072
1991–92	737
1992–93	630
1993–94	782

Note: Expenditure up to and including 1990–91 is for Great Britain. Expenditure in 1991–92 is England and Wales. Expenditure from 1992–93 is for England only.

Employment Service Regulation

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to amend the current regulations that prevent the Employment Service from assisting the unemployed unless they have been registered as unemployed for at least 26 weeks.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* The Employment Service assists a large number of jobseekers who have been unemployed for less than six months; between April and September this year it placed 700,000 such people into jobs. As well as vacancy displays, the ES's advisory interview service, and at 13 weeks, job search seminar and job review workshop programmes are available. Some programmes have an eligibility requirement of 26 weeks unemployment in order to focus resources on helping long-term unemployed people, who are at a greater disadvantage in the labour market. There are currently no plans to change the eligibility rules for Employment Department programmes.

Travel to Interview Scheme

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to amend the travel to interview scheme so that the unemployed can be assisted when the prospective employment will initially not last 12 months.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* A revision of the rule is being tested in the Employment Service's north-west region as part of a package of changes to improve the working of the scheme as a whole. The tested revision includes people in scope who may be appointed at first for a trial period with the prospect of an extension beyond if all goes well. The pilot began in October and will run until the end of March next year, after which the changes will be evaluated.

EDUCATION

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many quangos her Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Boswell: The number of bodies sponsored by the Department in 1979 was 30, as shown in the "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies"—Pliatzky Report, Cm 7797, January 1980. In 1993 the figure was 14, as shown in "Public Bodies 1993". Copies of these publications are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which quangos her Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Boswell: Since 1979 the following bodies were dissolved while under the sponsorship of the Department:

Centre for Information and Advice on Educational Disadvantage
Youth Service Forum
Kennedy Memorial Trust
Advisory Committee on Business Sponsorship of the Arts
The Cockroft Committee of Enquiry into the Teaching of Mathematics in Schools
Youth Service Review Group
Science Museum Advisory Council
Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education
Educational Counselling and Credit Transfer Information Service Steering Committee
Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group
Schools Council
Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers
Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups
Industrial Scholarships Trust
Advisory Committee for the Microelectronics Educational Programme
Assessment of Performance Unit
Burnham Further Education Committee
Burnham Primary and Secondary Committee
Council for the Accreditation of Correspondence Colleges
Council for Education Technology for the United Kingdom
Micro-electronics Education Support Unit
National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education
National Advisory Council for the Youth Service
University Grants Committee
Voluntary Sector Consultative Council
School Curriculum Development Committee
Secondary Examinations Council
Computer Board for Universities and Research Councils
Co-ordinating Committee on Marine Science and Technology
National Youth Bureau
Open University Visiting Committee
Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council
Universities Funding Council
Visiting Committee for Cranfield Institute of Technology
Visiting Committee for the Royal College of Art
National Curriculum Council
School Examinations and Assessment Council
Teaching as a Career Unit
Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
Council for National Academic Awards

SuperJANET

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many institutions and research centres are currently connected to the SuperJANET broadband fibre optic network.

Mr. Boswell: Sixty-eight higher education institutions and research centres are currently connected to the national broadband optical fibre network known as Super JANET. It is intended that all higher education institutions will be connected to the network over the next three years.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement concerning the cost to public

funds of employing ministerial special advisers in her Department.

Mr. Forth: The Department employs one special adviser.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on the special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Universities (Academic Staff)

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will publish a profile of academic staff at English universities in terms of age and department similar to that provided by the Secretary of State for Scotland in his answer of 3 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *920*.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is shown in the table.

Full-time non-clinical academic wholly university funded staff in former UFC-funded English universities, 1992–93

Cost centre	*Age Under 25*	*25–29*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–49*	*50–54*	*55–59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
Education	2	19	55	163	295	359	301	190	85	1,469
Medicine, dentistry and health	14	104	247	354	393	422	299	166	106	2,105
Engineering and technology	23	156	382	425	488	544	526	419	237	3,200
Agriculture, forestry and veterinary science	5	39	44	67	71	92	55	38	30	441
Biological, mathematical and physical sciences	29	314	649	764	765	1,010	1,127	811	384	5,853
Administrative, business and social studies	47	359	607	676	956	1,186	710	403	177	5,121
Architecture and planning	—	13	26	39	46	54	61	27	21	287
Language, literature and area studies	46	170	259	280	392	563	497	274	141	2,622
Other arts	4	67	183	226	311	445	365	212	139	1,952
Libraries, museums, etc (research only)	—	3	—	1	—	1	5	1	1	12
Total	170	1,244	2,452	2,995	3,717	4,676	3,946	2,541	1,321	23,062

Source:
Universities' Statistical Record.

Full-time non-clinical academic wholly institutionally funded staff in former polytechnics in England, 1992–93

Cost centre	*Age Under 25*	*25–29*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–49*	*50–54*	*55–59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
Education	4	19	52	137	250	356	242	137	42	1,239
Medicine, dentistry and health	10	38	86	129	160	169	96	49	12	749
Engineering and technology	41	157	277	367	441	557	524	375	150	2,889
Agriculture, forestry and veterinary science	—	2	3	10	4	10	4	3	2	38
Biological, mathematical and physical sciences	32	252	363	500	585	776	510	308	97	3,423
Administrative, business and social studies	70	301	555	778	1,299	1,276	684	383	165	5,551
Architecture and planning	4	15	40	63	102	148	95	51	23	541
Language, literature and area studies	17	58	65	84	139	158	102	56	17	696
Other arts	10	112	199	262	361	532	329	151	54	2,010
Libraries, museums, etc (research only)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	188	954	1,640	2,330	3,341	3,982	2,586	1,513	562	17,096

Source:
The Academic Staff of Polytechnics and Colleges: PCFC/HEFCE Return.

College Fees

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is the amount by which the recurrent grant to each university with recognised collegiate status has been reduced in recognition of college fees payment in the current academic year;

(2) what is the current level of college fees reimbursed through a student's mandatory award in each of the colleges or universities which have recognised collegiate structures.

Mr. Boswell: Reductions to universities' recurrent grant in recognition of college fee payment are determined by the Higher Education Funding Council for England—HEFCE. However, I understand that the following adjustments to recurrent grant have been made in the current academic year:

	£
Cambridge	−10,737,660
Durham	−169,351
Kent	−105,735
Lancaster	−120,578
Oxford	−14,239,512
York	−90,244

The current maximum levels of college fees reimbursed through a student's mandatory award in 1994–95 are shown in the table:

	Fee £
Cambridge Colleges	
Christ's	2,577
Churchill	2,589
Clare	2,595
Clare Hall	2,502
Corpus Christi	2,664
Darwin	2,619
Downing	2,730
Emmanuel	2,607
Fitzwilliam	2,745
Girton	2,646
Gonville and Caius	2,601
Hughes Hall	2,562
Jesus	2,628
King's	2,568
Lucy Cavendish	2,673
Magdelene	2,730
New Hall	2,724
Newnham	2,718
Pembroke	2,721
Peterhouse	2,562
Queens'	2,685
Robinson	2,700
St. Catharine's	2,646
St. Edmund's	2,523
St. John's	2,526
Selwyn	2,718
Sidney Sussex	2,718
Trinity	2,502
Trinity Hall	2,664
Wesley	2,661
Wolfson	2,601
Durham Colleges	
University	189
Hatfield	189
Grey	189
Van Mildert	189
Collingwood	189
St. Hild & St. Bede	189
St. Cuthbert's	189
St. Mary's	189
St. Aidan's	189
Trevelyan	189
St. Chad's	960
St. John's	960
Ushaw	960
Kent Colleges	
Darwin	165
Eliot	165
Rutherford	165
Keynes	165
Lancaster Colleges	
Bowland	175
Cartmel	175
Charlotte Mason	175
The County	175
Furness	175
Fylde	175
Grizedale	175
Lonsdale	175
Pendle	175
Oxford Colleges	
Balliol	2,986
Blackfriars	2,867
Brasenose	3,005
Campion Hall	3,183
Christ Church	3,003
Corpus Christi	2,996
Exeter	3,037
Greyfriars	3,060
Hertford	3,168
Jesus	3,009
Keble	3,237
Lady Margaret Hall	3,161
Lincoln	2,952
Magdalen	3,036
Manchester	3,064
Mansfield	3,354
Merton	2,919
New College	3,027
Oriel	3,161
Pembroke	3,012
Queen's	2,970
Regent's Park	3,170
Ripon (Cuddesdon)	2,823
St. Anne's	3,146
St. Benet's Hall	3,129
St. Catherine's	3,061
St. Edmund Hall	3,121
St. Hilda's	3,114
St. Hugh's	3,149
St. John's	2,967
St. Peter's	3,216
St. Stephen's House	3,063
Somerville	3,119
Trinity	2,989
University	3,022
Wadham	3,081
Worcester	3,072
Wycliffe Hall	3,063
York Colleges	
Alcuin	160
Derwent	160
Goodricke	160
Langwith	160
Vanburgh	160
Wentworth	160

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by her Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Forth: The Department has established one next steps agency, the Teachers' Pensions Agency. The civil servant carrying out the duties now held by the chief executive was a grade 5 and was paid a salary within the relevant range for the grade, which is currently £36,739 to £54,815 nationally. No other payments or emoluments were made.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the current members of the Further Education Funding Council and the remuneration they receive.

Mr. Boswell: The information is listed in the table. Except for the chief executive, all members and the chairman are part-time.

Name of member	*Annual remuneration £*
Chairman:	
Mr. Robert Gunn	34,975
Chief Executive:	
Sir William Stubbs	91,107
Other members:	
Mr. Nicholas Bennett	4,000
Mr. Anthony Cann	4,000
Dr. John Capey	4,000
Mr. Anthony Close	4,000
Mrs. Margaret Davey	4,000
Mrs. Patricia Haikin	4,000
Mrs. Margaret Hobrough	4,000
Mr. Christopher Jonas	4,000
Cllr. Les Lawrence	4,000
Sir Michael Lickiss	4,000
Mr. Michael Rowarth	4,000
Dr. Anne Wright	4,000

Funding Agency for Schools

Mr. Hall : To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the current members of the Funding Agency for Schools and the remuneration they receive.

Mr. Robin Squire: The current membership of the Funding Agency for Schools is:

Name	
Sir Christopher Benson	Chairman of the Sun Alliance Group plc (Chairman) and Costain Group plc.
Mr. Shailendra Adwalpalkar	Finance Director, Gillette International, AMEE Group
Sir Robert Balchin	Chairman, Grant-maintained Schools Foundation
Canon Gerald Greenwood	Director of Education, Southwark Diocesan Board of Education
Dr. Arthur Hearnden OBE	General Secretary, Independent Schools Joint Council
Mr. Stanley Kalms	Chairman of the Dixons Group
Mr. Lee Karu	Barrister
Mrs. Jacqueline E. Kearns MA FRSA	Headteacher, Homewood GM School, Tenterden, Kent
Mrs. Lesley King	Headteacher, St Joseph's RC GM Primary School, Aldershot
Mrs Pauline Latham	Chairman of Governors, Ecclesbourne GM School, Derbyshire
Cllr. Edward Lister	Leader of Wandsworth Council
Dr. Francis Patterson OBE	Headteacher, St. Francis Xavier's College, GM School, Liverpool
Mr. Peter Turner OBE	Recently retired Head, Whitefield Schools and Centre, Waltham Forest

The chairman receives an annual fee of £34,350 for an equivalent of two days per week. Other members of the agency are entitled to claim a fee of £155 for days on which they are transacting agency business. Members may also claim travel and subsistence expenses incurred on those days.

Higher Education Funding Council

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the current members of the Higher Education Funding Council and the remuneration they receive.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is listed in the table. Except for the chief executive, all members and the chairman are part-time.

Name of member	*Annual remuneration £*
Chairman: Mr Brandon Gough	34,974
Chief Executive: Prof. Graeme Davies	87,435
Other members	
Mrs. Joan Bingley	4,000
Sir John Cadogan	—
Prof. Colin Campbell	4,000
Mr. Michael Fallon	4,000
Prof. Brian Follett	4,000
Prof Kay-Tee Khaw	4,000
Sir Idris Pearce	4,000
Sir Robert Scholey	4,000
Dr. John Strickson	4,000
Dr. Robert Telfer	4,000
Miss Janet Trotter	4,000
Prof. David Watson	4,000

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in her Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the guidelines issued by her Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The conduct of officials of the Department is regulated by a terms and conditions of service handbook. This incorporates the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Educational Exchanges

Mr. Radice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about educational and youth exchange with the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Boswell: Germany is the most popular destination for young people taking part in United Kingdom youth

exchange programmes. In 1993–94, over 5,000 young people took part in over 300 United Kingdom German exchanges. The German educational exchange programme is the United Kingdom's second largest. In 1993–94, the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges invested some £1·15 million—13·5 per cent. of gross expenditure—in educational activities with Germany.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows. For the period 1979 to 1988 the information relates to those social security public bodies for which the then Department of Health and Social Security was responsible.

Advisory Steering Group on Resettlement

Family Fund

Invalid Three-Wheeler and Wheelchair Repair Maintenance Liaison Group

Review of Artificial Limb and Appliance Centres

Supplementary Benefit Appeal Tribunal Advisory Group

Medical Boarding Centres, including Pneumoconiosis Medical Panels

In addition, the attendance allowance board has been replaced by the disability living allowance advisory board; the national insurance advisory committee and the Supplementary Benefits Commission have been replaced by the social security advisory committee; and the national insurance local tribunals and the supplementary benefit appeal tribunals have been replaced by the Social Security Appeal Tribunals.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Hague: In 1979, the then Department of Health and Social Security was responsible for 97 non-departmental public bodies, as listed in the "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies"—Pliatzky Report Cmnd. 7797, January 1980—15 of which were concerned with social security matters. At 1 April 1993, the latest year for which data is available, the Department of Social Security was responsible for 12 non-departmental public bodies, as listed in "Public Bodies 1993".

Benefits Agency

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what action is being taken to ensure that Benefits Agency offices meet their charter targets;

(2) if he will list those Benefits Agency offices that have not achieved their charter targets for *(a)* income support, *(b)* retirement pensions, *(c)* sickness and invalidity benefit and *(d)* social fund crisis loan claims.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Charter targets.

I should first of all clarify that the information I have provided for Income Support, Sickness and Invalidity Benefit and Crisis Loans is in respect of the Secretary of State's primary targets as set out in the Benefits Agency's (BA) Business Plan. For Retirement Pension I have provided information relating to the Management target for clearance of claims in District offices. It is these targets that underpin the Charter Standards for the benefits set out in the Agency's Customer Charter.

I have enclosed the information you requested about the Benefits Agency offices that have not achieved these targets at year end 1993–94 and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Since its inception, the Agency has engineered a significant overall improvement in service delivery from 159 District offices. Charter Standards for claims clearance represent only one part of the overall performance of the BA and have to be considered together with other wider aspects of delivering a quality service.

Where there are problems in a particular area, every effort is made to provide support from the BA's Central Services. For example the complementing system, which allocates resources to business units within the Agency, takes account of external factors affecting a District's performance; and a recent initiative has seen an Area Directorate, with low performance, given extra money in the short term under a "contract" for specific improvements in performance in return.

We carefully monitor the range of performance behind the national figures. The importance of steady improvement to attain convergence of performance geographically is one of the key messages in my Strategic Steer to staff this year. I am confident that we have effective monitoring procedures in this area. BA Districts provide reports of their performance on a monthly basis to Area Directors and to Central Services. Central Services provide a monitoring report to the BA Management which highlights any areas of concern and the action being taken to resolve them.

Managers are required to account for the shortfall when targets have not been met and to provide details of action proposed to meet the targets in future.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will change the Child Support Agency form so as to show the detailed breakdown of all relevant finances and arrangements of those assessed.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Iain Mills, dated 24 November 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about changes to the Child Support Agency form so as to show the detailed breakdown of all relevant financial information.

The information which the Child Support Officer must provide to the parties to a maintenance assessment is specified under Child Support legislation. The Agency must provide sufficient information to allow clients to decide whether the assessment formula has been applied correctly, whilst respecting the confidential nature of the information which has been supplied by those clients, and ensuring compliance with the Data Protection Act. The Agency has no current plans to increase the amount of detailed information provided in the assessment notification.

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits of either a financial or emotional nature he believes accrue to children who have been the subject of a CSA assessment.

Mr. Burt: Payment of child maintenance is of direct financial benefit to many parents with care and their children; those who are not in receipt of income support will see an immediate rise in their income as a result of regular maintenance. Even when income support is in payment, the knowledge that maintenance is a portable income is a positive incentive and help for parents with care to seek employment, thereby improving the children's standard of living. In addition, the establishment of regular maintenance helps to reinforce the responsibilities which parents have for their children, even where they live apart.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration he has given to the findings of research carried out by Barnardos's, the Children's Society, NCH Action for Children, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Save the Children on the impact of the Child Support Agency's activities on children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: We have carefully noted the content of the recent report from these five charities and will take it into account, along with reports from other organisations, in formulating our proposals for changes to the child support arrangements.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much will be saved in the social security budget by cutting the entitlement to unemployment benefit from 12 to six months in each financial year from 1 April 1996.

Mr. Roger Evans: Using the most recently published unemployment benefit figures it is estimated that cutting the entitlement to unemployment benefit from 12 to six months will save £70 million in 1996–97 and £220 million in 1997–98.

Notes:

1. Estimates assume 2·55 million unemployed claimants (GB) and 600 thousand Unemployment Benefit claimants.
2. Savings are estimated using 1990–91–92 FES data and 1994 Unemployment Benefit Statistics.
3. Savings are rounded to the nearest £10 million.
4. 1996–97 savings are in 1996–97 prices. 1997–98 savings are in 1997–98 prices.
5. Figures assume transitional protection in 1996–97.
6. Estimates for years beyond 1997–98 are not available.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing, for the most recent available date, the number of people in receipt of *(a)* the higher rate and *(b)* the lower rate of statutory sick pay.

Mr. Hague: During 1992–93, the latest year for which information is available, an estimated 330,000 people received statutory sick pay at any one time. One third—around 110,000—of these cases were estimated to be in receipt of the lower rate, and two thirds—around 220,000—were estimated to be in receipt of the higher rate.

Notes:

1. Data from the April 1993 New Earnings Survey (GB) suggests that two thirds of people eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) would have received the higher rate if they had fallen ill; the remaining one third would have received the lower rate. Applying this breakdown to actual SSP recipients assumes a constant distribution of sickness across earnings bands.
2. Most SSP recipients receive occupational sick pay in addition to SSP when they are sick. In many cases, this brings the total payment received up to full pay.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current higher rate of statutory sick pay if it had been uprated annually in line with the retail price index since April 1990.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newport West (Mr. Flynn) on 27 October, *Official Report*, column *794*.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the effect on revenues, expressed in today's prices, of the freeze in the higher rate of statutory sick pay since April 1990 giving figures for *(a)* each year and *(b)* total savings to date.

Mr. Hague: The estimated savings arising from freezing the higher rate of statutory sick pay in each year from April 1991, and the cumulative savings up to April 1994, are set out in the table.

Estimated savings generated from freezing higher rate SSP

Year	*Estimated savings £ million*
1991–92	60
1992–93	80
1993–94	95
Cumulative total	235

Estimates are given at constant 1994–95 prices. Figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million but are not accurate to that degree.

Sickness Benefit

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of non-contributory sickness benefit are people with industrial injuries.

Mr. Hague: The number of sickness benefit claimants whose incapacity is the result of an industrial injury or a prescribed industrial disease who did not satisfy the contribution conditions and are in receipt of benefit is 1,000.

Source:

One per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain at 3 April 1993 rounded to the nearest thousand.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the Benefits Agency proposes to publicise the new incapacity benefit being introduced in April 1995 to Britain's ethnic minority communities, with particular reference to *(a)* the new medical test for those sick more than six months and *(b)* those severe medical conditions that will exempt people from the new medical test.

Mr. Hague: In February 1995, a leaflet outlining the new benefit, the medical test and the groups affected will be available from BA offices and via a freephone response line. It will be translated into Punjabi, Urdu and Bengali and produced on audio tape as well as being produced in print in English and Welsh and in braille and on tape.

An advertising campaign aimed at advisers will also draw attention to the leaflet.

A second leaflet will be produced in June in the same formats and languages providing information about job-hunting and in-work benefits. This leaflet will be included with the letter sent to people who have been assessed as capable for work.

Local information initiatives will be undertaken in the run up to the introduction of incapacity benefit to ensure existing claimants are aware of how the changes will affect them.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what facilities will be available under the new incapacity benefit procedures for those referred for medical examination by a Benefits Agency doctor, for those who require an interpreter.

Mr. Hague: All customers who require an assessment by Benefits Agency medical services—BAMS—will be sent an information pack with their appointment. This information pack will include an invitation to the customer to inform BAMS of any special requirements they may have, including the need for specific language skills. BAMS will then arrange for the customer to be seen at a time when someone is available to act as interpreter. In many instances, this will be a member of staff with the appropriate language skills, usually either the examining doctor or the medical examination assistant. However, if no member of staff has the appropriate language skills an interpreter will be provided.

Benefits Ready-reckoners

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a ready-reckoner, on the same basis as the tax revenue ready-reckoner published by the Treasury, showing the value of benefits in April 1995 assuming normal indexation using the retail price index or Rossi index as appropriate.

Mr. Hague: We have no plans to do so.

Adult Dependency Increase

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* sickness benefit and *(b)* invalidity benefit received an adult dependency increase on behalf of an adult dependant who is not caring for dependent children.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Benefit	*Number of beneficiaries receiving an increase for an adult but not for a child*
Sickness Benefit	24,000
Invalidity Benefit	378,000

Note:
Estimates of total number of recipients of adult dependency increases are based on a one per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain at 3 April 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library copies of each survey listed in his answer of 25 October, *Official Report*, column *562–63*.

Mr. Hague: Those surveys referred to in the reply given on the 25 October at columns *562–63*, which are already published, have been placed in the Library. Copies of other surveys will be placed there after publication.

Invalidity Benefit

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give the number of current invalidity benefit claimants in Mid Glamorgan at *(a)* Porth, *(b)* Tonypandy, *(c)* Pontypridd and *(d)* Aberdare;

(2) how many income support claimants are currently receiving disability premium, with a breakdown of their means of qualification, at Porth, Tonypandy, Aberdare and Pontypridd in Mid Glamorgan in respect of *(a)* receipt of invalidity benefit or *(b)* submission of medical certificates only or *(c)* receipt of severe disablement allowance or *(d)* receipt of disability living allowance;

(3) if he will give the number of invalidity benefit/disability premium claimants found fit for all work and fit for light work in the last 12 months in the Porth, Tonypandy, Aberdare and Pontypridd areas.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Kim Howells, dated 23 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Michael Bichard to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Invalidity Benefit (IVB) and Income Support (IS) customers in Mid Glamorgan. This was in respect of the total number of IVB customers and also regarding the number of IVB and Disability Premium customers found fit for work and the qualifying reason for IS customers being in receipt of a Disability Premium. Mr Bichard is on annual leave and I have, therefore, been asked to reply on his behalf.

I have provided details at Appendix A of the number of IVB customers in the areas you requested.

Information is not readily available regarding Disability Premiums being withdrawn following a reference to the Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS); to obtain this information would be at disproportionate cost. This is because the Disability Premium is a component of IS payable to customers in prescribed circumstances, including when they have entitlement to IVB. Loss of entitlement to the Disability Premium does not always result in loss of entitlement to IS. No statistics are maintained to record changes in components of IS entitlement.

However, that information that is available relating to disallowed IVB claims following reference to the BAMS has been provided at Appendix B. Information is not readily available in the exact format requested because to obtain details of those found capable of suitable alternative work as opposed to capable of work would be at a disproportionate cost.

The figure for Aberdare Benefit office in Appendix B relates entirely to that office, whereas that relating to Pontypridd is for the whole Taff Rhonda District comprising of Pontypridd, Porth and Tonypandy. To separate the figure given for Pontypridd into the three offices within the District could only be done at a disproportionate cost.

As you requested, I have attached at Appendix C a table giving at 30 August 1994, the date of the last count, the number of IS customers at the offices named who were receiving the Disability Premium.

However, with regard to your request for details of a breakdown of customers means of qualification for a Disability Premium, I should explain that the full range of information requested is not routinely collected in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. This is because statistics are not maintained about the qualifying condition which was satisfied and

led to the award of a premium. To identify in each case the precise criteria that was satisfied would be at disproportionate cost.

However, I have placed at Appendix D information which has been obtained from the Quarterly Statistical Enquiry which was based on a five per cent. sample of IS customers at November 1993. The information is for the Wales administrative region but cannot be broken down to a local level. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 1000.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Number of IVB claimants at 31 October 1994

Porth	6,317
Tonypandy	7,017
Pontypridd	6,265
Aberdare	6,189

Number of IVB awards disallowed following reference to the Benefits Agency Medical Service

Aberdare BO	391
Pontypridd BO	733

Appendix C	*Number*
Porth	1,108
Pontypridd	1,184
Tonypandy	1,141
Aberdare	1,257
Total	4,690

Source:
Management Information Statistics—August 1994.

Appendix D	*Number*
In receipt of Invalidity Benefit	5,000
In receipt of Severe Disablement Benefit	4,000
In receipt of Disability Living Allowance	10,000
Other	25,000
All cases	44,000

Source:
Quarterly Statistical Enquiry—November 1993.

Housing Benefit

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had from building societies and banks about the effect that reducing the eligibility to housing benefit will have on their ability to lend to housing associations.

Mr. Roger Evans: None.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he is prepared to review the work of the compensation recovery unit to take more note of the future medical, social and financial needs of sick and injured people.

Mr. Roger Evans: Compensation is subject to recoupment only up to the date of award or settlement.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the projected income of the compensation recovery unit for this financial year.

Mr. Roger Evans: On current trends, it is estimated that the compensation recovery unit will recoup approximately £100 million in 1994–95.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the market testing initiative to the compensation recovery unit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The work of the compensation recovery unit is currently the subject of a feasibility study to determine whether all or part of the work should be subject to a market test. Some initial research has been done which merits further careful consideration before any firm decisions are made.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Hague: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Hague: The Department follows the guidelines in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". The conditions of service for the staff of this Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Hague: No one civil servant had the same or similar responsibilities as any of the agency chief executives before the decision was taken to establish the agencies.

Attendance and Disability Living Allowances

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claims were submitted for attendance allowance in each year since 1990 for *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom; how many went to appeal; and what percentage were accepted upon appeal;

(2) how many claims were submitted for disability living allowance in each year since 1990 for *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom; how many went to appeal; and what percentage were accepted upon appeal.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information is in the tables.

Attendance Allowance

	Great Britain All Claims Received	Great Britain Appeals Registered	Scotland All Claims received
1990–91	429,295	n/a	n/a
1991–92	594,497	n/a	n/a
1992–93	500,388	2,130	51,260

Attendance Allowance

	Great Britain All Claims Received	Great Britain Appeals Registered	Scotland All Claims received
1993–94	439,020	5,025	46,636
1994–95	285,676	n/a	31,059

Disability Living Allowance

Year	New claims received Great Britain	New claims received Scotland	Appeals registered Great Britain	Appeals registered Scotland	Successful appeals Great Britain	Successful appeals Scotland
1992–93	523,695	63,631	6,918	n/a	33 per cent.	n/a
1993–94	428,927	53,716	29,617	2,141	50 per cent.	43 per cent.

Source: Analytical Services Division DSS.

1. Prior to 1992 there was no right of appeal for Attendance Allowance claimants.
2. DLA appeal figures for 1992–93 may include a small number of Mobility Allowance cases.
3. Appeals registered in the period shown may not relate to claims made during the same period.
4. Successful appeals are those where the rate of award has been increased, figures include cases where the disabled person's condition has deteriorated since the initial decision was made.

This Department is responsible for social security only in Great Britain. For information relating to Northern Ireland I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is estimated to be the saving of public money resulting from the introduction of the proposed jobseeker's allowance with reference to existing expenditure on the unemployed.

Mr. Roger Evans: Using the most recently published unemployment benefit figures it is estimated that the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance would reduce expenditure on benefits by about £150 million in 1996–7 and £300 million in 1997–8.

Notes:

1. Assumes transitional protection in 1996–7.
2. Estimates assume 2·55 million unemployed claimants (GB) and 600 thousand Unemployment Benefit claimants.
3. Savings estimated using 1990–91–92 FES data and 1994 Unemployment Benefit statistics.
4. 1996–7 figures are in 1996–7 prices. 1997–8 figures are in 1997–8 prices.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he is making for the remuneration of those members of police authorities appointed by himself.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Secretary does not appoint any members of police authorities. Councillor and independent members of new police authorities will be able to claim £15 per hour for time spent on police authority business, up to a limit of £120 per day and £3,000 per year—£6,000 per year if they are the chairman of the authority.

Magistrate members of new police authorities will, as at present, be able to claim financial loss allowance at the rates payable to them as magistrates.

Mr. Hoon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how many the number of police officers has increased since 1992.

Mr. Maclean: Between August 1992 and August 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of police constables increased by 750. Over the same period, the total numbers of officers fell by 603, reflecting the thinning out of unneeded supervisory ranks.

Special Constables

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his proposals for increasing the number of special constables.

Mr. Howard: I am firmly committed to encouraging the recruitment of special constables and have set a target of 30,000 by the end of 1996. A national advertising campaign to encourage applications was launched at the end of October. As part of the partnership against crime campaign, police forces will be offering applicants the chance to join the specials as a neighbourhood constable, a special who works only in one particular area. I hope that this will broaden the appeal of the specials to a wider range of volunteers.

Crime

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on current trends in the figures for recorded crime.

Mr. Maclean: For the 12 months to June 1994, the number of crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales decreased by 5·5 per cent. compared to the previous 12 months.

This is the largest fall over 12 months for 40 years. This will, I hope, reassure the public that recent rises in recorded crime can not only be slowed but actually reversed.

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the trends in violent crime.

Mr. Maclean: Between 1981 and 1993, violent crime recorded by the police increased at a rate of 6 per cent. per year, compared with an increase in all recorded crime of 5 per cent. per year. In the 12 months to June 1994,

violent crime accounted for 6 per cent. of all crimes recorded by the police.

The British crime survey provides an insight into people's experience of crime, whether or not it was reported to the police. The survey suggests that for those offences that can be compared with the police figures, violent crime increased at a rate of less than 3 per cent. per year between 1981 and 1993.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement explaining the reasons for the reduction in recorded crime.

Mr. Maclean: We need to be cautious: recorded crime can be affected by a number of factors. But we are most encouraged by the recent falls in recorded crime.

Police, Wales

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce a decision about the future organisation of the police service in Wales.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend is currently seeking views from all the interested parties. He will reach a decision in the light of those views, and in the light of an assessment of the professional policing issues involved from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

Prison Officers

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on the pay and conditions of prison officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I received two letters in October form the Prison Officers' Association, which raised matters concerning the pay and conditions of prison officers in England and Wales. Responsibility for this year's pay negotiations and for related conditions of service lies with the Prison Service.

Fire Services

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the effects of the standard spending assessment on fire services in South Yorkshire fire authority.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend met a delegation from South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority on 24 August when concern was expressed about the authority's financial position. In September, two members wrote on the authority's behalf about the calculation of the fire standard spending assessment.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are planned to provide adequate transitional funding in preparation for the establishment of any new combined fire authorities established as a result of the review of local government.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: In England it is proposed that the new combined fire authorities should operate within the same, or as nearly as possible the same, boundaries as existing fire authorities. It is therefore the Government's expectation that the transition to the new arrangements can be made without the need for any of the authorities involved to incur significant additional costs.

Racially Motivated Attacks

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what view he has formed of the effectiveness of current laws to deal with racially motivated attacks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: All violent attacks are already criminal offences. Racially motivated attacks are particularly abhorrent and that is why the courts can and do take racial motivation into account as an aggravating factor when passing sentence.

We strengthened the process to deal with racially motivated attacks in the Criminal Justice Act 1994 and believe that our laws are now adequate. We must now concentrate on making sure that they are used consistently and effectively across the country to deal with these odious crimes.

Prison Discipline

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to improve the disciplinary regime in prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The prison disciplinary system, incentives and privileges are all matters which I am currently considering and expect to reach conclusions shortly.

Political Parties

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce proposals for the registration of political parties.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: We have no plans to do so.

Drugs

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will be monitoring current levels of funding for the West Glamorgan drugs initiative in 1995–96.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The three-year period of funding for the drugs prevention team in West Glamorgan will be completed in March 1995.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Howard: The information to 1 April 1993 is as follows:

Advisory Committee on Suspension and Revocation of Authorities for Wireless Personnel
Advisory Committee on Radio Interference
Advisory Council on the Penal System
Central Committee on Common Police Services
Chief Constables Committees for District Police Training Centres
Committee on Training for Justices' Clerks' Assistants
Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship
Conference on Local Government Electoral Law
Criminal Law Revision Committee
Electoral Advisory Conference
Fire Service College Board
Frequency Advisory Committee
Joint Committee for Refugees for Vietnam

Licensing Planning Committees
Local Authority Committee for District Police Training Centres
London Building Acts Tribunal of Appeal
Mobile Radio Committee
New Town Licences Premises Committees
Police Disciplinary (Senior Officers) Tribunal
Police National Computer Policy Committee
Police Advisory Committee on Sexual Offences
Queen's Police Gold Medal Essay Competition Committee
Race Relations Research Advisory Committee
Regional Probation Staff Development Consultative Committee
Standing Advisory Committee on Cinematograph (Safety) Regulations
Standing Conference on Crime Prevention
Standing Committee on Probation Manpower Needs
Television Advisory Committee
Wireless Telegraph Appeals Tribunal
Working Party on Magistrates Courts

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Howard: The Home Office was responsible for 282 non-departmental public bodies in 1979, and for 280 on 1 April 1993, the latest year for which a published figure is available.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much money is planned to be distributed to local authorities through section 11 funding in 1995–96; how much of this is estimated will be available for new bids; and how much is committed to on-going projects.

(2) what is the overall level of section 11 funding for each of the last five years; and how much of the section 11 budget has been transferred to the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Expenditure under section 11 in each of the past five financial years was as follows:

Year	*£ millon*
1989–90	114·8
1990–91	135·5
1991–92	113
1992–93	129·7
1993–94	131·2

The single regeneration budget came into operation on 1 April 1994. The following sums were transferred from section 11.

Year	*£ million*
1994–95	60·5
1995–96	53
1996–97	53

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *64* that the Government are making available an additional sum of £15 million in each of the next two financial years for new section 11 projects starting in 1995–96. This has doubled the amount which was earlier expected to be available for new projects, and is additional to previous Home Office provision under section 11 of £43·8 million for 1995–96. Precise figures for new funding, and the division of funding between local authorities and other eligible recipients such as further education colleges and grant maintained schools, will depend upon actual expenditure in the current financial year and the outcome of the current applications round for which the closing date has been extended to 30 December.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the responses he received to his consultation on the proposed review body to deal with alleged miscarriages of justice and indicate which of them favoured leaving investigations entirely in the hands of the police.

Mr. Maclean: Fifty individuals and organisations responded to the Government's discussion paper "Criminal Appeals and the Establishment of a Criminal Cases Review Authority". Of the 23 responses which considered the alternative approaches to investigation canvassed in paragraphs 54 to 64 of the paper, 10 favoured inquiries by police forces overseen by the review body; four favoured the secondment of police officers and other investigators to the review body; seven favoured a mixture of these two approaches; and two proposed the exclusion of police officers from any investigation by the review body. Neither the discussion paper nor any respondent to it suggested that investigations should be left entirely in the hands of police forces. The Government have concluded that the review body in investigating cases put to it should have power to commission inquiries by police officers, where appropriate from an outside force, who would work in accordance with the review body's specific requirements and would report to it.

Cults

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures are taken to monitor the activities of cults in the United Kingdom;

(2) if his Department has considered agreeing a code of conduct with religious groups, cults and so on with the aim of mitigating their worst excesses.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government do not monitor the activities of new religious movements. It is for the police to investigate any allegations of illegal activities on the part of such organisations.

The Government believe that it would not be feasible to agree and enforce a code of conduct for religious movements.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Howard: This year Home Office Ministers intend to send 440 Christmas cards. The cost of purchasing and posting these cards will be £217.14, inclusive of VAT, and £79.20 respectively. It is not possible to estimate accurately the cost in staff time of sending out these

Christmas cards; but it would be minimal. I have today placed examples of the Home Office Christmas cards in the Library.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the responsibilities of his Department in relation to the investigation into the Pan Am 103 crash over Lockerbie.

Mr. Howard: My Department has an interest in any general issues arising from the Lockerbie bombing in view of my overall responsibility for counter-terrorist policy in Great Britain. The Metropolitan police, the forensic explosives laboratory of the Defence Research Agency and many other police forces and agencies have provided assistance to the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary during the course of the investigation.

Computer Pornography

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about how the outcome of the review of the future of the obscene publications branch will affect investigations into computer pornography.

Mr. Maclean: The Commissioner's management restructuring exercise has been looking at the whole of the Metropolitan police, including headquarters functions and specialist units, such as the obscene publications branch. Its aim is to make the best possible use of resources. Action against pornography remains a high priority. There will be no change in the responsibilities of the obscene publications branch for the investigation of computer pornography.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to introduce the five-year shotgun and firearms certificate.

Mr. Maclean: An order was laid before the House on 13 October to extend the life of firearm and shot gun certificates from three to five years. We intend that all certificates granted from 1 January 1995 will be valid for five years.

Rape

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the lowest age of a defendant who has been charged with rape; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Statistics on the age of defendants when they are charged by the police are not recorded centrally. Up to the end of 1993, the latest year for which figures are available, the lowest age of a person prosecuted and proceeded against for rape was 13.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to coroners on the collection and recording of evidence in fatal road traffic accidents.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Coroners are independent judicial officers who carry out their inquiries in accordance with procedures laid down in the coroners rules 1984. These include provisions relating to the treatment of witnesses, exhibits and documentary evidence. The collection of evidence for the purpose of an inquest following a fatal road traffic accident is a matter for the individual judgment of the coroner according to the particular circumstances of each case. My right hon. and learned Friend has issued no specific guidance on the matter.

Anthony O'Kere

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current case of Anthony O'Kere; and when a final decision may be reached.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A decision will be made shortly and I will write to the hon. Member.

Political Refugees

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many political refugees from China are now settled in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information is that, in the period 1 January 1979 to 31 October 1994, around 160 Chinese nationals, including associated dependants, were recognised as refugees and granted asylum in the United Kingdom. Chinese nationals granted asylum may apply for settlement after four years. Information on the number of Chinese nationals granted asylum and who were accepted for settlement in 1992 and 1993 is published in table 6.1 of the Command Papers "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1992" CM2368 and "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1993" CM2637. Copies of both these publications are available in the Library. Information prior to 1992 is not readily available.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the numbers of political refugees settled in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information on those given leave to remain in the United Kingdom as a recognised refugee is that in the period 1979 to end-June 1994 around 44,000 persons, including associated dependants, were given such leave. These comprise some 20,400 asylum applicants who were recognised as refugees and granted asylum in the United Kingdom, and 23,600 south-east Asian refugees accepted for settlement, mainly on arrival.

Persons granted asylum here may apply for permanent settlement after four years. Information on the number of persons granted asylum and who were accepted for settlement in the years 1979–1993, along with south-east Asian refugees, is published in table 8 of the Home Office statistical bulletin issue 22/90 "Refugee Statistics United Kingdom 1989" and Table 10.1 of Home Office statistical bulletin Issue 17/94 "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1993". Copies of both these publications are available in the Library.

International Drug Trafficking

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in tackling international drug trafficking.

Mr. Maclean: The Government remain fully committed to the international fight against illicit drug trafficking, as part of their comprehensive anti-drugs strategy, comprising action on supply and demand reduction. Action is being taken forward vigorously by the Government on a number of fronts, aimed at improving the effectiveness of international co-operation against the drug traffickers:

United Kingdom enforcement agencies maintain extensive operational links with overseas counterparts, reinforced by 37 drug liaison officers in 22 countries, who work closely with local law enforcement agencies.

The United Kingdom is playing a prominent part in the development of the European Police Office, Europol, based on a United Kingdom initiative to establish a European drugs intelligence unit. The first stage of Europol, the European drugs unit, formally opened in February 1994. It exchanges and analyses criminal intelligence on drug trafficking and associated money laundering activities affecting European Union member states.

The United Kingdom staff at the Europol drugs unit report to the National Criminal Intelligence Service—NCIS—which provides an intelligence co-ordinating role for police and Customs in this country and a national focal point for exchange of information and intelligence about serious crime, including drug trafficking, and major criminals of international interest.

We actively support the leadership role of the United Nations international drug control programme—UNDPC—supporting a range of multilateral anti-drugs projects worldwide. We also give support bilaterally, through for example the provision of training and equipment to improve the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in appropriate countries. In the last three years, the United Kingdom has provided over £29 million in drug-related assistance overseas.

The United Kingdom has continued to encourage countries that have not done so to ratify the 1988 United Nations convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to implement its provisions fully in domestic legislation. The 1988 convention established a solid basis for international co-operation in a number of important areas, such as seizure and confiscation of drug traffickers' assets, mutual legal assistance, extradition, controlled deliveries, precursor control and maritime intervention. Provisions enabling the United Kingdom to ratify the 1988 convention, in June 1991, were included in the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990.

The United Kingdom fully implemented, last year, European Community legislation controlling trade in the precursor and essential chemicals required to manufacture illicit drugs, based on the recommendations of the chemical action task force.

We have continued to work within the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations and with other major donors to promote good practice and to ensure more effective action against drugs, particularly in relation to countries of central and eastern Europe.

The United Kingdom recognises the important role of the International Criminal Police Organisation—Interpol—and the World Customs Organisation—WCO, formerly the Customs Co-operation Council—and supports its activities in a practical way, providing expert practitioners from HM Customs and police to participate in its initiatives. The United Kingdom has been particularly instrumental in the promotion of the WCO's initiative on customs/business co-operation against drugs trafficking and has implemented its own national programme of memoranda of understanding with trade associations and members.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Howard: There is no specific guidance to staff on relationships with lobbying companies. Staff are, however, bound by the general principles governing the conduct of Crown servants, which require them not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgement or integrity.

"Questions of Procedure for Ministers" provides general guidance for Ministers.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years, when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Howard: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Howard: It is not the general practice of the Department to publish the salaries of individual civil servants. The salaries of the civil servants running the organisations in the Home Office which subsequently became executive agencies fell within the following ranges:

United Kingdom Passport Agency: £33,970 - £44,996

Prison Service: £62,504 - £73,216

Forensic Science Service: £45,000 - £52,100

Fire Service College: £36,178 - £47,921

There were no emoluments additional to the salary.

Merseyside Police Budget

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the list of Members who have made representations concerning reductions in the Merseyside police budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The budget for the Merseyside police is a matter for the Merseyside police authority.

Correspondence on the issue of central Government support for the Merseyside police has been received from the hon. Members for:

Bootle (Mr. Benton)
Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle)
Riverside (Mr. Parry)
Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton)
Garston (Mr. Loyden)
Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt ME)
Wirral, South (Mr. Porter)
Crosby (Mr. Thornton)
Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth)
St Helens, North (Mr. Evans)
St Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham)
Southport (Mr. Banks)
Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara)

Funding levels for police forces in 1995–96 will be issued shortly after the Budget statement.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning reductions in the budget for the Merseyside police.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to his question on 26 October at column *642*.

Hunting

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police were deployed to protect the Essex Foxhounds at Good Easter on 19 November; and what was the estimated cost.

Mr. Maclean: The policing of hunts is a matter for the chief officer. I understand that police officers were not deployed to protect the hunt but that 125 uniformed officers were deployed to keep the peace. The costs involved are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are planned to combat the theft of mobile telephones and facilitate the detection of those knowingly selling stolen telephone equipment.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* The Department of Trade and Industry, with the support of the Home Office, has been discussing with representatives of the telecommunications industry how the industry itself can make mobile phones less attractive to thieves. Measures currently under consideration include tighter controls on the issue and use of electronic serial numbers and the introduction of property marking and registration schemes.

The detection of those selling stolen goods is an operational policing matter. A number of forces have established specialist squads to tackle the problem of mobile phone theft.

Crime Victims

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to inform the victims of violent crime who were previously informed of the temporary release of their attackers of their permanent release.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* We have published for consultation draft revised national standards for the supervision of offenders in the community. The draft revised standard for the supervision of prisoners before and after release from custody states that in cases involving serious sexual or violent offences the relevant probation service should arrange for the victim to be contacted within two months of sentence and offered the opportunity of being kept informed of sentence developments. Where this opportunity is taken up, the draft revised standard envisages that the service will contact the victim when permanent release is imminent. We shall consider comments on the draft standards before finalising them.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Heseltine: Since 1979, the following executive non-departmental public bodies have been abolished within the field of the President of the Board of Trade's current responsibilities:

Furniture Development Council
Metrication Board
Price Commission
National Metrological Co-ordinating Unit
Regional Gas Consumers' Councils

Mr. Sykes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Heseltine: The number of executive non-departmental public bodies within my departments current responsibilities were:

(a) 35 in 1979
(b) 23 in 1994

Insider Dealing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what weaknesses he has identified in the operation of the law on insider dealing; and what further legislation he considers necessary.

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

New legislation on insider dealing came into force on 1 March 1994. The Government will keep its effectiveness under review but have no plans to propose any changes.

Regional Office, Plymouth

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the regional office of his Department in Plymouth to commence operating; and if a suitable site has been found for the development of the office.

Mr. Eggar: The options for siting the new office are being considered. Meanwhile, 30 staff, including the newly appointed director, are already providing a service to Devon and Cornwall from temporary offices in Phoenix house, Notte street in the centre of Plymouth.

Trade Figures

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will supply figures for trade between the United Kingdom and Moldova for each year since 1989.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Information on United Kingdom trade with Moldova since January 1993 is published in "Business Monitor MM20, Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", which is available in the Library of the House. Information is not available for earlier periods because Moldova was not separately identified from the rest of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Parry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on United Kingdom-Libyan trade during the past five years.

Mr. Needham: The British Government neither promote nor discourage trade with Libya. Figures for United Kingdom trade with Libya over the past five years are given in the table below.

UK trade with Libya—1989–1993

	£ thousand				
	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Imports	104,545	151,605	121,219	162,899	156,542
Exports	239,191	244,849	255,718	228,273	274,051

Source:
United Kingdom Overseas Trade (Business Monitor MA20).

EC Industry Council

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Industry Council held on 8 November.

Mr. Eggar: I attended the Industry Council on 8 November.

The most important issue before the Council was steel. Commissioner Bangemann reported that minimum capacity cuts of 19 million tonnes identified in the Braun plan had not been achieved and that most of the measures introduced to support the restructuring process would therefore come to an end. I stressed Her Majesty's Government's view that further restructuring depends critically on stricter control of state aids.

The Council debated a Commission report on monitoring of the conditions attaching to the aids which were agreed for Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and German companies last December under article 95 of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty. The Council supported me in asking the Commission to monitor the situation even more closely.

The Council was asked to agree a revised package of support for the former East German steel company EkoStahl, which was now being sold by the German privatisation agency to the Belgian company, Cockerill Sambre, following the collapse of the deal with the original purchaser, Riva. I argued that although I would honour the agreement made by the council last December, the revised proposal appeared to be more generous in several respects. I said that I could not support the revised proposal unless I could be convinced of its equivalence to the December 1993 agreement. Discussions are continuing.

Other issues on the agenda were industrial competitiveness, where the Council agreed a resolution in response to the Commission's recent communication on the subject; the Commission's annual report on competition policy; and the Commission briefly presented two communications on the pharmaceutical and mechanical engineering industries respectively.

No votes were taken at the Council.

Export Licences

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of occasions over the last five years that his Department has refused an export licence for military and defence orders.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This question could be answered only at disproportionate cost. There will, however, be some details of licences issued and refused in the annual report of the export control organisation to be published shortly. A copy of that report will be placed in the Library of the House and I will arrange for the hon. Member to receive a personal copy.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the proportion of the United Kingdom total exports to Indonesia made up of defence-related products and services, on the latest available figures.

Mr. Needham: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it has been the consistent policy of successive United Kingdom Governments not to disclose details of defence trade with individual countries.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Rooker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department is taking to reduce the obstacles in the European single market in respect of manufactured goods.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom continues to take a leading role in the internal market council, both with new measures to address barriers and practical efforts to ensure the smooth and effective functioning of the single market. We are assisting the Commission in its efforts to improve its complaints procedures and are encouraging practical means of achieving closer co-operation between national enforcement officials in the Community. My Department has established a single market compliance unit, which helps companies to tackle individual single market problems. We have also initiated studies focusing on specific single market issues of concern to United Kingdom businesses.

Overseas Trade

Mr. Radice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which country is the United Kingdom's main trading partner; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: In 1993, the United Kingdom's main trading partner was Germany, with visible imports and exports together worth £36 billion, accounting for 14 per cent. of total United Kingdom trade. The next largest partner was the USA, with United Kingdom trade worth £32 billion.

West London Enterprise Agency

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase grants from public funds to the West London enterprise agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* The Department of Trade and Industry does not provide grants from public funds to local enterprise agencies. I have therefore no plans to increase grants from public funds to the West London enterprise agency, or to any other local enterprise agency.

The Department of Trade and Industry provides funding to training and enterprise councils for support services for small and medium-sized businesses. From 1996, these services will normally be delivered through business links.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the budget from his Department to Gibraltar for the year 1994; and if he will give a breakdown of these financial expenses.

Mr. Baldry: Total operating costs and capital expenditure of our post in Gibraltar for the financial year 1993–94 were £674,969. In addition, we provided the Government of Gibraltar with project-related assistance of £512,258.

Embassy Expenditure

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the total expenditure on embassy budgets and *(b)* the levels of embassy staff for the years 1992–93 and 1993–94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The cost of running diplomatic missions overseas, including notional rents for owned properties, was:

1992–93
£365 million

1993–94
£398 million

Total United Kingdom-based staff employed in diplomatic missions overseas and paid for by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were:

1992–93
2,600

1993–94
2,500

Total locally engaged staff employed in diplomatic missions overseas were:

1992–93
7,000

1993–94
7,100

Indonesia

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Government of Indonesia about human rights abuse.

Mr. Goodlad: We raise human rights issues as part of our regular dialogue with the Indonesians, and did so most recently on 17 November.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been received in the last year from human rights organisations or individuals concerning the situation in Indonesia and East Timor.

Mr. Goodlad: We receive many representations from non-governmental organisations and individual correspondents. Details could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

European Parliament

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the definition of official business used for the daily travel allowance for Members of the European Parliament referred in his answer to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) 19 October, *Official Report,* column *237.*

Mr. Baldry: To qualify for the daily travel allowance a Member of the European Parliament should be attending a meeting of Parliament or its organs—plenaries, committees, and delegations. The Member signs a list at the start of each meeting to record his or her attendance.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the highest and lowest claims for travel allowances from United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not available to us. Members of the European Parliament claim their own allowances from the European Parliament's own administration.

Malta

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Government of Malta with regard to the case of Mr. and Mrs. Sample and her son James Portelli.

Mr. Baldry: Our High Commission sought a welfare report from, and brought a court order to, the attention of the Maltese authorities in 1991, attended court hearings in 1992, and on several occasions urged Malta to sign one of the child abduction conventions.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in *(a)* Ministers' private offices and official residences including No. 1 Carlton gardens and Chevening and *(b)* United Kingdom embassies and official residences abroad.

Mr. Goodlad: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. The costs are covered by the entertainment expenditure of the FCO, including its post abroad, and the ODA, and their agencies. For the financial year ended April 1994, this was £7,493,073.

Rwanda and Burundi

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to propose methods by which the United Nations ability for preventative action can be strengthened in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In Rwanda, the United Kingdom contributed to the restoration of stability by deploying a logistical battalion with UNAMIR. The Security Council is now considering a number of options for improving security conditions in the refugee camps and creating a secure environment within Rwanda, to encourage refugees to return home.

Within the region, the United Kingdom supports the proposal by the Organisation of African Unity and UNHCR for a conference to address refugee issues, including those in Burundi.

More generally, the United Kingdom fully supports enhancing the preventive diplomacy capability of the UN, and of regional organisations. Our African peacekeeping initiative aims to achieve better co-ordination between the UN and the OAU to provide early warning of conflicts. Where preventive efforts break down, our initiative sets out practical steps for the more rapid and effective deployment of peacekeeping forces.

Sadiq Al Mahdi

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to make representations to the Sudanese authorities to ensure fair and just treatment for Sadiq Al Mahdi.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: HM embassy in Khartoum made representations to the Sudanese authorities during Sadiq Al Mahdi's detention for three weeks earlier this year. Sadiq Al Mahdi was released on 3 July.

Diplomatic Service

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total expenditure on the diplomatic service for the years 1992–93 and 1993–94; if he will express this as a percentage of total spending on defence, diplomacy and aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Total expenditure on the diplomatic service in 1992–93 was £714·6 million or 3 per cent. of total spending on defence, diplomacy and aid. In 1993–94, it was £774·5 million or 3 per cent. of total spending on defence, diplomacy and aid.

East Timor

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when British Ministers or officials last visited East Timor.

Mr. Goodlad: September 1994.

European Union

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for publication in the *Official Report* of a copy of the letter on the European Union, sent to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, to which he refers in his answer of 3 November 1994 *Official Report,* column *1385.*

Mr. Baldry: Yes, the text of the letter was as follows:

You asked:

> "What arrangements exists to fill the positions of Fisheries Commissioner and Interior Judicial Affairs Commissioner in the event that the Norwegian and Swedish electorates reject joining the European Union?"

We expect that the Commission President would reallocate responsibility for these issues among the remaining Commissioners. It is his prerogative to do so.

Rwanda

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the establishment of an international judicial process to prosecute individuals suspected of genocide and other crimes against humanity in Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Security Council resolution 955 of 8 November 1994 established an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda. We co-sponsored this resolution.

Africa

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries in Africa have been the subject of arms export licence refusals on the ground of internal oppression or regional insecurity.

Mr. Baldry: The latest period for which figures have been compiled is the calendar year 1993.

No applications for export licences were refused to countries in Africa on the grounds of internal oppression or regional insecurity in that period.

UN Rapid Deployment Force

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the creation and maintenance of a United Nations rapid deployment

force to be used in preventive and peacekeeping missions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Some UN member states have proposed the creation of a rapid deployment force dedicated to UN peacekeeping. Given the costs of maintaining, training and equipping such a force, and the difficulty of matching its capabilities to the widely varying requirements of different missions, those ideas have not found widespread support. The UN Secretary-General has, however, established a UN standby force planning team tasked with creating a database of the resources which member states can make available to the United Nations at short notice. The Secretary-General's objective in launching this initiative is to enhance the capability of the United Nations to launch peacekeeping operations and deploy forces rapidly. Many member states, including the United Kingdom, have already supplied the necessary information to the UN Secretary-General and we and the French Government are actively encouraging other states to support this UN initiative.

EU Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many times votes in the EU Council have been published under the provisions of article 7(5) of Council decision 93/662/EC on allowing greater publicity for Council meetings;

(2) how many times explanations of votes in EU Council meetings have been published in accordance with article 5 of Council decision 93/662/EC on allowing greater publicity for Council meetings.

Mr. Baldry: The press releases which are issued after each Council meeting are placed in the Library. Since the publication of the Council decision referred to by the hon. Member, these have normally contained details of votes and explanations of votes.

Armenia

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to open an embassy in Armenia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are at present no plans to open an embassy in Armenia. The pattern of overseas representation is kept under review. HM ambassador in Moscow is accredited to Armenia and his staff make regular visits there.

Moldova

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to open an embassy in Moldova or change the current method of United Kingdom representation in that country.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The British ambassador to Moscow is also accredited to Moldova. We have no plans at present to change this arrangement nor to open an embassy in Moldova.

Libya

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom-Libyan relations at the latest date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are still issues of major concern which prevent an improvement in bilateral relations.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens are employed in Libya according to latest statistics; and what was the figures five years ago.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no figures available of British nationals employed in Libya. However, between 1990 and 1992, we estimate that there were 5,000 United Kingdom citizens in Libya.

Next Step Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next step agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Goodlad: The civil servant who did the work comparable to that of the director of the Natural Resources Institute before it was established as an agency was a home civil servant grade 4. The present national salary scale for that grade is £45,278 to £54,815. The civil servant who did the work of the director of Wilton Park before it was established as an agency was a diplomatic service grade 4—equivalent to home civil servant grade 5. The present national salary scale for that grade is £36,739 to £54,815. Neither officer was entitled to London weighting.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Goodlad: The conduct of Ministers in my Department is governed by "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", the guidance for all Departments promulgated by the Cabinet Office. Conditions of service for the staff of my Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse the information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Goodlad: No central record is kept of such contacts. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lockerbie

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to hold a public inquiry into the

Lockerbie bombing incident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no such plans.

Levels of Service

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he will ensure that the services of *(a)* the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration, *(c)* the BBC World Service and *(d)* the British Council remain at appropriate levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Expenditure plans for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Diplomatic Wing, and the Overseas Development Administration are reviewed annually as part of the public expenditure survey. The outcome is announced in the Financial Statement and Budget Report and in more detail in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's departmental report. Planned grants in aid to the BBC World Service, which is funded on a triennial basis, and the British Council are reviewed at the same time.

Germany

Mr. Radice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the present state of Anglo-German relations; and what steps he is taking to improve them.

Mr. Baldry: Our last summit meeting in April showed that British/German relations are very good. It underlined the close co-operation and contacts between our two Governments across the board and our common approach to many important issues affecting Europe and the rest of the world.

During the German presidency of the European Union, we have continued to work closely on a wide range of subjects, including growth and employment in the Union, the extension of security and prosperity to the east, and efforts to combat organised crime.

Now that Chancellor Kohl's new Government are in place, we look forward to working with them bilaterally and in the European Union to ensure a good outcome to the Essen European Council and beyond.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministers' Conduct

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what is the position of Her Majesty's Government on inviting senior civil servants, such as the Cabinet Secretary, to sit with the Patronage Secretary to examine Ministers about their conduct.

The Prime Minister: From time to time, my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip and the Cabinet Secretary are asked to advise me on matters relating to the registration of Members' interests and "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". This may necessitate establishing the facts with the Ministers concerned.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister how many Government Departments are involved following up the Pan Am 103 crash over Lockerbie; and if he will identify their respective responsibilities.

The Prime Minister: The Crown Office is the lead department on matters relating to the prosecution of those suspected of the Lockerbie bombing. The Foreign and Commonwealth office is the lead Department for international aspects. These Departments consult others on issues for which they are responsible, as they arise.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Halsbury Statutes

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to review the Halsbury statutes of 1717 with a view to their repeal; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any statutes passed in 1717 which are both still in force and in need of repeal.

Ministers' Pensions

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers in Her Majesty's Government between 1986 and 1994 have had pension contributions paid by outside interests while they held ministerial office.

The Prime Minister: Pension arrangements are a personal matter for individual Ministers. However, they are expected to follow the guidance in paragraphs 128–134 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers".

Salary Increases

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government will ask the Confederation of British Industry to request that salary increases for chief executives and chairmen of companies should not exceed the rate of inflation; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *465*.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Members' Salaries

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Lord President of the Council what will be the differential between the salaries of Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament in 1995; and what it was in 1965.

Mr. Newton: In 1965 the salary of a Cabinet Minister was £8,500, and that of a Member of Parliament £3,250, a ratio of 2·6:1; from January 1995 the comparable

figureprovided for by the draft Ministerial Salaries Order 1994 would be £42,834 for a Cabinet Minister against a Member's salary of £33,189 under the resolution of 3 November 1993, giving a ratio of 1·3:1.

Ministerial and Other Salaries Order

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement about the salaries covered by the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order.

Mr. Newton: The salaries of Ministers and other paid office holders were last increased from 1 January 1994 under the terms of the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order 1993. At that time it was decided that henceforth the level of ministerial salaries should normally be increased by the same proportion as those of hon. Members, and that Ministers in the other place would receive the same increases, in cash terms, as their counterparts in this House.

I announced this arrangement to the House during the debate on Members' salaries in November 1993, *Official Report*, 3 November 1993, column 457. Ministers in this House will receive the 2·7 per cent. staged payment from last year's award, plus a 2 per cent. increase due in respect of the 1995 settlement. Ministers in the other place will receive the corresponding cash increases.

The draft Ministerial and Other Salaries Order to implement these changes from 1 January 1995 was laid in the House on Monday 21 November. The details are set out in the tables.

In accordance with the resolution of 3 November 1993, the same increases will be applied to the reduced parliamentary salary paid to Commons Ministers and paid office holders, which will increase from the current rate of £23,854 to £24,985 on 1 January 1995.

Ministers salaries

	Current salary	*2nd stage of 1994 settlement wef 1 January 1995*	*Total inc. 2 per cent. 1995 settlement wef 1 January 1995*
Commons Ministers etc.			
Prime Minister	54,438	55,900	57,018
Cabinet Minister	40,895	41,994	42,834
Minister of State	28,936	29,713	30,307
Parliamentary Under Secretary	21,961	22,551	23,002
Attorney General	43,456	44,624	45,516
Solicitor General	35,632	36,589	37,321
Government Chief Whip	34,037	34,951	35,650
Government Deputy Chief Whip	28,936	29,713	30,307
Government Whips	18,620	19,120	19,502
Assistant Government Whips	18,620	19,120	19,502
Leader of the Opposition	37,495	38,502	39,272
Opposition Chief Whip	28,936	29,713	30,307
Assistant Opposition Whip	18,620	19,120	19,502
Speaker	42,909	44,062	44,943
Chairman of Ways and Means	28,936	29,713	30,307
First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means	25,431	26,114	26,636
Second Deputy Chairman Ways and Means	25,431	26,114	26,636
Lords Ministers etc.			
Cabinet Minister	52,260	53,999	55,329
Minister of State	46,333	47,751	48,835
Parliamentary Under Secretary	38,894	40,124	41,065
Lord Advocate	52,340	54,079	55,409
Government Chief Whip	46,333	47,751	48,835
Government Deputy Chief Whip	38,894	40,124	41,065
Government Whips	35,099	36,239	37,111
Leader of the Opposition	38,894	40,124	41,065
Opposition Chief Whip	35,099	36,239	37,111
Chairman of Committees	46,333	47,751	48,835
Principal Deputy Chairman of Committees	42,354	43,772	44,856
Minister in neither house			
Solicitor General (Scotland)	45,539	46,762	47,697
Parliamentary salaries			
Member of Parliament	31,687	32,538	33,189
Reduced parliamentary salary	23,854	24,495	24,985

The Speaker is entitled to draw the salary shown in this table, under the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order, but has opted to take a lower salary equal to that of a Cabinet Minister in the House of Commons.

The Lord Chancellor's salary is set separately by Section 3 of the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Waldegrave: In 1979 there were 118 such bodies; in 1993, the latest year for which there are published figures, there were 85.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave: The following list shows which quangos have been abolished from 1979 to 1993, the latest year for which there are final figures:

1979

1. Advisory Council for Agriculture and Horticulture in England and Wales
2. Farm Settlements Advisory Committee for Selection of Tenants
3. Plant Variety Rights Advisory Panels (12)
4. Poultry Diseases Panel
5. Torry Research Station Advisory Committee

1980

1. Advisory Committee on the Banana Trade
2. Experimental Centres Advisory Committees in England and Wales (reduced from 22 to 21)
3. Regional Panels (reduced from 7 to 5)
4. Tate & Lyle Customer Safeguards Committee

1981

1. Agricultural Wages Committees (reduced from 25 to 24)
2. White Fish Authority (abolished October 1981 and replaced by SFIA)
3. Agricultural Construction Industry Liaison Group
4. Milk and Dairies Tribunal (reduced from 7 to 5)

1982

1. Thames Barrier Advisory Team
2. Flood Protection Research Committee
3. Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operation (replaced by Food From Britain March 1983)
4. Experimental Centres Advisory Committees England and Wales (reduced from 21 to 20)

1983

1. Committee on Artificial Insemination of Cattle
2. Land Settlement Association Ltd
3. 'Food Additives and Contaminants Committee' and 'Food Standards Committee' amalgamated to form 'Food Advisory Committee'
4. Fisheries R & D Board
5. Kew Scientific Advisory Panel
6. Scientific Panel for Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs
7. Wakehurst Place Consultative Panel

1984

1. Joint Consultative Organisation for R & D in Agriculture and Food (abolished May 1984 replaced by Priorities Board for R & D in Agriculture and Food)

1985

None

1986

1. Eggs Authority (31.12.86.)

1987

1. Agricultural Chemicals Approval Scheme, Scientific Advisory Committee

1988

1. National Seeds Development Organisation Ltd (privatised)
2. Agriculture Economics Technical Committee
3. Committee of Investigation for England and Wales under the Agricultural Marketing Act 1958
4. Committee of Investigation for Great Britain under the Agricultural Marketing Act 1958

1989

1. Experimental Centres Advisory Committees in England and Wales (reduced from 20 to 18)
2. Advisory Committee on Pesticides (reduced from 6 to 1)

1990

1. Experimental Centre Advisory Committees in England and Wales (reduced from 18 to 14)
2. Reading Cattle Breeding Centre Advisory Committee
3. Apple and Pear Development Council

1991

1. Agricultural Wages Committees (reduced from 24 to 23)
2. Experimental 'Husbandry Farms' Advisory Committees in England and Wales (reduced from 11 to 10)
3. Regional Flood Defence Committees (reduced from 10 to 9)

1992

1. Agricultural Statistics Consultative Committee
2. Experimental 'Husbandry Farms' Advisory Committees in England and Wales
3. Experimental 'Horticultural Stations' Advisory Committees in England and Wales

1993

1. Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees (reduced from 24 to 17)
2. Agricultural Wages Committees (reduced from 23 to 17)
3. Area VII White Fish Industry Advisory Committee
4. Steering Group on Chemical Aspects of Food Surveillance

Animal Transportation

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the personnel licensed to export livestock from *(a)* Sheerness and *(b)* Grimsby have previous convictions for offences relating to the welfare of livestock.

Mrs. Browning: There is no requirement for such personnel to be licensed. We are aware that some involved recently in the export of animals may have past convictions for welfare offences, but prohibition from engaging in the trade is not a penalty provided for by statute.

Before any consignment leaves Great Britain, the Ministry carries out checks to determine that the facilities for the export of the livestock are sufficient to ensure that the welfare of the animals can be properly safeguarded throughout the journey.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times the certification procedures relating to *(a)* the live export and *(b)* the live transport of livestock have been breached in the last year.

Mrs. Browning: The detection of breaches, and the initiation of prosecution action where appropriate, is the responsibility of local authorities. No central figures are kept on the number of breaches.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about his plans for the development of B quotas for milk.

Mr. Jack: There is no proposal from the Commission for a two-tier quota system for milk. Denmark has been promoting the idea, but it has found little support from other member states. The Government's view is that the costs of administering and controlling such a system would be very high and that unsubsidised exports of dairy products made from B quota milk would displace existing subsidised exports, thus exacerbating the Community's dairy surplus. Moreover, the creation of a B quota would, under the system envisaged by the Danes, require a 4 per cent. cut in current milk quotas. Since the United Kingdom does not have enough quota as it is, any reduction in current quota levels would be unacceptable.

Food Labelling

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given to the proposals by the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards on considering tightening up controls on the labelling of food.

Mrs. Browning: The Local Authority Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards has provided comments in response to our recent consultative proposals for consolidating the Food Labelling Regulations 1984 and its amendment. These will be taken into account in the revised proposals which will be circulated for further comment in the new year.

Dry Stone Walls

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what grants are available to hill farmers in England to maintain dry stone walls; and what were the total amounts paid for each year since 1984.

Mr. Jack: Capital grants are available under the farm and conservation grant scheme to all eligible farm businesses for the provision, replacement and improvement of traditional wall and banks. The table below shows the grant paid on these items predominantly for dry stone walling, under the F and CGS and its predecessor the agriculture improvement scheme since 1986 in both less favoured areas and lowland areas—non-LFAs. Information prior to the financial year 1986–87 is not readily available.

Grant paid on traditional walls under AIS and F and CGS

Year	*Grant paid in LFAs £000s*	*Grant paid in Non-LFAs £000s*	*Total grant paid £000s*
1986–87	307	25	332
1987–88	928	48	976
1988–89	1,075	60	1,135
1989–90	1,119	103	1,222
1990–91	1,092	170	1,262
1991–92	1,183	321	1,504
1992–93	1,417	431	1,848
1993–94	1,474	530	2,004
Total	8,595	1,688	10,283

Hill Farmers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of hill farmers in north-east Lancashire whose incomes are less than £10,000 per annum.

Mr. Jack: Information on farm incomes is collected by the farm business survey, the results of which are published annually in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom".

The latest complete results are for 1992–93 and these indicate that about 47 per cent. of "full-time" cattle and sheep farms in England which are wholly or mainly in the less-favoured areas had a net farm income of less than £10,000. The survey covers some 2,300 farms in England and is designed to provide estimates of farm income for each of the main farm types in England as a whole. The sample is not intended to provide estimates for individual counties and therefore information for farms in north-east Lancashire is not available.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what grants he is making available for the upgrading of slaughterhouses to standards required by the EC.

Mrs. Browning: We are not making any grants available for this purpose.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Waldegrave: The next steps agencies established by my Department were headed by the following grades of civil servant before they attained agency status:

ADAS (agency in 1992)	Grade 2
Central Science Laboratory (agency in 1992)	Grade 3
Central Veterinary Laboratory (agency in 1990)	Grade 3
Pesticides Safety Directorate (agency in 1993)	Grade 4
Veterinary Medicines Directorate (agency in 1990)	Grade 4

Salary ranges for civil servants of grades 2, 3 and 4 are tabled annually in the Civil Service Year Book, copies of which are routinely placed in the Library of the House.

Rabies

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of human rabies have been identified as the result of animal attacks in *(a)* France, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* Benelux during each of the last five years for which records are available.

Mrs. Browning: Two cases were reported in France, one in 1991 and the other in 1992. Both were acquired outside France. The only other case in the last five years was in eastern Germany in 1990. We do not know the details of this case.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of rabies in foxes have been reported in Belgium in 1994 to date; and what was the total for 1993.

Mrs. Browning: Up to 30 June 1994, 10 cases of rabies have been reported in foxes in Belgium. There were no cases reported in 1993.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has sought regarding the number of cases of rabies identified in the past 10 years in *(a)* Austria, *(b)* the Czech Republic, *(c)* Slovakia, *(d)* Hungary, *(e)* Poland, *(f)* Germany and *(g)* France.

Mrs. Browning: Detailed information about the number of rabies cases occurring in Europe, including Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Germany and France, is available quarterly from the WHO collaborating centre for rabies surveillance and research from its headquarters in the Federal Republic of Germany. I have not sought any additional information.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the fox population of Belgium was vaccinated against rabies in the years 1992–93; and what proportion has been vaccinated to date in 1994.

Mrs. Browning: Since 1992 vaccinated baits have been spread in Belgium at the following rates:

Spring 1992: 9,000 sq. km
Autumn 1992: 8,453 sq. km.
Spring 1993: 8,610 sq. km.
Autumn 1993: 5,510 sq. km.
Spring 1994: 2,553 sq. km.

It is not possible to say how many of these baits were picked up by foxes

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest information for the number of cases of rabies identified in foxes in northern France *(a)* in 1994 to date, *(b)* in 1993 and *(c)* in 1992.

Mrs. Browning: Fox rabies was reported in northern France as follows:

1992: 1,000 cases
1993: 198 cases
1994 to date 55 cases

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated cost, in its first year, of the meat hygiene service; what proportion of that figure will be extracted from the meat industry; and what will be the budgetary treatment of any surplus or deficit in its trading account.

Mrs. Browning: The running costs of the meat hygiene service in 1995–96 are currently estimated at approximately £46 million, excluding certain one-off items relating to the establishment of the agency and to the transfer of staff from local authorities.

Invitations to tender have been issued to potential contract staff and suppliers. The terms and conditions of employees transferring to the agency are currently being confirmed with local authorities. These exercises will produce more detailed costings, which will be made available both to the industry as part of the on-going process of consultation and to other interested parties.

It is anticipated that the agency will set charges to recover the majority of normal running costs from the fresh meat industry within the provisions of the relevant charging legislation. Set-up costs will, however, be funded by MAFF.

Legislation does not allow charges above the real cost. It is not currently anticipated that a substantial deficit will arise on the provision of services by the agency.

Badgers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the 460 tests for M. bovis on badgers killed in her Department's removal operations referred to in his answer of 20 October, *Official Report*, column *335*.

Mrs. Browning: So far the outcome of the 460 results which were pending in October is that 207 badgers were negative and 68 were positive for M. bovis; 185 results are still pending.

Sheep Annual Premiums

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when sheep annual premiums were finalised; on what date payments were authorised to be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Commission regulations 1640/94 of 6 July 1994 and 1765/94 of 18 July 1994 authorised member states to make first and second advance payments under the 1994 sheep annual premium scheme based on an estimated amount of premium. The rates to apply in the United Kingdom were announced by the Ministry on 29 July 1994 and payments of both advances together began in England in the week beginning 19 September 1994. Final payments under the 1994 scheme will not be made until next spring after the final rate is announced by the Commission.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of total farm incomes is represented by *(a)* hill livestock compensatory allowance payments and *(b)* sheep annual premiums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The total value of receipts of hill livestock compensatory allowances, sheep annual premium and farm incomes in the United Kingdom are available in tables 6.7 and 6.1 of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom, 1993", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 23 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I attended a meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 23 November, with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office.

The Council discussed the arrangements to apply when Spain and Portugal are integrated into the common fisheries policy on 1 January 1996. I reiterated my determination to resist any proposals which would impose new bureaucratic restrictions on British fishermen and to protect the Irish box. A wide range of views was expressed. The Presidency decided that it was not possible to reach a decision at this meeting of the Council and is reflecting on how to take matters forward but with the firm intention of reaching a decision at the December Council meeting.

The Council approved a number of measures concerning the organisation of the fisheries market, guide prices and tariff quotas. These items will be adopted formally in due course.

A proposal establishing rules for monitoring trade in certain Norwegian fishery products was adopted.

The Council considered the recent decision of the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation on the Greenland halibut TAC. This resulted in no new proposal.

The Council noted the Commission's report on the state of its negotiations with Russia for the purchase of 8,000 tonnes of cod, action which was agreed as part of the enlargement negotiations earlier this year.

The Council remitted for further work a Commission proposal on permits for EU vessels fishing in third country waters.

No votes were taken at this Council.

Rodents

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he intends to take over the increase in mice and rats in domestic properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* The draft report of the national rodent survey, which will give an indication of the current levels of mice and rat infestation, is being finalised by MAFF, the Department of the Environment, the Department of Health and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, together with its commercial co-sponsors. It is hoped to publish the full report in the new year and an announcement will be made then.

HEALTH

Senile Dementia and Alzheimer's

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people over 60 years were recorded in the United Kingdom for each of the last 10 years as having Alzheimer's disease;

(2) how many people over 60 years in the United Kingdom were recorded for each of the last 10 years as suffering from senile dementia.

Mr. Bowis: It is estimated that some 5 per cent. of the population aged 65 and over suffer from dementia. Of these it is estimated that over half suffer from Alzheimer's disease. There is no evidence to suggest that the incidence of Alzheimer's disease has changed significantly over the last 10 years.

Obstetric Cholestasis

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the exact source of the information given in her answer of 8 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *366*, that *(a)* obstetric cholestasis affects one in 1,000 pregnancies and *(b)* in her letter of 23 August 1994 to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) that parental mortality in mothers affected by obstetric cholestasis is five times higher than normal;

(2) if she will make it her policy to encourage epidemiological studies to ascertain the incidence of stillbirth due to obstetric cholestasis;

(3) what information she has on the cause of the stillbirths referred to in her answer of 22 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *198;* and what action she is taking to improve that information.

Mr. Sackville: Information is available in the following articles;

Reyes H. the Spectrum of Liver and Gastrointestinal Disease seen in Cholestatis of Pregnancy *Gastroenterol Clin North Am 1992 21 905–11*, Schorr-Lesnick B. et al Liver Diseases Unique to Pregnancy *Am Journal Gastroenterol 1991; 86: 659–62* and de Swiet M. ed *Medical Disorders in Obstetric Practice Oxford: Blackwell Scientific 1984.*

Copies of the articles will be placed in the Library. The figure of one in 1,000 pregnancies is an estimate based on the published sources above and was intended to indicate the order of magnitude of the condition.

Health authorities already participate in epidemiological surveys to establish the causes of stillbirths and infant deaths and in the "Confidential Enquiry into Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy"—CESDI—which was established in 1992. This is the mechanism that is in place for identifying avoidable factors that give rise to stillbirths and deaths in infancy. CESDI's second annual report for 1993, which is due to be published shortly, includes examination of the small proportion of stillbirths which are associated with delivery. Its future work programme is being widened to include other stillbirths.

Although the cause of most stillbirths are unknown, a large proportion are due to fetal conditions such as asphyxia at birth, congenital anomalies and prematurity, while others are the result of maternal conditions such as hypertension and haemorrhage.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general and *(b)* senior managers were employed by NHS trusts in each year since 1991–92, by region.

Mr. Malone: The information available for September 1993 is shown in the table.

General and Senior Managers in NHS Trusts by Region—30 September 1993. Whole-time equivalents

Northern	300
Yorkshire	1,190
Trent	610
East Anglian	510
North West Thames	620

General and Senior Managers in NHS Trusts by Region— 30 September 1993. Whole-time equivalents

North East Thames	1,090
South East Thames	800
South West Thames	410
Wessex	610
Oxford	390
South Western	860
West Midlands	650
Mersey	770
North Western	400
England Total	9,210

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Notes:

(1) Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

(2) Total may not equal sum of components due to rounding.

(3) It is not possible to identify general managers and senior managers separately.

(4) The England total given for managers differs from that published in October in table E of the Statistical Bulletin, which incorrectly included some 280 staff from trusts in Wales.

(5) The England total in September 1993 is not directly comparable with numbers published for 1991 and 1992. A change in data collection procedures in September 1993 resulted in the recategorisation of many staff who would have been coded as 'others' in the 1991 and 1992 censuses.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice is given to hospital trusts—by her Department—when advertising for non-executive trust board members; and what requirement there is to state any political affiliation when applying for board membership.

Mr. Malone: None. Information about the political affiliation of candidates plays no part in the appointments process.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ban gagging clauses in settlements reached between NHS trusts and their employees following the termination of employment.

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive issued guidance on termination settlements to chief executives of NHS trusts—TEL 94–3—on 16 May 1994 which made it plain that any confidentiality clause in an employment contract should not be framed in such a way to suggest that a termination would escape proper public scrutiny. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total expenditure on consultancies by each trust hospital in the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Expenditure by national health service trusts solely on consultancy services is not available centrally. Information is collected on

"external contract staffing and consultancy services".

This expenditure relates to services purchased from other trusts, health authorities and the private sector and includes, for example, linen supplies, transport and computing services as well as consultancy services.

The expenditure on external contract staffing and consultancy services by NHS trusts in England for the financial years 1991–92 and 1992–93 will be placed in the Library. Figures for 1993–94 will be available in December. There were no trusts prior to 1991–92.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those chief executives of NHS trusts who have resigned or have been dismissed; and what were the reasons for resignation or dismissal.

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Community Care, Kent

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement regarding the amount of money made available for community care in Kent prior to, and since, the recent changes; and what is her estimate of the availability of resources for the care of the elderly in Kent for 1995–96 and the three preceding years.

Mr. Bowis: Kent personal social services standard spending assessments, which include resources for community care, plus the special transitional grant for community care introduced in 1993–94 are shown in the table for each of the last five years:

£ million

1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
95·154	117·790	126·655	156·772	177·834

It is for local authorities to decide how to allocate their resources in the light of local priorities, with the exception of the special transitional grant, which must be spent on community care services.

Funding for 1995–96 will be announced shortly.

NHS Private Facilities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for health how many patients have been treated in NHS hospitals, private facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Sackville: The numbers of finished consultant episodes and out-patient attendances for private patients in national health service hospitals in England by region are shown in the tables.

Finished Consultant Episodes, Ordinary Admissions and Day Cases

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*
England	79,243	83,478	81,366	87,906
Northern	3,034	3,998	3,349	3,056
Yorkshire	4,542	4,321	4,842	5,174
Trent	5,182	4,116	2,797	2,961
E Anglia	4,997	5,563	4,504	4,284
NW Thames	7,357	8,952	10,345	8,891
NE Thames	8,113	7,918	7,402	9,715
SE Thames	6,597	7,055	6,648	8,220
SW Thames	4,468	4,937	5,081	5,832
Wessex	2,135	2,215	2,643	2,602
Oxford	6,466	7,505	6,928	6,916
S Western	3,380	4,864	5,044	5,644
W Midlands	6,269	6,141	6,081	6,524
Mersey	3,975	2,594	2,370	2,245
N Western	6,123	6,401	6,445	7,256
SHAs	6,605	6,898	6,887	8,586

1992–93 figures are not yet available.

Source:

SD2A, Hospital Episode Statistics.

Outpatient Total Attendances

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
England	156,574	154,327	147,869	145,366	139,560
Northern	6,493	6,058	5,451	4,911	5,028
Yorkshire	4,117	3,808	3,785	1,874	2,151
Trent	4,803	4,989	3,856	6,369	12,810
E Anglia	4,730	6,736	3,556	6,010	2,789
NW Thames	30,248	29,904	30,936	23,159	21,857
NE Thames	36,993	38,047	30,381	30,449	25,793
SE Thames	9,348	9,379	9,045	7,084	5,870
SW Thames	4,092	4,227	3,598	2,814	2,767
Wessex	7,248	5,331	4,971	6,723	5,673
Oxford	8,123	8,217	6,773	8,864	9,245
S Western	3,204	2,668	3,625	3,712	3,365
W Midlands	6,835	7,215	8,174	11,213	10,522
Mersey	8,128	4,438	5,174	4,248	3,180
N Western	7,474	8,259	12,580	10,671	6,023
SHAs	14,738	15,051	15,964	17,265	22,487

Source:
KHO9 returns.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what legislation wheelchairs are provided to disabled people.

Mr. Bowis: The national health service provides wheelchairs in exercise of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's powers under section 5(2)(a) of, and schedule 2 to the National Health Service Act 1977.

Mixed Sex Wards

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are issued by her Department concerning mixed sex hospital wards; and what representations she has received.

Mr. Sackville: None, but the patient's charter expects patients to be treated with dignity and respect for their cultural and religious beliefs. There will also be a new national standard addressing mixed sex wards in the revised and expanded patient's charter to be published in the new year. The Department has received several representations about mixed sex wards both from hon. Members and from members of the public.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to discourage mixed sex wards in acute patient care.

Mr. Sackville: It is for individual hospitals to decide in the light of local conditions whether, and if so in what circumstances, mixed sex wards should be used. The revised and expanded patient's charter to be published in the new year will include a new national standard on mixed sex wards.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide an estimate for the value of fundholding allocations retained by general practitioner fundholders at the year end in each of the last four years, by region.

Mr. Malone: The available data for the first two years of fundholding are shown in the table. Final audited accounts for 1993–94 are not yet available. Savings may be retained for up to four years for use for the benefit of patients of the practice.

	1991–92		*1992–93*	
Regional Health Authority	*Retained savings £ million*	*Percent of budgets set percent.*	*Retained savings £ million*	*Percent of budgets set percent.*
Northern	0·7	1·6	2·3	3·6
Yorkshire	1·1	2·1	3·3	3·2
Trent	1·5	4·0	1·9	2·3
East Anglian	0·6	4·5	0·6	2·5
N W Thames	0·7	2·6	2·0	3·3
N E Thames	1·0	6·1	1·6	5·8
S E Thames	0·7	3·6	1·2	2·9
S W Thames	1·6	6·1	1·1	2.1
Wessex	0·7	3·1	1·8	3·4
Oxford	1·1	3·6	3·2	4·8
S Western	0·6	2·4	1·5	2·8
W Midlands	2·6	7·3	4·9	5·9
Mersey	1·1	4·2	2·8	4·7
N Western	0·7	3·0	0·4	0·9
England	14·5	3·7	28·3	3·5

Note:
Retained savings may not sum to England totals due to rounding.

Patient Complaints

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patient complaints have been received in each of the last five years by region.

Mr. Malone: The latest information available about numbers of hospital patient complaints by region is shown in the table. Information about complaints against family health service practitioners is not available centrally in the form requested.

Hospital Complaints

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Northern	1,546	1,750	2,083	2,627	2,758
Yorkshire	2,015	2,233	2,384	2,779	3,939
Trent	2,398	2,970	2,772	3,772	4,303
East Anglian	1,105	1,207	1,504	1,877	2,536
North West Thames	2,626	3,348	3,534	4,505	4,694
North East Thames	4,121	4,351	4,207	6,055	8,505
South East Thames	3,076	2,257	2,515	5,472	5,243
South West Thames	2,953	3,213	2,849	4,065	4,726
Wessex	1,846	2,109	2,063	3,026	3,276
Oxford	1,371	1,477	1,822	1,728	3,182
South Western	1,617	2,064	2,248	2,532	4,877
West Midlands	3,241	3,894	3,859	5,105	[1]N/A
Mersey	1,803	1,654	1,507	2,307	3,661
North Western	3,032	3,054	3,234	4,475	5,381
Special Health Authorities	546	600	769	805	773

Source:
K040 returns.
[1] No return was submitted.

The increase in complaints recorded can be attributed to the increase in patient awareness and confidence due to the patients charter.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average response time for emergency ambulance calls in London in the year 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994.

Mr. Sackville: According to figures provided by the London ambulance service, the average response time in 1993–94 was between 14 and 15 minutes.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received as to the effectiveness of the cell analysis test for breast cancer devised by Dr. Ian Ellis of Nottingham city hospital.

Mr. Sackville: We are aware of the promising research work being undertaken by Dr. Ellis of Nottingham city hospital to determine effective strategies for the treatment of breast cancer based on cytology.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the absenteeism rate for employees of the London ambulance service in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Sackville: According to figures supplied by the London ambulance service, absenteeism rates for all staff in the years requested were:

1991: 9·2 per cent.
1992: 10·1 per cent.
1993: 9·4 per cent

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of ambulances arriving after 14 minutes from being called in the London area, in the year from 1 April 1993.

Mr. Sackville: According to figures supplied by the London ambulance service, of a total 494,900 calls in 1993–94, 186,960 ambulances arrived after 14 minutes. Of those, 112,065 arrived between 14 and 19 minutes.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number and percentage of emergency ambulance calls in the London area that took *(a)* 14 minutes, *(b)* 15 minutes, *(c)* 16 minutes, *(d)* 17 minutes, *(e)* 18 minutes, *(f)* 19 minutes, *(g)* 20 minutes, *(h)* 21 minutes, *(i)* 22 minutes, *(j)* 23 minutes, *(k)* 24 minutes, *(l)* 25 minutes, *(m)* 26 minutes, *(n)* 27 minutes, *(o)* 28 minutes, *(p)* 29 minutes and *(q)* 30 minutes, in the year 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994 and in the current year.

Mr. Sackville: According to figures supplied by the London ambulance service, the information is as shown in the tables.

Minutes	*Calls*	*Percentage of Total*	*Cumulative Total*	*Cumulative Percentage*
Response Times 1993–94				
14	40,877	8·3	307,940	62
15	31,154	6·3	339,094	69
16	26,810	5·4	365,904	74

Minutes	Calls	Percentage of Total	Cumulative Total	Cumulative Percentage
Response Times 1993–94 cont.				
17	21,769	4·4	387,673	78
18	17,934	3·6	405,607	82
19	14,398	2·9	420,005	85
20	12,139	2·5	432,144	87
21	9,740	2·0	441,884	89
22	7,771	1·6	449,655	91
23	6,410	1·3	456,065	92
24	5,654	1·1	461,719	93
25	4,614	0·9	466,333	94
26+	28,567	5·8	494,900	100
Response times 1 April 1994–31 October 1994				
14	27,655	8·9	203,594	65
15	18,521	5·9	222,115	71
16	15,753	5·0	237,868	76
17	12,818	4·1	250,686	80
18	10,523	3·4	261,209	84
19	8,526	2·7	269,735	86
20	7,102	2·3	276,837	89
21	5,497	1·8	282,334	90
22	4,476	1·4	286,810	92
23	3,633	1·2	290,443	93
24	3,064	1·0	293,507	94
25	2,544	0·8	296,051	95
26	1,725	0·6	297,776	95
27	1,656	0·5	299,432	96
28	1,355	0·4	300,787	96
29	1,185	0·4	301,972	97
30	1,078	0·3	303,050	97
31+	9,172	2·9	312,222	100

Calls responded to within 14 minutes have increased by 13 per cent. per month this year compared with last year.

City Hospital, Birmingham

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her Department is monitoring the changed arrangement for out-of-hours cover in oral surgery at the City hospital, Birmingham; and whether she has been informed by the trust as to the reasons that out-of-hours cover was withdrawn by South Birmingham acute unit.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for local management. The hon. Member may wish to contact Dr. M. D. Skillicorn, chairman of North Birmingham health authority, for details.

Lung Diseases

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the Government's total spending on medical research is directed at research into diseases of the lung.

Mr. Sackville: The main agency through the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council–MRC–which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. In 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, MRC expenditure on research wholly or partly related to respiratory diseases was £11·2 million, 4·53 per cent of total expenditure of £247 million. In addition, the Department itself funds a range of research projects of relevance to respiratory diseases. A proportion of Government spending also goes on research into cancer of the lung.

AIDS

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities have filed reports under the AIDS (Control) Act 1987 for the last financial year; and whether and where these reports are available for public examination.

Mr. Sackville: The AIDS (Control) Act 1987 requires reports to be made to each regional health authority by the district health authority for each district in the region and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State by the regional health authority. The Act also requires reports to be published by the authority by which they are made.

Information on the numbers of DHAs which have submitted their reports is not therefore available centrally.

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will issue guidance to health and local authorities on prompt payment for the provision of HIV/AIDS related services to voluntary sector organisations with which they have contracted.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service executive issued a requirement to health authorities on 28 October 1994 to comply with the Confederation of British Industry prompt payment code. Additionally, health authorities were required to set out their payment policies and publish details of their payment performance in their annual reports and publicise their arrangements for handling complaints about failure to pay on time. A copy of FDL(94)67 is available in the Library.

Issuing guidance to local authorities on prompt payment is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

We have no plans to issue guidance specifically about payment for HIV/AIDS-related services.

GP Fundholders

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the range within which earnings of *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioners fall, by region together with the numbers of general practitioners at each point.

Mr. Malone: Information about the geographical distribution of general practitioners' earnings or the earnings of GP fundholders compared with non-fundholders is not available.

Paracetamol

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were treated in hospitals for overdoses of paracetamol in each year since 1990.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available in the form requested. The "Hospital Episode Statistics" include paracetamol poisonings as part of the classification "Aromatic Analgesics not elsewhere classified (diagnostic code International Classification of Diseases 965.4)". The number of finished consultant episodes in this category for the years since 1990 are shown in the table.

Finished Consultant Episodes, Diagnostic Code ICD 965.4

Year	Number of Episodes (Thousands)
1989–90	28·0
1990–91	30·3
1991–92	28·4

Statistics for 1992–93 and 1993–94 are not yet available.

Mental Health

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each year since 1979 the resources that accrued from each individual mental handicap and mental illness hospital; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available centrally on income generated by individual hospitals within or outside the national health service.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to restrict the number of paracetamol tablets sold to the general public; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: There are already controls over the number of paracetamol tablets which may be sold outside a registered pharmacy. Packs containing more than 30 effervescent tablets, more than 25 tablets that are not effervescent and more than 10 sachets of powder of granules may be sold only from registered pharmacies. The Medicines Control Agency is keeping under review the need for any further restriction of the availability of paracetamol to the general public.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died as a direct result of paracetamol overdoses in the last year.

Mr. Sackville: Data for 1993 and 1994 are not yet available.

In England and Wales in 1992, the number of cases of poisoning by aromatic analgesics not elsewhere classified (ICD[1]965.4) was 220.

Note:

In England and Wales most cases coded to ICD 965.4 are due to paracetamol overdose. Exact figures for paracetamol deaths are not readily available.

[1]International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Cold-related Illnesses

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many death certificates in 1993 had *(a)* hypothermia, *(b)* pneumonia, *(c)* other cold-related illnesses as one of the contributory causes of death; and what were the figures for each of the four previous years in each case.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table.

Deaths in England and Wales where hypothermia [1](ICD 991.6) was mentioned as a contributory cause, 1989–1993

	Number
1989	372
1990	368
1991	534
1992	362
1993	472

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for health how many deaths were recorded for *(a)* hypothermia and *(b)* cold-related illness for the years 1987 to 1993 for (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Scotland, (iii) England, (iv) Wales and (v) Northern Ireland.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table.

Number of deaths from hypothermia in England, Wales, Northern Ireland (ICD 991.6)[1] and Scotland (ICDs E901.0, E901.8, E901.9 and secondary codes 788.3, 780.0, 780.8, 780.9)[1] 1987–1992

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
England	249	181	156	143	236	142
Scotland	34	39	39	45	25	29
Northern Ireland	7	8	6	9	11	8
Wales	19	12	10	8	13	7
United Kingdom	309	240	210	205	285	186

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were recorded for *(a)* hypothermia and *(b)* cold-related illness for each month of 1992, 1993 and 1994 for (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Scotland, (iii) England, (iv) Wales and (v) Northern Ireland.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table.

Number of deaths from hypothermia by month in England, Wales, Northern Ireland (ICD 991.6)[1] and Scotland (ICDs E910.0, E910.8, E910.9 and secondary cause codes 778.3, 780.0, 780.8 and 780.9)[1] in 1992.

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
January	28	3	—	—	31
February	27	10	3	1	41
March	9	3	—	—	12
April	12	4	1	1	18
May	3	1	—	4	8
June	—	—	—	1	1
July	—	1	—	—	1
August	2	—	—	—	2
September	4	—	—	1	5
October	12	2	2	—	16
November	15	2	—	—	17
December	30	3	1	—	34

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by her Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Sackville: The Medicines Control Agency and NHS Estates directorate were led by grade 3 civil servants, the Medical Devices Directorate by a grade 4, and the NHS superannuation branch by a grade 6. None of these civil servants received any emolument other than those payable under standard civil service terms and conditions.

Chief executives of next steps agencies are directly accountable to Ministers. Their posts carry different responsibilities from those of their civil service predecessors and cannot be regarded as directly comparable.

GPs' and Dentists' Lists

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been struck off *(a)* GPs' lists and *(b)* dentists' lists in the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford in each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Malone: Information is not available in the form requested.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list and date those occasions in the past two years when Ministers or officials in her Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the guidelines issued by her Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Sackville: There are no guidelines which refer to lobbying companies.

Guidance to Ministers on the conduct of their affairs is contained in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", issued by the Cabinet Office.

Staff rules incorporate general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Drug Prescriptions

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what complaints she has received from patients prescribed cheaper drugs by their general practitioners, following her Department's guidelines.

Mr. Malone: No such guidelines have been issued.

Dental Fillings

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the comparative costs of restoring teeth with *(a)* amalgam and *(b)* white fillings;

(2) what percentage of dentists in the national health service have the necessary skills to restore teeth with fillings other than amalgam;

(3) what percentage of dentists in the nation health service restore teeth with fillings other than amalgam.

Mr. Malone: Skills taught during training of dentists include the selection of appropriate materials for fillings. In 1993–94 there were 10,691,884 courses of treatment where dental amalgam was used as the filling material and 6,028,756 courses involving glass ionomer-composite. This excludes courses of treatment where it is not possible to distinguish the type of material used. No data are available centrally on the number of dentists who use only fillings other than amalgam. The range of fees for dentists for fillings using dental amalgam starts at £5·30. The range of fees for a tooth coloured restoration starts at £9·95.

Transportation of Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to strengthen the guidelines covering the transportation of *(a)* corpses, *(b)* other parts of the body and *(c)* specimens between hospitals, pathology laboratories and mortuaries with respect to (i) strength of container, (ii) types of vehicle, (iii) strapping or fixing of container, (iv) instructions to driver, (v) type of company or public corporation owning vehicle, (vi) use of preservative fluid and (vii) other considerations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: In arranging for the transportation of bodies and pathological specimens between facilities, health service personnel need to be conscious of the sensitivities involved. They will also need to take account of the nature and degree of any infection risk, and the requirements which will consequently apply.

In 1991 the Health and Safety Executive's health services advisory committee issued updated guidance, commended to the health service by the national health service executive, on

"Safe Working and the Prevention of Infection in Clinical Laboratories"

and

"Safe Working and the Prevention of Infection in the Mortuary and Post Mortem Room".

The guidance includes references to the transportation of specimens, including large specimens such as limbs. I have no plans to further strengthen the guidelines at present. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Further national and international guidelines relate to the transport of goods which are classified as dangerous, including pathology specimens which may pose a risk of infection.

Private Beds

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount of income the national health service received from private pay beds for each financial year since 1979 and for the latest year for which information is available; and how much each national health service trust has received since its establishment by way of income from private pay beds.

Mr. Sackville: Information on overall private patient income for the national health service in England is given in the table. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 7 February at column *43* for information on private patient income for individual NHS trusts. The figures for 1992–93 are confirmed.

NHS (England) private patient income

Year	*£000*
1978–79	30,830
1979–80	36,127
1980–81	46,642
1981–82	54,404
1982–83	51,850
1983–84	55,844
1984–85	55,953
1985–86	61,325
1986–87	59,437
1987–88	67,514
1988–89	77,659
1989–90	92,590
1990–91	108,732
1991–92	140,834
1992–93	157,314

Source:
NHS Summarised Accounts of Health Authorities and NHS Trusts (England).
Note:
The figures in the table include money received from NHS patients for accommodation in single rooms and small wards (section 63 NHS Act 1977), private in-patients (Section 65) and private out-patients (section 66).
Information for 1993–94 will not be available until December 1994.

Septrin

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate she has made about the possible side effects attributable to the use of septrin;

(2) what plans she has to prohibit the use of septrin.

Mr. Sackville: Septrin—co-trimoxazole—is an effective medicine for the treatment of severe bacterial infections. Since its introduction, the side-effects associated with its use have been closely monitored by the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Control Agency. The side effects are well documented and are included in the product data sheet which is produced by the manufacturer and authorised by the licensing authority, and the "British National Formulary", which the Department of Health sends free of charge to doctors, copies of which are available in the Library.

The Department has no plans to prohibit the use of septrin. It is our view that this drug has a place in medical practice when prescribed with appropriate care, and it is for doctors to use their training, knowledge and experience to weigh carefully the likely benefits of a drug against the anticipated risks. As for all medicines, its safety will be kept under review.

Nurses' Pay

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is earned by *(a)* staff nurses and *(b)* ward sisters (i) exclusive of and (ii) inclusive of allowances; and if she will provide a breakdown by nursing grade.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Pay of nursing staff in the pay scale grades D to G at the maximum of the scale as of 1 April 1994

Grade	*Basic £*	*Estimated average earnings £*
Clinical grade D (basic staff nurse)	12,950	15,240
Clinical grade E (staff nurse advanced skills)	15,000	17,700
Clinical grade F (basic ward sister)	17,600	20,230
Clinical grade G (sister with continuing responsibility for a ward)	19,600	21,380

(1) The estimated average earnings takes account of all allowances, including additional payments for unsocial hours and overtime. London payments are not included.
(2) Nursing staff working in inner London earn up to an additional £2,605 per year.

Disability Payments

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has further considered the possibility of local authorities being permitted to make direct payments to disabled people in lieu of care services; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I intend to take, in conjunction with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, a new power to enable social services authorities and social work departments to make direct cash payments to disabled people in lieu of community care services. Direct payments are a logical extension of the citizen's charter. They will give disabled

people greater independence and choice and involve them and their carers more fully in their own care.

This development will give disabled people greater independence and control over their lives. It fully complements the other important measures which my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People is announcing. But, as a new departure, direct payments carry some risks. So in the short term we intend to limit those able to receive such payments to a relatively small number group, probably those disabled people who are able and willing to manage their care. The intended power will also be permissive - authorities themselves will need to decide whether to take advantage of it, based on their judgment of whether it will help them make better use of their resources. Direct payments will be an alternative to community care services, where authorities assess a need for them. There will be no overlap with social security benefits.

There are many complex issues to be resolved. We will be working with the key interests to make sure that the details are right. It would be unwise to introduce legislation before we are satisfied that we have done so. We hope to move to a Bill as soon as practicable.

SCOTLAND

Beef Exports

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by region, the revenue generated by on-the-bone beef exports.

Mr. Hector Monro: This information is not held centrally.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. David Marshall : To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money Scottish Enterprise spent on replacing its computer and related equipment this year; how much money was raised by the disposal of the previous equipment; when it was purchased; and what it cost.

Mr. Stewart: The acquisition and disposal of computer and related equipment by Scottish Enterprise is an operational matter for that body. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Diet

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated cost of the proposed conference at Kirkliston on the Scottish diet.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This conference, at Ingliston on 7 November, was organised by the Rowett Research Institute and the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland. I understand that the net cost was some £19,300.

NHS Private Patient Facilities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients have been treated in NHS hospitals' private facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Health Board of treatment	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Argyll and Clyde	104	99	128	87	86
Ayrshire and Arran	253	336	440	187	74
Borders	31	28	28	49	32
Dumfries and Galloway	1	—	—	1	—
Fife	1	6	7	3	5
Forth Valley	142	82	34	36	37
Grampian	261	462	485	421	362
Greater Glasgow	39	28	12	43	22
Highland	88	83	105	120	91
Lanarkshire	—	7	—	1	1
Lothian	115	148	172	141	145
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	150	172	155	199	128
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—
Scotland	1,185	1,451	1,566	1,288	983

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much income has been generated by NHS hospitals' private patient facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information by health board area is set out in the table. The figures have been taken from health board annual accounts and, from 1992–93, a combination of health board and NHS trust annual accounts. The figures for 1993–94 are provisional. The figure for Greater Glasgow in that year includes overseas patients, and can therefore not be compared directly with those for earlier years.

Health board	*1989–90 £000s*	*1990–91 £000s*	*1991–92 £000s*	*1992–93 £000s*	*1993–94 £000s*
Argyll and Clyde	69	57	49	43	36
Ayr and Arran	144	174	234	142	115
Borders	22	32	42	52	32
Dumfries and Galloway	3	5	6	6	8
Fife	1	1	4	—	1
Forth Valley	82	22	37	33	55
Grampian	304	328	473	563	567
Greater Glasgow	34	43	12	19	485
Highland	28	37	54	60	117
Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	1
Lothian	212	255	548	608	802
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—

Health board	1989–90 £000s	1990–91 £000s	1991–92 £000s	1992–93 £000s	1993–94 £000s
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	130	162	184	193	244
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—
Total	1,029	1,116	1,643	1,719	2,463

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the surcharges or deficits recorded by each individual NHS trust in each year since their inception.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the turnover of each NHS trust in each year since its inception.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is provided in the table.

Wave	NHS trust	Turnover 1992–93 £000	Turnover 1993–94 £000
First			
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals		113,056	114,811
South Ayrshire Hospitals		42,958	45,309
Second			
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare			55,158
Caithness and Sutherland			14,072
Dundee Teaching Hospitals			108,288
Grampian Healthcare			131,912
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals			50,408
Moray Health Services			22,720
North Ayrshire and Arran			69,719
Raigmore Hospital			46,756
Royal Alexandra Hospital			44,363
Royal Scottish National Hospital and Community			20,352
Southern General Hospital			78,335
Stirling Royal Infirmary			38,646
Victoria Infirmary			55,620
West Lothian			63,419
Yorkhill			52,725

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which NHS trusts failed to *(a)* break even, *(b)* keep within the external financing limit and *(c)* record a 6 per cent. return on capital; and by what percentage and sum in each year since their inception.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

(a) None

(b) Victoria Infirmary NHS trust overran the external financing limit by 1·4 per cent.—£21,000—in 1993–94.

(c) As detailed in table.

NHS trust	1993–94 Percentage	1993–94 Sum
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals	0·4 per cent. below	-£483,000
Victoria Infirmary	0·1 per cent. below	-£61,000
Yorkhill	0·3 per cent. below	-£123,000

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received from farmers who have bought holdings unaware that the previous holding owner's herd was considered BSE-infected.

Sir Hector Monro: One farmer has made representations to my Department about the BSE status of a holding which he had purchased.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have contacted the BSE hotline since it began.

Sir Hector Monro: During the period between 1 August and 12 November this year, 16,769 requests for information have been dealt with by the national BSE hotline.

In dealing with the inquiries, 276,342 herd numbers have been checked.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received regarding decision 94/474.

Sir Hector Monro: Forty-seven representations have been received by my Department regarding EC decision 94/474 concerning protection measures relating to BSE.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of marts operating in Scotland and the number of marts that provide systems whereby information on whether an animal comes from a BSE infected holding is available.

Sir Hector Monro: There are currently 33 auction markets in Scotland. The Department has no information about which of these markets provide information to purchases about the health status of an animal's farm of origin.

Emergency Hospital Admissions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of emergency hospital admissions by region for each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Health Board of treatment	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Argyll and Clyde	28,987	29,572	30,899	32,122	33,560
Ayrshire and Arran	21,708	22,211	23,825	25,908	28,529

Health Board of treatment	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Borders	7,024	7,532	7,763	8,121	8,570
Dumfries and Galloway	9,289	10,187	10,762	10,722	11,386
Fife	17,782	18,011	18,887	19,454	19,666
Forth Valley	15,675	17,714	18,016	18,917	20,039
Grampian	35,439	38,252	39,072	39,005	40,109
Greater Glasgow	74,045	77,510	78,659	82,473	95,254
Highland	14,734	14,705	15,676	16,826	17,178
Lanarkshire	35,763	36,547	38,270	39,001	40,924
Lothian	56,781	57,966	59,868	62,262	63,637
Orkney	976	1,088	1,151	1,144	1,208
Shetland	1,290	1,333	1,216	1,230	1,377
Tayside	33,587	34,339	35,061	35,146	36,896
Western Isles	1,956	1,923	2,038	2,124	2,407
Scotland	355,036	368,890	381,163	394,455	420,740

Forestry

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the Forestry Commission identifies the exact boundaries of the tracts of land it disposes of each year.

Sir Hector Monro: When the Forestry Commission sells an area of land it checks the boundaries on the ground against the original title deed map and a master map of its land holdings. The exact boundaries of the land are then plotted on the current Ordnance Survey map which becomes the title deed map for the sale.

Mallaig Harbour

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to make an announcement about the Mallaig harbour development.

Sir Hector Monro: I hope to be in a position to make an announcement within the next few weeks on Mallaig harbour authority's application for grant assistance under the Fisheries Act 1955 towards the cost of the proposed development at the harbour.

Dental Services

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he monitors whether dentists providing NHS services are progressively moving into private practice; and what evidence he has on this matter.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: General dental practitioners are independent contractors who are free to decide whether to offer NHS treatment to each individual patient. No information is available on dentists' private practices. The Government monitor information provided regularly by all health boards on the availability of NHS dental services. No health board has reported that it has been unable to arrange access to NHS dental services for people who wish to use them in its area.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what effect he expects sessional pay to have on dental waiting lists.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sessional remuneration for general dental practitioners was one of the options for change outlined in the Government's consultation paper "Improving NHS Dentistry". Ministers are now considering all the responses received before deciding the way forward. No decisions have have yet been taken.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Lang: A list of bodies which have been abolished since 1979 is not held centrally by my Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, there is a list of bodies which, between 1 April 1985 and 1 April 1993, have been abolished, amalgamated with other bodies, are no longer sponsored by my Department or have ceased to be non-departmental public bodies for other reasons—for example, cessation of Government funding. This is as follows:

Advisory Committee on Statistical Information
Appeal Panel for Entry to Pharmaceutical Lists in Scotland
Colleges of Education—Governing bodies (5)
Committee of Investigation for Scotland
Consultative Committee on the Curriculum
Countryside Commission for Scotland
Dumping at Sea Representation Panel
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art—Board of Governors
Dundee Institute of Technology—Board of Governors
East of Scotland College of Agriculture—Board of Governors
Edinburgh College of Art—Board of Governors
Electricity Consultative Councils (2)
Fire Service Examinations Board (Scotland)
Glasgow College of Technology—Board of Governors
Glasgow School of Art—Board of Governors
Highlands and Islands Development Board
Highlands and Islands Development Consultative Council
Hill Farming Research Organisation
Lay Observer for Scotland
Leith Nautical College
Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh—Board of Governors
National Committee for the In-Service Training of Teachers
National Health Service Tribunal for Scotland
National Panel of Specialists
Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland
Newbattle Abbey College—Board of Governors
North of Scotland College of Agriculture—Board of Governors
Orkney Islands Shipping Company Ltd
Paisley College of Technology—Board of Governors
Queen's College—Board of Governors
Queen Margaret College—Board of Governors
Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology—Board of Governors
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama— Board of Governors
Scottish Advisory Committee on Top Grade Scientific Posts
Scottish Agricultural Development Panel
Scottish Agricultural Statistics Consultative Committee
Scottish Agricultural Research and Development Advisory Council
Scottish College of Textiles—Board of Governors
Scottish Committee for Staff Development in Education
Scottish Council for Post Graduate Medical Education
Scottish Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education
Scottish Council for Research in Education
Scottish Development Agency
Scottish Health Eduction Co-ordinating Committee
Scottish Institute of Agricultural Engineering
Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman
Scottish National Camps Association Ltd—Council of Management
Scottish National War Memorial—Board of Trustees
Scottish Special Housing Association—Council of Management

Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council
The Scottish Agricultural College
Visiting Committees to Detention Centres and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) (5)
West of Scotland Agricultural College—Board of Governors
Working Party on Management Training for Leisure and Recreation

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Lang: In 1979 my Department sponsored 244 non-departmental public bodies. In 1993 there were 160.

Prison Privatisation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the present list of Her Majesty's prisons in Scotland which are now under consideration for privatisation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no Scottish prisons currently under consideration for privatisation.

Patient Complaints

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table detailing the number of patient complaints in each of the last five years, by region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available for the full period requested. Information about complaints since January 1993 is now published in a series of quarterly NHS complaints bulletins, copies of which are held in the Library of the House.

Cattle

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farmers *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each region have entered the voluntary passport system for cattle.

Sir Hector Monro: The use of animal passports is entirely voluntary and the Department has no information on the number of farmers who have decided to use them.

Valuation and Rating Act

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what use he has made of powers under section 6 (8B) of the Valuation and Rating (Scotland) Act 1956; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: None.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what use has been made of his powers under section 6 (8A) of the Valuation and Rating (Scotland) Act 1956; and if he will make a statement

Mr. Stewart: Section 6(8A) of the Valuation and Rating (Scotland) Act 1956 was inserted by the Local Government Finance Act 1988, schedule 12, paragraph 4. The powers have been exercised only once, in the making of the Valuation for Rating (Decapitalisation Rate) (Scotland) Regulations 1990, SI 1990 No. 505.

Finance Statistics

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the rate of *(a)* gross domestic product per capita, *(b)* disposable income per capita and *(c)* average earnings in Scotland in each year since 1974.

Mr. Stewart: The information is given in the table.

	Gross domestic product per head (£)	*Personal disposal income*[1] per head (£)	Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees[2][3] (£)
1974	1,267	1,017	39·5
1975	1,628	1,278	52·6
1976	1,927	1,499	62·7
1977	2,190	1,673	68·6
1978	2,452	1,896	77·0
1979	2,802	2,252	87·5
1980	3,212	2,650	107·4
1981	3,542	3,004	122·0
1982	3,894	3,252	133·5
1983	4,266	3,519	145·2
1983	—	—	144·3
1984	4,455	3,845	155·7
1985	4,920	4,086	165·8
1986	5,331	4,463	176·6
1987	5,813	4,823	187·9
1988	6,419	5,187	204·5
1989	7,054	5,659	221·4
1990	7,752	6,351	244·0
1991	8,123	6,904	265·3
1992	(P)8,616	(P)7,617	286·7
1993	—	—	296·8
1994	—	—	300·8

(P) Provisional.

Source:

Central Statistical Office Employment Department.

Notes:

[1] Personal disposable income is defined as the income of the personal sector (households, individuals living in hostels and other institutions, unincorporated businesses such as farms, the funds of pension and life assurance schemes, private trusts and all non-profit making bodies such as universities and charities) less taxes on income, social security contributions, community charge and current transfers from personal income. It is not a measure of the spending power of households.

[2] At April each year. Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees whose pay was not affected by absence.

[3] 1974 to first row for 1983 compiled on basis of men aged 21 and over and women aged 18 and over. Second row for 1983 onwards compiled on basis of employees on adult rates.

Exporters

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of Scottish-based active exporters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: This answer necessarily has to be best estimate, as it cannot be definitive. The Scottish Council (Development and Industry) has around 1,800 manufacturing companies on its database, about 1,000 of which could be termed active and significant exporters. There are no data available in relation to active service sector exporters.

Exports pertaining to small and medium sized companies had shown an 18 per cent. increase in 1993 and are now worth over £1·4 billion. Some 110,000 jobs are thought to be dependent on exporting and the SCDI's latest estimates point towards Scotland's spectacular 1993 performance being sustained.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of total farm incomes is represented by *(a)* hill livestock compensatory allowance payments and *(b)* sheep annual premiums; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: In 1993 the percentages of total income from farming represented by hill livestock compensatory allowances and sheep annual premium were 17 per cent. and 33 per cent. respectively.

For 1992–93 the equivalent percentages for livestock farms in the less-favoured area are set out in the table:

	Percentage of net farm income represented by:	
	Hill livestock compensatory allowances *Per cent.*	*Sheep annual premium* *Per cent.*
LFA Specialist sheep	48	150
LFA Specialist beef	50	29
LFA Mixed cattle and sheep	55	97

Source:
Scottish farm accounts scheme.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what acreage has been put into regeneration of the natural habitat in hill farming; and if he will evaluate the effect this will have on hill farm incomes.

Sir Hector Monro: The area of hill farming land which farmers may have put into regeneration is not known to my Department, nor is any effect that this might have on their incomes.

Unified Business Rate

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date Her Majesty's Government first decided that there should be a Scottish unified business rate; and to whom this policy was first announced.

Mr. Stewart: The Government's unified business rates policy was first announced by my right hon. and learned Friend, the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) in a speech to the Scottish Young Business Group in Glasgow on 8 May 1989. Powers were subsequently taken in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to enable my right hon. Friend to prescribe non-domestic rate poundages for each Scottish local authority from 1990–91 onwards with the intention of reducing poundages progressively to the level of the national non-domestic rate in England.

Labour Statistics

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many adults were in *(a)* full-time employment, *(b)* part-time employment, *(c)* self-employment and *(d)* unemployment in each year since 1979; and if he will provide a breakdown by parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information for Scotland is given in the table.

At parliamentary constituency level, self-employed estimates are not available. The numbers unemployed are available but not in a form which will allow comparison over time on a consistent basis. Employees in employment estimates, split into full-time and part-time, are available from the censuses of employment carried out in 1981, 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1991. This information, along with the unemployment information, is on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information.

Thousands

June	*Employees in employment* *Total*[1]	Full-time	Part-time	Self-employed	Unemployed[2]
1979	2,102	—	—	146	138
1980	2,082	—	—	141	166
1981	2,002	—	—	136	244
1982	1,950	—	—	150	274
1983	1,899	—	—	164	300
1984	1,901	—	—	168	308
1985	1,900	—	—	174	322
1986	1,879	—	—	176	332
1987	1,879	—	—	182	326
1988	1,921	—	—	198	278
1989	1,957	—	—	221	233
1990	1,986	—	—	208	200
1991	1,997	1,490	507	223	222
1992	2,008	1,488	521	215	237
1993	1,984	1,448	536	216	245
1994	1,962	1,416	546	222	—

Source:
Employment Department.
Notes:
[1] Part-time/full-time data for all employees are not available prior to June 1991.
[2] The unemployed figures given are seasonally adjusted.

Non-domestic Rates

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each individual corporation, company, group, organisation and other entity he has consulted for the purposes of determining evidence for the purposes of re-valuation of non-domestic rates to be effective from 1 April 1995.

Mr. Stewart: The valuation for rating of individual subjects is the responsibility of the assessor for each valuation area. It is therefore assessors, not the Secretary

of State, who gather evidence for the purposes of revaluation.

Our consultations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and relevant ratepayer companies in relation to the formula valuation of certain lands and heritages under section 6 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1975 have been informed by evidence on movement in values generally provided by assessors.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what are the reasons for the delay in the payment of sheep annual premiums to farmers; and if he will consider paying compensation in cases where there has been unnecessary delay and inconvenience;

(2) what recent representations he has received on the delay in making sheep annual premiums to farmers; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department is in the process of changing over to a new computer system designed to cope with the increased complexity of the agricultural subsidy schemes following reform of the common agricultural policy. The changeover has not gone as smoothly as I would have wished, causing delays in the issue of payments under the 1994 sheep annual premium scheme. The Department is doing its utmost to overcome the problems and get the payments out as soon as possible. Next year, the processing of SAP claims should be quicker.

I fully recognise the importance of these advance SAP payments to producers and very much regret the delay. However, there is no obligation under the EC regulations governing the scheme to make advance payments of premium so the question of compensation does not arise.

I have received representations about the delay in making payments from the hon. Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and from the National Farmers Union of Scotland. In addition, officials of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department have received representations from some SAP claimants.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many sheep annual premiums have been made to date; and what is the total value of such payments;

(2) when he expects the sheep annual premium for this year to be *(a)* finalised and *(b)* made to farmers; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: By 18 November, my Department had issued advance payments on 9,335 claims, totalling over £25 million under the 1994 scheme.

Commission regulations 1640/94 and 1765/94 authorised member states to make first and second advance payments under the 1994 scheme based on an estimated amount of premium. Payments of both advances together began in Scotland in the week beginning 24 October 1994. Final payments under the 1994 scheme will not be made until next spring after the final rate is announced by the Commission.

Environmental Code of Practice

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the economic impact of the national voluntary environmental code of practice on businesses; if he will list the businesses which have agreed to follow the national environmental code of practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: There are various voluntary codes—promoted by, for example, individual industries, the international chambers of commerce, and the Confederation of British Industry—through which a commitment to environmental management may be demonstrated.

The Government welcome such voluntary initiatives but do not keep centralised information on them.

Inward Investment

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each inward invested project attracted to Scotland since 1990 how much the planned investment was worth and the number of jobs guaranteed.

Mr. Stewart: Many inward investors do not publicly announce details of their investment projects and releasing details of these projects would constitute a breach of confidence. The following table, however, gives details of the total number of inward investment and the total number of planned jobs recorded by Locate in Scotland in recent years:

Year	*Number of projects*	*Planned investment (£ million)*	*Planned jobs (new and safeguarded)*
1990–91	63	394·1	10,244
1991–92	59	380·9	6,002
1992–93	65	352·0	8,059
1993–94	95	587·6	11,072
Total	282	1,714·6	35,377

The figures for planned investment and planned jobs are those provided by the companies concerned at the time of the investment decision and take no account of subsequent developments. Company plans are of course subject to change and some projects may fail to meet job forecasts, while others may exceed them. Evidence over a period of years suggests that, on average, around two-thirds of planned direct jobs are achieved. Many additional jobs are of course also created indirectly in supplier companies.

Productivity

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of productivity within the Scottish economy using value added per employee; and if he will analyse the figures by industry.

Mr. Stewart: The information is available only for the manufacturing sector and is set out in the table. Figures are provided for 1991, which is the latest year for which information is available.

SIC 1980 Class	*Industry group*	*Gross value added per employee (£)*
2–4	Manufacturing industries	23,947
21	Extraction and preparation of metalliferous ores	—
22	Metal manufacturing	15,915
23	Extraction of minerals nes	43,514

SIC 1980 Class	Industry group	Gross value added per employee (£)
24	Manufacture of non-metallic mineral products	27,508
25/26	Chemical and man-made fibre industries	40,785
31	Manufacture of metal goods nes	18,776
32	Mechanical engineering	24,760
33	Manufacture of office machinery and data processing equipment	42,128
34	Electrical and electronic engineering	22,216
35	Manufacture of motor vehicles and parts	22,573
36	Manufacture of other transport equipment	24,517
37	Instrument engineering	24,981
41/42	Food, drink and tobacco manufacturing industries	25,332
43	Textile industry	13,980
44	Manufacture of leather and leather goods	23,146
45	Footwear and clothing industries	13,499
46	Timber and wooden furniture industries	16,705
47	Manufacture of paper and paper products; printing and publishing	26,433
48	Processing of rubber and plastics	22,940
49	Other manufacturing industries	16,374

Source:
Annual Census of Production.

Temporary Sheriffs

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the contribution temporary sheriffs make to the administration of justice in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The use of temporary sheriffs when permanent sheriffs are unavailable for court work serves to avoid increases in court waiting periods and inconvenience to court users which would result from cancelled sittings. Their use also makes an important contribution to dealing efficiently with temporary increases in court business. A balance must however be maintained between the respective contributions of permanent and temporary sheriffs and I have accordingly decided, following consultation with the sheriffs principal, to increase by three the number of permanent appointments. Applications for these posts will be invited shortly. The successful candidates will be appointed as floating sheriffs to serve in a number of courts.

Woodlands

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for introducing a tendering system and locational supplements as part of the woodland grant scheme.

Sir Hector Monro: We will introduce a pilot system for inviting people to tender for the establishment of woodlands in the national forest. We will also introduce a flat-rate locational supplement of £600 per hectare for appropriate woodland establishment schemes in priority areas within the central Scotland woodlands area, community forest areas in England which have had their business plans approved, Sherwood and Aman Gwendraeth in South Wales. These schemes will run for a pilot period of three years, starting with 1995–96. Full details will be announced in time for planting to take place in 1995–96.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's policy on the disposal of Forestry Commission woodlands, its target for the area of woodlands to be sold and its target for the amount of woodland sold for which public access should be protected by way of access agreements.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* The Government's policy on the disposal of Forestry Commission woodlands is set out at appendix VI of the commission's annual report for the year ended March 1990, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House. When we announced this policy in 1989, we asked the Commission to dispose of 100,000 hectares of forestry land and properties in the period up to the end of the century. As noted in our public expenditure plans, the Commission intends to sell 15,000 hectares in each of the next three years. Every effort will be made to secure an access agreement for all woodlands which are sold.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by county all Forestry Commission woodlands sold since 1 January 1993, indicating those for which an access agreement was in place.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* A list, by county, of the Forestry Commission woodlands sold in 1993 is held in the Library of the House. A list of those woodlands sold in 1994 will be placed in the Library early next year. Of the woodlands sold by 30 September 1994, those listed below were subject to access agreements.

County	Name of property
Derbyshire	Birch Wood
	Britton Wood
	Kings Lot and Longway Bank
North Yorkshire	Gateforth East
	Moreby Wood
	Sutton Wood
Clwyd	Nant y Ffridd (part)
	Nant y Ffridd (part)
Dyfed	Allt y Gwydre
	Court Wood
	Factory Wood
	Taldrum Wood
	Tan y Lan
	Ty'r Dopa
Gwent	Graig Syddi
Powys	Castlering
	Granner Wood
	Hilltop

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide an estimate for the value of fundholding allocations retained by general practitioner fundholders at the year end in each of the last four years by region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested relates to GP fundholder savings which are retained not by the fundholder at year end but by the health board on the fundholder's behalf to be used for the benefit of patients. These figures are available only for those years for which audited health board accounts have been completed. The audited accounts for 1993–94 have not yet been finalised but it is estimated that savings will be about 4 per cent.

Health board	*1991–92 £000*	*1992–93 £000*
Argyll and Clyde	56	Nil
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—
Borders	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—
Fife	—	—
Forth Valley	—	—
Grampian	103	95
Greater Glasgow	—	13
Highland	—	—
Lanarksire	—	—
Lothian	29	39
Orkney	—	—
Shetland and	—	—
Tayside	Nil	12
Western Isles	—	—
Scotland	188	159

[1] Figures represent gross amounts in all cases.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusions the Government have reached in the light of the responses to their consultation paper, "Contaminated Land Clean-up and Control", which was announced on 11 March 1994, and the recent consultation exercise on the revision of Scotland's nuisance legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[pursuant to his reply 23 November 1994 c. 196–97.]:* I have today published a paper which sets out my proposals for dealing with contaminated land and liabilities and concludes the review which I announced on 24 March last year. I will arrange for copies to be deposited in the Libraries of the House. I am grateful to the 91 individuals in the organisations who submitted their views in response to the consultation document.

The Government remain committed to the "suitable for use" approach to the control of existing contamination, relating any need for remedial work to the presence of any unacceptable risks to health or the environment and to the actual or intended use of the site. This approach gained wide support from our respondents. It provides a platform for tackling real hazards where they exist in an orderly and controlled manner, without imposing unnecessary financial and regulatory burdens and without discouraging enterprise.

Subject to parliamentary approval, I intend to use the creation of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, working in conjunction with the enterprise bodies, to develop guidance on remediation. I will expect the agency to take an overall monitoring and reporting role in respect of Scottish land contamination. Our "Development of Contaminated Land", is now set in the context provided by the United Kingdom sustainable development strategy, allowing us to establish a balance between green-field and brown-field development.

My proposals are intended both to provide an appropriate and sensible approach to tackling the legacy of past contamination which will not jeopardise public health or the environment, and to take advantage of the opportunity that remediation work offers for regeneration.

Our consultation paper also said that, in the light of the emerging conclusions of the review, the Government would re-assess the justification for the present unique statutory exemptions for abandoned mines. In view of the concerns that have been expressed about water pollution from abandoned mines, the Government will now propose legislative amendments to remove the existing statutory defence and exemptions for mines abandoned after the end of 1999 so that SEPA, as successor to the RPAs, will have the same powers, in respect of those mines, as for other discharges.

The Government will also propose a duty of mine operators to give SEPA six months' notice of any proposed abandonment. This will provide an additional safeguard to ensure that when mines are abandoned this is done in a responsible manner with full regard to the effects on the water environment.

TREASURY

National Audit Office

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the proportion of total public expenditure which came under the remit of the National Audit Office for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: Public expenditure is usually measured in terms of general Government expenditure, comprising both central and local governemnt. The remit of the National Audit Office—in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Audit Office—includes all central Government expenditure including grants to local authorities but excluding notional items such as capital consumption. The figures for these items in each year since 1979 are as follows—the percentage of public expenditure within NAO's remit represents the total of central Government expenditure as a proportion of general Government expenditure:

Year	*GGE £ millions*	*Central Government Expenditure (excluding notionals) £ millions*	*NAO remit (per cent. of GGE)*
1978–79	72,431	62,688	86·55
1979–80	89,992	77,361	85·96
1980–81	108,637	94,666	87·14
1981–82	120,516	104,033	86·32
1982–83	132,672	118,004	88·94
1983–84	140,436	126,393	90·00
1984–85	150,789	135,069	89·57

Year	GGE £ millions	Central Government Expenditure (excluding notionals) £ millions	NAO remit (per cent. of GGE)
1985–86	158,474	144,672	91·29
1986–87	164,848	150,464	91·27
1987–88	173,233	155,366	89·69
1988–89	179,798	161,208	89·66
1989–90	200,832	175,127	87·20
1990–91	218,139	202,592	92·87
1991–92	236,268	223,949	94·79
1992–93	260,237	245,635	94·39
1993–94	277,550	264,365	95·25

Central Government Accounts

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value of the central Government accounts, covering public spending and receipts, audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The Comptroller and Auditor General is the auditor of all central Government accounts. The value of central Government receipts and payments for each year since 1978–79 covered by NAO's audits is as follows:

Year	Receipts (£ million)	Payments (£ million)	Total (£ million)
1978–79	56,841	64,797	121,638
1979–80	70,498	77,361	147,859
1980–81	82,583	94,666	177,249
1981–82	97,522	104,033	201,555
1982–83	104,913	118,004	222,917
1983–84	113,019	126,393	239,412
1984–85	123,266	135,069	258,335
1985–86	134,003	144,672	278,675
1986–87	139,980	150,464	290,444
1987–88	154,910	155,366	310,276
1988–89	168,386	161,208	329,594
1989–90	180,620	175,127	355,747
1990–91	204,188	202,592	406,780
1991–92	214,208	223,949	438,157
1992–93	210,343	245,635	455,978
1993–94	217,029	264,365	481,394

Customs and Excise Staff

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to increase the number of Customs and Excise staff based at Tilbury;

(2) what plans he has to cut the number of Customs and Excise staff employed at Tilbury.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to cut the number of Customs and Excise staff employed at Teesside port;

(2) what plans he has to increase the number of Customs and Excise staff based on Teesside.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Decisions on the deployment of Customs' staff at particular places are essentially a matter for Customs and Excise based on operation requirements. It would be wrong to give details of Customs' cover for obvious security reasons.

Taxation, Scotland

Dr. Howells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total raised in Scotland from forms of taxation, other than income tax and VAT, *(a)* in 1990, *(b)* in 1991, *(c)* in 1992, *(d)* in 1993 and *(e)* in the first six months of 1994.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total raised from VAT in Scotland was as follows:

Year	Amount (£ million)
1990–91	2,520
1991–92	2,850
1992–93	3,110
1993–94	3,250

Taxation, Wales

Dr. Howells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total raised in Wales from forms of taxation, other than income tax and VAT, *(a)* in 1990, *(b)* in 1991, *(c)* in 1992, *(d)* in 1993 and *(e)* in the first six months of 1994.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total raised from VAT in Wales is estimated as follows:

Year	Amount (£ million)
1990–91	1,380
1991–92	1,630
1992–93	1,740
1993–94	1,820

Cigarettes and Alcohol

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions, in each region of the United Kingdom since 1 January 1993, have been made by HM Custom and Excise for re-selling cigarettes and alcohol, which were purchased for self-consumption and had been bought, duty-paid, in other parts of the European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To 31 October 1994 Customs and Excise prosecuted 307 individuals for the importation and illegal resale of alcohol and tobacco from other EU countries—178 in London and the south-east, 46 in the south and the south-west, 35 in the midlands and 48 in the north.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Members' Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Nelson: Treasury Ministers expect to send around 1,000 official Christmas cards this year at a purchase price of approximately £300. Postage costs cannot be estimated at this stage, and information relating to staff costs is not

available. A sample copy of the Treasury Christmas card is being placed in the Members' Library.

EC Budget Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Budget Council held on 16 November.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I represented the United Kingdom at the Budget Council on 16 November. The Council considered the European Parliament's proposed changes to the draft budget which the Council established in July, *Official Report*, 17 October 1994, columns *1–4*; and established a second reading draft budget for 1995.

The Council's second reading draft budget totals 75,930 million ecu—£59,343 million—in commitment appropriations and 72,000 million ecu—£56,272 million—in payment appropriations. The second reading draft budget is 583 million ecu—£456 million—in commitments and 924 million ecu—£722 million—in payments below the financial perspective ceilings and is within the existing own resources ceiling of 1·20 per cent. The following table compares the outcome of the Budget Council with the proposals in the Commission's preliminary draft budget and with the proposals in the European Parliament's draft budget, with reference to the financial perspective ceilings:

	Financial perspective expenditure ceilings		*Preliminary draft budget*[2]		*Parliament draft budget*		*Council second reading draft budget*	
Commitment appropriations	*mecu*	*£ million*[1]	*mecu*	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*
1. Common Agricultural Policy	36,994	29,219	36,994	29,219	36,449	28,487	36,994	28,913
2. Structural operations	25,264	19,745	25,264	19,745	25,264	19,745	25,264	19,745
3. Internal policies	4,652	3,636	4,610	3,603	4,523	3,544	4,321	3,535
4. External action	4,605	3,599	4,555	3,560	4,572	3,573	4,393	3,433
5. Administration expenditure	3,852	3,011	3,827	2,991	3,823	2,988	3,811	2,979
6. Reserves	1,146	896	1,146	896	1,146	896	1,146	896
Total commitments	76,513	59,799	76,396	59,708	75,775	59,222	75,930	59,343
Total payment appropriations	72,924	56,994	72,417	56,597	71,318	55,739	72,000	56,272

[1] Throughout this reply the rate of £1=1·2795 ecu has been used (the rate notified in the Official Journal as prevailing on the last working day of last month (31 October).
[2] Including letter of amendment No. 1 to the PDB for 1995.

The European Parliament will consider the draft budget for 1994 at its plenary session in December. The 1995 Community Budget is expected to be adopted by the Parliament on 15 December, to take effect from 1 January.

The Council took no formal votes, the presidency concluding that there was the necessary majority to establish the second reading draft budget for 1995.

The Budget Council also discussed the revision of the financial perspective to take account of enlargement.

Ecofin

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Ecofin meeting on 7 November.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 17 November, *Official Report*, column 2.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Departments before the agency was established.

Mr. Nelson: The salaries of the officials concerned were as follows:

	£	
Central Statistical Office:	76,060	(for 1990–91)
Paymaster General's Office:	41,831	(for 1993–94)
Royal Mint:	45,350	(for 1989–90)
Valuation Office:	55,290	(in 1991)

EC Expenditure

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *15*, what account he took of the additional resources coming from new EC members.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The figures for the effect of the Edinburgh financing settlement on the United Kingdom net contribution—£75 million in 1995–96, rising to £250 million in the 1999—are based on a Community of Twelve.

The financial consequences of enlargement are a separate matter. It will not be possible to determine them finally until all the prospective member states have completed their referendums and parliamentary processes, and we know exactly which ones will be joining, and until the consequential revision of the financial perspective is agreed.

However, on the assumption that all four prospective new members join the Community, we expect that enlargement will result in a small reduction in the United Kingdom's net contribution compared with what it would otherwise have been in the absence of enlargement.

The own resources ceiling after enlargement will remain at the levels now proposed: that is, 1·21 per cent. of Community GNP in 1995, 1·22 per cent. in 1996, 1·24 per cent. in 1997, 1·26 per cent. in 1998 and 1·27 per cent. in 1999.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the net cost to each member state of the European Union of the increase in the size of the Community budget for each of the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I regret that the information is not available in the detail requested. The following analysis gives some broad indications of likely developments.

Revenue

All member states will contribute more to the higher budget. The extra contributions will be broadly in line with their relative GNP, apart from the effect of the United Kingdom abatement. Thus Germany will contribute about 30 per cent. of the extra cost, France over 20 per cent., and Italy between 15 and 20 per cent. The United Kingdom will contribute about 16 per cent. before abatement. Other, smaller member states will pay a smaller share.

As now, the United Kingdom abatement will reduce our net contribution by 66 per cent. of the difference between our contribution to, and receipts from, the allocated budget—that is, excluding external expenditure, on which we get no rebate.

Change in the own resources structure

By 1999, member states' gross contributions to the Community will more closely reflect their actual GNP shares rather than their shares of a notional harmonised VAT base. GNP is widely acknowledged to be a fairer measure of a member state's ability to contribute than VAT.

The impact of this change in the structure of the revenue side of the budget, taken in isolation, is expected to benefit mainly Spain, Germany and France, with Portugal, Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg being small gainers. Italy will pay heavily—reflecting the benefit it has received in the past from having a VAT base which is a smaller proportion of its GNP base than any other member state; Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands will also pay more. There will be no change in the United Kingdom's net contribution, taking one year with another, because any changes to our gross contributions which arise will be wholly offset by the abatement in the following year.

Expenditure

It is not possible to estimate with any certainty how each member state would benefit from the additional resources available. The following gives some pointers:

(a) *Agriculture*. The Edinburgh European Council decisions make no difference to the distribution of CAP receipts between member states, although the recent reform of the CAP will change the balance to some extent; and the Community now has a new GATT commitment to reduce the value of export subsidies and the volume of subsidised exports.

(b) *Cohesion Fund*. The Cohesion Fund (worth 2·6 billion ecu in 1999–1992 prices) will benefit Spain, Greece, Portugal and the Irish Republic. The allocations decided by the European Council are: Spain 52–58 per cent., Greece 16–20 per cent., Portugal 16–20 per cent., Ireland 7–10 per cent. This is likely to lead to receipts of about 1·4 billion ecu for Spain, 0·5 billion ecu for Portugal, 0·5 billion ecu for Greece and 0·2 billion ecu for Ireland.

(c) *Structural Funds*. The largest relative beneficiaries will be those member states composed entirely or mainly of "Objective 1" regions (regions where development is lagging behind): Spain, Greece, Portugal and the Irish Republic. Increased grants are also available to the United Kingdom: Northern Ireland has long been, and Merseyside and the Highlands and Islands have now become objective 1 regions, though all were, strictly speaking, too rich in terms of per capita GNP to qualify.

(d) *Other internal policies*. These include research and development, trans-European networks and a range of other policies. Member states' receipts will depend upon specific decisions taken in specialist Councils and in the annual Budget Councils.

(e) *External actions*. These will, by definition, not result in receipts for member states, though much of the business which results from this expenditure will benefit firms in the Community, including those from the United Kingdom.

(f) *Administration*. The principal beneficiaries are likely to be Belgium and Luxembourg where most of the Community's administrative activities are concentrated. France will also benefit from the decision that the European Parliament should remain in Strasbourg. (The United Kingdom acts as host to the JET research programme at Culham in Oxfordshire and has been chosen to provide the site (Canary Wharf, London) of the new Medicines Evaluation Agency.)

Overall assessment

In recent years, the United Kingdom has usually been the second largest net contributor to the EC Budget, both in total per capita, after Germany.

By 1999, we expect that France will have passed us on both counts. The Netherlands is also expected to be a larger per capita net contributor. Italy's net contributions to the Community will increase significantly, though she will still pay less than us. Germany will remain by far the largest net contributor, and will pay much more than us towards the Edinburgh deal.

Of the new member states, Austria and Sweden are expected to be larger net contributors than us per head of population, as is Norway, if it joins. Finland will be broadly in budgetary balance.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the net cost incurred by each of the EC member states as a result of the 1988 financing review in each of the subsequent financial years.

Mr. Heatcoat-Amory: This information is not readily available and estimates could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rates Revaluation

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions the Scottish Assessors Association or its representatives has met its counterparts in the Inland Revenue with respect to the impending rates revaluation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: In dealing with the impending rates revaluation, both the Valuation Office agency and the Scottish Assessors Association have followed long-standing practice on harmonisation.

Since the last revaluation in 1990 there have been 13 meetings of the Steering Committee on Harmonisation (Practice and Procedure) England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the last seven of which have concentrated on the impending revaluation. The most recent was held on 27 October 1994.

In addition, there has been on-going contract at working level covering particular classes of property and harmonisation issues, precise details of which are not readily available.

"A Tax on Disability"

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what study his Department has made of "A

Tax on Disability" published by the Disablement Income Group, a copy of which has been sent to him; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heatcoat-Amory *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* The report has been read by Treasury Ministers and officials and its recommendations have been noted. The Government have put in place a substantial package of assistance to help meet the cost of VAT on fuel and power. It will help over 15 million people including the overwhelming majority of disabled people. The value of the package builds to £1·3 billion a year.

Charging Policies

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to government.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* The Office of Public Service and Sciences has produced guidance on charging which recognises the diversity of costs and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code. In line with this guidance, the Departments and agencies for which the Chancellor of the Exchequer is responsible have developed schemes of charges for information under the code of practice on access to Government information.

The Treasury: For simple requests the first hour's work is free. Requests taking between one and three hours to prepare are charged at £15 per hour or part of an hour. For complex requests taking more than three hours, the charge is based on the actual cost of the extra work.

HM Customs and Excise: The Department has adopted the same arrangements as the Treasury.

Inland Revenue: A charge of £15 is made for handling requests except where the cost of staff time and other direct costs of meeting the request are estimated at £50 or more. In those cases, the charge is equal to the estimated cost.

Valuation Office: The office has the same arrangements as the Inland Revenue.

Central Statistical Office: Answering requests for statistics and analysis is the CSO's raison d'etre and charges for meeting these requests are made in line with the charging guidelines published in the CSO's agency framework documents. The CSO's policy is not to charge for meeting requests for some other information, for example, on the CSO's policies and activities.

Registry of Friendly Societies: The Department carries out a public record function relating to the registration of mutual societies. A standard fee is charged for the inspection on any particular day of documents relating to a single society or branch and copies can be supplied at £1·50 for up to five pages. No charge is made for general information about performance of the Department but if requests are made which result in additional work, a similar level of charge is payable as for the inspection of documents. More complex requests are costed individually.

Royal Mint: The agency's policy is to treat each application on its merits. Account is taken of the complexity of the request in deciding whether it would be appropriate to levy a charge which would be based on the Office of Public Service and Science guidelines.

Department for National Savings: The Department's current policy is to provide information free of charge but its policy is being reviewed in the light of experience of the past eight months of the code's operation.

National Investment and Loans Office: It is the policy of the office to follow the guidelines on charging set out by the Office of Public Service and Sciences.

DEFENCE

Borletti

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department was aware of the limited performance of the Borletti L85 fuse, the MOD contract for which was placed with Borletti on 20 March 1991.

Mr. Freeman: The limits on use of the L85 fuse have been known since its introduction into services in 1980.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reason was given by his Department for the placing of a £2,088,000 order for L85 fuses with Borletti on 20 March 1991.

Mr. Freeman: The order for artillery shell fuses was placed after a competition between Borletti, which offered the L85 fuse, and Royal Ordnance plc, which offered the L106 fuse. Orders were placed for both fuses, with the mix between them being determined by factors such as the operational conditions under which the fuse was to be used and priced.

RNAD Coulport

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions are imposed on the operation of radar and radio equipment by vessels on Loch Long in the vicinity of RNAD Coulport.

Mr. Soames: The area in Loch Long around RNAD Coulport contains a protected area and a restricted area. Non-military vessels are only permitted to enter the restricted area. No mandatory restrictions are applied to non-military vessels, but it has been the practice to ask vessels proceeding up or down Loch Long to cease operating radar equipment while within the restricted area. We are unaware of any instance where masters have been reluctant to comply.

Contaminated Military Sites

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the paper presented by John Stuart, head of his Department's environment unit, to a defence industry conference in Munich at the end of October, on contaminated military sites.

Mr. Soames: The 1994 environmental restoration opportunities conference was held in Munich in October in conjunction with a meeting of the NATO committee responsible for a pilot study on the environmental aspects of reusing former military lands. The conference enabled representatives of Government and industry from many NATO and other central and eastern European countries to exchange information and views on the challenges facing them in dealing with contaminated land, and Mr. Stuart was one of many speakers. As we have previously made clear, we are reviewing our procedures for dealing with land contamination on the defence estate, and this process is helped by sharing experience with other countries.

Mortar Fuses

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Junghans is being considered as a supplier for a mortar fuse order.

Mr. Freeman: My Department has no plans for a direct purchase of mortar bomb fuses from Junghans. Different options for the fuse of the high explosive element of the 51 mm mortar bomb order, placed with Royal Ordnance plc in July, are being considered. Under the terms of the contract, whichever fuse is chosen is a matter for the company's technical commercial judgment.

Loch Long

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-military vessels, and of what nationalities, have been boarded by United Kingdom military personnel in Loch Long in each year since 1990.

Mr. Soames: Boardings of non-military vessels in Loch Long are conducted not by military personnel but by the Clyde marine unit of the Ministry of Defence Police. Records of the nationality of vessels boarded are not kept. The number of boardings in each year since 1990 is:

1990: 6
1991: 4
1992: 2
1993: 2
1994: 6

Borletti, Junghans and Raupass

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to reclaim moneys from the companies Borletti, Junghans and Raupass.

Mr. Freeman: Civil proceedings have commenced against Gordon Foxley, certain members of his family circle and the companies involved in the payment of secret commissions.

Light Armour Weapons

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the orders, and their value, which have been placed by his Department for light armour weapons since 1985.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1985, my Department has placed two orders for weapons used against light armoured vehicles, one with Hunting Engineering Ltd. in 1986 for the light anti-armour weapon for the 1980s and one with Raufoss in 1987 for the M72 light anti-armour weapon. The values of these orders were £237 million and £2·4 million respectively. In addition, two orders have more recently been placed for rifle-launched grenades that have an armour piercing capability. The value of these orders, placed with Luchaire, is commercially confidential.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he ordered an attrition batch of Sea Harriers; with what inertial navigation system they will be fitted on delivery to the Royal Navy; if he will list Sea Harrier losses over the past five years, showing for each how far electronic and electrical systems and sub-systems were recoverable for reuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: An initial batch of 10 new aircraft was ordered in March 1990. A further order, bringing the total to 18, was placed in January 1994. An additional five conversions were ordered separately in July 1994 to complete the attrition reserve. On delivery, some aircraft will be fitted initially with the current standard inertial navigation equipment known as NAVHARS—navigation, heading and attitude system—taken from Navy spares stocks. The possibility of fitting later deliveries with a replacement navigation system incorporating more modern technology, including a global positioning system, is currently being examined.

The Sea Harrier losses over the past five years are as follows:

Sea Harrier FRS Mk1

4 October 1989 (HMS ARK ROYAL)

1 December 1989 (HMS INVINCIBLE)

8 May 1990 (HMS INVICNIBLE)

10 May 1991 (Wales)

28 May 1992 (HMS INVINCIBLE)

16 April 1994 (Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Sea Harrier F/A2

5 January 1994 (Chivenor)

Electronic and electrical systems and sub-systems are not re-used after the inevitable impact damage which occurs when an aircraft is lost.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Freeman: The salary of the civil servants whose duties most closely compare with those of the present chief executives of my Department's agencies are as follows:

Agency	*Year*	*Remuneration £*
Army Base Repair Organisation	1992–93	53,000
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment	1990–91	48,600
Defence Accounts Agency	1990–91	46,946
Defence Analytical Services Agency	1992–93	53,481
Defence Animal Centre	1993–94	46,059
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency	1994–95	55,958
Defence Operational Analysis Centre	1992–93	46,122
Defence Postal and Courier Service	1992–93	62,090
Defence Research Agency	1990–91	59,020

Agency	Year	Remuneration £
Disposal Sales Agency	1994–5	42,930
Duke of Yorks Royal Military School	1991–92	43,000
Hydrographic Office	1989–90	43,851
Logistic Information System Agency	1994–95	55,958
Meteorological Office	1989–90	53,100
Military Survey	1990–91	46,084
Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation	1991–92	47,578
Queen Victoria School	1991–92	33,578
RAF Maintenance Group	1990–91	51,957
RAF Signals Engineering Establishment	1994–95	55,045
RAF Training Group	1993–94	56,710
Service Children School (North-West Europe)	1990–91	37,900

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Soames: My Department is well aware of the need to take into account the full range of appropriate considerations, including regularity and propriety, when taking decisions and when dealing with external contractors or lobbyists.

Conditions of service for the staff of my Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties, not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Staffing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number of officers and ranks in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Air Force and *(c)* Royal Navy for 1979, 1984 and each year since 1989.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is provided in the table below:

	Royal Naval Services		Army		Royal Air Force	
1 April	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks
1979	10,029	62,471	17,153	139,028	14,580	71,730
1984	9,831	61,450	17,220	144,319	15,139	77,950
1989	10,156	54,483	17,310	138,257	15,374	76,069
1990	10,162	53,052	17,433	135,379	15,274	74,411
1991	10,126	51,929	17,509	130,130	15,215	73,156
1992	10,097	52,022	17,240	128,123	15,058	70,904
1993	9,802	49,555	16,129	118,454	14,472	66,437
1994	9,182	46,597	14,840	108,188	13,465	62,216

The figures include trained personnel and those undergoing training and personnel in the nursing services. They have been extracted from "Tri-Service Personnel Statistics 1—Strengths, Intake and Outflow of United Kingdom Regular Forces", copies of which are placed in the Library of the House.

Lockheed C130J

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates of the meetings between officials in his Department and Market Access International to discuss the Lockheed C130J.

Mr. Freeman: A representative from Market Access International was present at, but did not play an active part in, a presentation given by Lockheed last October which was attended by officials from my Department. Otherwise, there have, to the best of my knowledge, been no meetings between MOD officials and Market Access International personnel to discuss the Hercules rolling replacement programme.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specialist advice on international finance, export credits and business development is available to his Department's Defence Export Services Organisation.

Mr. Freeman: The Defence Export Services Organisation receives advice on international finance and export credits from its international finance adviser, who maintains close links with the Export Credits Guarantee Department. DESO's business development branch is the initial point of contact and advice for small and medium-sized companies new to the defence export field.

Defence Contractors

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence contractors are on the list of contractors requiring special attention; and how many of such contractors were *(a)* newly placed on the list and *(b)* left the list in each year since 1989.

Mr. Freeman: There are currently 10 contractors on the list of contractors requiring special attention. The additional information required could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Anglo-German Co-operation

Mr. Radice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Anglo-German defence co-operation.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *134*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Palace Yard

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what consultation he undertook with right hon. and hon. Members prior to the purchase of the new parking and traffic management signs in New Palace Yard which replaced the previous plastic cones; and what was the cost of this project.

Mr. Ray Powell: The proposal by the Parliamentary Works Directorate to improve the signs in New Palace Yard was endorsed by the Committee on 18 May 1994. The cost of the signs was £8,090 including VAT.

Norman Shaw North

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what representations he has received from hon. Members with offices in the Norman Shaw building or their staff *(a)* in respect of recent works in the Norman Shaw building to (i) the main lifts, (ii) the rear lift, (iii) the card-controlled rear access door, (iv) the card-controlled gate access from the Embankment, (v) the refurbishment of the car park and (vi) the allocation of parking spaces to non-essential personnel with residences within the Palace and *(b)* in respect of the numbers and qualifications of security personnel.

Mr. Ray Powell: Two hon. Members have made representations concerning matters referred to in *(a)*. No other representations have been received.

Parliamentary Offices

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what will be the effect of the problems associated with construction at Westminster station on the timetable for the construction of new parliamentary offices.

Mr. Ray Powell: The Accommodation and Works Committee has established close links with the senior management of London Underground. It receives monthly reports from a joint steering group set up to oversee the interface between the new station and parliamentary building projects, and will be meeting the chief executive shortly to review progress.

The most recent report from the steering group shows that London Underground has agreed a revised programme with its contractor to achieve the February 1997 date when the site is to be ready for construction to start on the parliamentary project.

State Opening

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what was the total cost to Parliament of the State Opening of Parliament on 16 November.

Mr. Ray Powell: The total cost of the State Opening of Parliament on 16 November has not yet been finalised but some £40,000 has been set aside by the two Houses for this purpose.

Upper Waiting Hall Exhibitions

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the new parliamentary building to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 12 December to Friday 16 December.

WALES

Drugs

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the level of funding for drugs initiatives in West Glamorgan in 1995–96 provided by *(a)* the Welsh Office and *(b)* the Home Office.

Mr. Richards: The funding of local initiatives to combat drug misuse in Wales are the responsibilities of the local agencies involved. Following the recommendations of the efficiency scrutiny of health promotion in Wales, central Welsh Office resources of some £2·3 million were added to the allocations of Welsh district health authorities from 1 April 1994.

Home Office funding is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people are employed in his drugs and alcohol unit;

(2) what is the budget for this drugs and alcohol unit for 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend announced on the 19 October that he was setting up a drugs and alcohol unit. Action is in hand to identify and recruit staff to it. The unit will have access to a budget of £333,000 in 1994–95. Provision for 1995–96 has not yet been finalised.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives are being pursued to educate young people about the effects of substance abuse and drug taking; what is the current budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave him on 26 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *658–60*.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums of money divested from the Welsh Office budget in the current year down to the local health authorities aimed specifically at the prevention of drug abuse.

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office has provided local health authorities with a total of more than £2,300,000 aimed at combating drug misuse.

Farmers Unions (Meetings)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultative meetings were arranged during the

last 12 months with the National Farmers Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We consult regularly with the National Farmers Union on issues that arise from time to time.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultative meetings were arranged during the last 12 months with the Farmers Union of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We consult regularly with the Farmers Union of Wales over issues that arise from time to time.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which NHS trusts failed to *(a)* break even, *(b)* keep within the external financing limit and *(c)* record a 6 per cent. return on capital; and by what percentage and sum in each year since their inception.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Break even

In 1993–94 Clwydian NHS trust made a revenue deficit of £84,000.

(b) Keep within external financing limit

In 1993–94 Swansea NHS trust and Powys NHS trust exceeded their external financing limit by £10,000 and £252,000 respectively.

(c) Rate of Return

Pembrokeshire NHS Trust achieved a 4·7 per cent. rate of return in 1992–93 and a 6·9 per cent. rate of return in 1993–94. Clwydian NHS trust achieved a 5·6 per cent. rate of return in 1993–94.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the surpluses or deficits recorded by each individual NHS trust in each year since their inception.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is contained in the following table:

NHS Trust	*(£000) Surplus*	*(£000) Deficit*
1992–93		
Pembrokeshire	116	—
1993–94		
Bridgend and District	100	—
Carmarthen and District	342	—
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	160	—
Clwydian Community Care	—	84
Glan Clwyd	288	—
Glan Hafren	560	—
Gwent Community Health	393	—
Llandough	335	—
Llanelli/Dinefwr	316	—
Pembrokeshire	Broke even	—
Powys Health Care	476	—
South East Wales Ambulance	48	—
Swansea	146	—
Wrexham Maelor	588	—

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general and senior managers were employed by NHS trusts in each year since 1991–92 by region.

Mr. Richards: The whole-time equivalent number of general and senior managers in post in NHS trusts at 30 September was as follows. In the table, trusts are shown against the district health authority area in which they are situated. The first trust in Wales was established on 1 April 1992. From April 1993 there were 14 trusts and from April 1994, 24 trusts. The aggregate figures given are not, therefore, comparable over time as different numbers of trusts may be included within each area for different years.

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Clwyd[1]	—	107	119
East Dyfed	—	54	80
Gwent	—	89	129
Gwynedd	—	—	37
Mid Glamorgan	—	29	107
Pembrokeshire	21	21	17
Powys	—	37	37
South Glamorgan[2]	—	99	108
West Glamorgan	—	15	39
Wales	21	451	673

[1] Includes figures for North Wales Ambulance Trust, established 1 April 1994, which covers both Clwyd and Gwynedd areas.

[2] Includes figures for South and East Wales Ambulance Trust, established 1 April 1993, which covers South Glamorgan, Gwent and Powys.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the turnover of each NHS trust in each year since its inception.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is contained in the following table:

NHS trust	*£ million*
1992–93	
Pembrokeshire	40·1
1993–94	
Bridgend and District	60·8
Carmarthen and District	37·0
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	22·7
Clwydian Community Care	60·1
Glan Clwyd	55·4
Glan Hafren	91·1
Gwent Community Health	56·2
Llandough	45·8
Llanelli/Dinefwr	27·3
Pembrokeshire	41·5
Powys Health Care	41·8
South East Wales Ambulance	16·1
Swansea	52·3
Wrexham Maelor	49·1

Schools (Teachers)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the pupil–teacher ratios for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94 for public sector (i) nursery schools, (ii) primary schools, (iii) secondary schools, (iv) non-maintained schools, (v) special schools and (vi) all schools; and whether these figures include unqualified teachers.

Mr. Richards: The following table gives figures for LEA-maintained schools:

	1992–93	[1]1993–94
Nursery	20·3	20·6
Primary	22·1	22·3
Secondary	15·7	15·9
Special	6·2	6·4

[1] Provisional
Source:
Schools Census data.

There are no public sector non-maintained schools. The ratios for grant-maintained schools are 1992–93: 15·2; 1993–94: 16·8. The corresponding figures for all maintained schools are 18·6 and 18·8. Independent schools are not included in these figures.

Pupil-teacher ratios are calculated using full-time equivalent qualified teachers only.

Hospitals (Private Patients)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much income has been generated by NHS hospitals' private patient facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 10 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *433*. Final figures for 1993–94 are not available.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps are being taken to increase the number of teachers qualified to teach through the medium of the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: We have put in place an incentive supplement scheme to increase the supply of secondary teachers trained to teach through the medium of Welsh; 121 students have been recruited to secondary Welsh medium initial teacher training courses this year—an increase of 17 per cent. over the equivalent figure for 1993—and overall recruitment to Welsh medium courses has increased by 8 per cent.

Funding is also available to local education authorities in Wales, though the grants for education support and training programme, to increase the number of teachers able to teach other subjects through the medium of Welsh. This funding provides courses to enable teachers to transfer from English medium to Welsh medium teaching.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations have been received over the last 12 months on the funding of the teaching of Welsh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: A number of representations have been made to the Welsh Office over the last 12 months. The Department is making available grant aid of over £6 million for Welsh in this financial year.

Nurses

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many qualified nursing staff there were by speciality for each region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Richards: Information on the number of all nursing and midwifery staff employed directly by the national health service in Wales is given in the following table. Reliable figures by specialty are not available centrally. It is not possible to provide separate information on qualified nurses for those on local pay scales.

[1]*Nursing and Midwifery Staff in post at 30 September (whole-time equivalent).*

	Clwyd	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Pembroke-shire*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	[2]WHCSA	Wales
1990											
Qualified nurses[3]	2,359	1,433	2,782	1,389	3,382	525	660	3,010	2,437	10	17,987
Unqualified nurses[4]	815	610	1,232	523	1,395	152	399	1,299	606	—	7,031
Nurses on local pay scales[5]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1991											
Qualified nurses[3]	2,427	1,425	2,734	1,365	3,396	532	685	2,965	2,464	16	18,009
Unqualified nurses[4]	843	593	1,190	555	1,381	154	400	1,232	616	56	7,020
Nurses on local pay scales[5]	—	—	—	—	—	22	—	—	—	—	22
1992											
Qualified nurses[3]	2,470	1,446	2,682	1,391	3,407	495	656	3,079	2,452	17	18,095
Unqualified nurses[4]	878	606	1,182	577	1,494	148	388	1,299	729	56	7,357
Nurses on local pay scales[5]	—	—	—	—	—	104	—	—	—	—	104
1993											
Qualified nurses[3]	2,413	1,444	2,624	1,445	3,337	408	618	3,105	2,496	19	17,909
Unqualified nurses[4]	866	617	1,122	581	1,471	136	392	1,253	726	58	7,222
Nurses on local pay scales[5]	48	—	—	23	—	216	—	1	—	—	288

[1]Nursing and Midwifery Staff in post at 30 September (whole-time equivalent).

	Clwyd	East Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Pembroke-shire	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan	[2]WHCSA	Wales
1994											
Qualified nurses[3]	2,432	1,424	2,483	1,401	3,297	2	—	3,175	2,572	20	16,805
Unqualified nurses[4]	871	599	1,025	571	1,493	—	2	1,237	762	53	6,613
Nurses on local pay scales[5]	47	—	—	32	—	723	994	6	—	—	1,801

Notes:
[1]Staff employed by NHS trusts are shown against the health authority area in which they are situated.
[2]Welsh Health Common Services Authority.
[3]Grade C and above.
[4]Excludes pre-registration learners.
[5]Qualified and unqualified.
Source:
NHS payroll system and associated information systems.

Police

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has made to the Home Office on the subject of police force manning levels in 1993–94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: These are matters for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide an estimate for the value of fundholding allocations retained by general practitioner fundholders at the year end in each of the last four years, by region.

Mr. Richards: The information, for the last three years for which final accounts are available, is as follows:

		(£000)
1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992—93*
Nil	40	465

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the management allowances payments made to general paractitioner fundholding practices and practices preparing to be fundholders *(a)* by wave and *(b)* in total for each (i) family health service authority and (ii) region in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Richards: Practice fund management allowance payments are not recorded by wave.

The following payments were made in 1992–93, the latest year for which details are available:

FHSA	*£000*
Clwyd	439
Dyfed	150
Gwent	286
Gwynedd	17
Mid Glam	181
Powys	103
South Glam	86
West Glam	370
Wales	1,632

Source:
FHSA annual acccounts 1992–93.

Hospitals (Private Patients)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients have been treated in NHS hospitals' private facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Richards: The information available, which relates to private patient attendances at NHS hospitals, is given in the following table. The number of cases or attendances does not relate to the number of people who have received treatment as individuals may be treated more than once a year.

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	[1]1993–94
In-patient cases:					
Clwyd	388	419	394	365	370
East Dyfed	637	348	195	154	106
Gwent	48	106	109	99	140
Gwynedd	229	244	272	171	110
Mid Glamorgan	297	173	230	146	144
Pembrokeshire	135	159	79	44	64
Powys	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	111	118	118	119	97
West Glamorgan	149	193	161	159	173
Wales	1,994	1,760	1,558	1,257	1,204
Out-patient attendances:					
Clwyd	2,267	3,167	2,511	2,343	2,187
East Dyfed	2,441	1,839	1,779	1,809	1,254
Gwent	70	78	65	90	130
Gwynedd	290	367	235	289	266
Mid Glamorgan	672	692	881	491	239
Pembrokeshire	1,534	1,489	1,673	1,225	1,259
Powys	—	—	—	5	—

	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	[1]1993–94
South Glamorgan	1,058	1,163	1,008	733	752
West Glamorgan	624	917	863	963	1,029
Wales	8,956	9,712	9,015	7,948	7,116
Day cases attendances:					
Clwyd	513	129	103	103	145
East Dyfed	452	151	92	114	135
Gwent	47	105	116	126	106
Gwynedd	182	117	258	126	132
Mid Glamorgan	139	126	168	151	174
Pembrokeshire	149	85	60	46	81
Powys	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	5	8	4	1	2
West Glamorgan	364	504	346	357	251
Wales	1,851	1,225	1,147	1,024	1,026
Regular day patient-attendances:					
Clwyd	—	—	—	—	—
East Dyfed	—	—	—	—	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd	—	—	5	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—	—
Powys	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—
Wales	—	—	5	—	—

[1] Provisional.

Training

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many training weeks *(a)* were promised and *(b)* were undertaken for (i) employment training, (ii) youth training and (iii) other programmes for each TEC in Wales, for each year since their inception.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

PE Teachers

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average annual cost of employing a physical education teacher.

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

Measles Immunisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with chairmen of the *(a)* Welsh health authorities and *(b)* family health service authorities with respect to the reimbursement of the cost of the measles immunisation campaign.

Mr. Redwood: I have seen no reason to consult chairmen of Welsh health authorities on this issue. I have already provided an extra £713,000 towards the cost of this campaign, and authorities have been requested to provide my Department, by 20 December, with details of any additional costs involved. I shall then consider whether to make further money available.

Integrated Transport

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider pilot schemes to establish the feasibility of integrated transport programmes for north-east Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is primarily a matter for Clwyd county council.

River Dee Crossing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of transport supplementary grant he will pay to Clwyd county council for the construction of the new River Dee crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Clwyd county council estimates that the scheme will cost £61 million. Transport grant is being provided to meet 50 per cent. of eligible expenditure, with the balance made available to Clwyd county council in the form of supplementary credit approvals.

Crewe-Holyhead Line

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he had with British Rail on the proposed upgrading of the Crewe to Holyhead railway line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I met Mr. Robert Horton, chairman of Railtrack, recently and we discussed the plans to upgrade the line as far as Bangor over the next two years to allow 90 mph running.

Buses, Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has with the traffic commissioners to ensure that bus companies in Clwyd that operate services in and around King Edward street, Shotton, Deeside are aware of the requirements of road safety, the need for small buses in narrow streets and for

consultations between the public and those who provide bus services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Traffic commissioners have a statutory responsibility for ensuring the safe and reliable operation of local bus services. Responsibility for deciding when local services need to be restricted in terms of vehicle size or their routes lies initially with the local highway authority which may, in the interests of road safety or to relieve severe traffic congestion, ask the traffic commissioner to determine a traffic regulation condition.

I understand that the traffic commissioner for the north-western traffic area has not received any request for the determination of a traffic regulation condition in or around King Edward street in Shotton. I therefore see no need to consult him about these issues.

Emergency Hospital Admissions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many emergency hospital admissions there were by region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Richards: Latest estimates by district health authority area, are given in the following table:

[1]*Number of immediate admissions*

Area of treatment	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*Thousands 1992—93*
Clywd	29·2	30·2	39·3	37·2	36·7
East Dyfed	15·8	16·3	18·1	21·8	25·2
Gwent	33·4	34·9	36·2	38·4	39·1
Gwynedd	22·7	18·9	18·7	21·4	16·7
Mid Glamorgan	41·0	43·8	45·2	50·4	52·3
Powys	3·3	3·9	3·8	4·4	4·6
South Glamorgan	35·9	40·4	44·1	48·4	47·9
West Glamorgan	29·5	32·5	26·1	35·5	32·4
Pembrokeshire	10·1	11·0	10·2	9·7	10·2
Wales[2]	221·0	231·2	241·6	265·2	270·1

[1] Including accident and emergency.
[2] Since 1991–92, includes admissions for which the area of treatment is not known.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Redwood: The head of Cadw, before it became an agency in 1990, was paid £42,181. There were no additional emoluments.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Redwood: Conditions of service for the staff of my Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgement or integrity.

Transportation of Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority and the chairman of the Wrexham Maelor hospital trust with respect to the defective packaging and containment of the body transported to the University hospital of Wales from Wrexham; if he will set up an inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This is currently a matter for the Wrexham Maelor NHS trust. The trust has already announced that a formal inquiry into the circumstances of this case has begun. Representatives of South Glamorgan health authority and the University hospital of Wales will be invited to participate. The trust has apologised to the family and made it clear that it will conduct the inquiry and handle its conclusions with the family's welfare uppermost in its mind. I am asking to see the report of the inquiry to consider whether there are any policy implications.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when sheep annual premiums were finalised; on what date payments were authorised to be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The rate of premium for both the first and second advance of payment for 1994 was published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities, No. L172 on 7 July 1994 as Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1640/94. Payments are authorised on an individual basis as and when they are processed.

Farmers in Wales received their advance payments much earlier this year and the great majority of claims were paid by the end of September.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sheep annual premiums have been made to date; and what is the total value of such payments.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As at 18 November, 15,283 claimants in Wales have been paid a total of £73·704,491 as advance premium under the 1994 scheme.

Hill Farming

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what acreage has been put into regeneration of the natural habitat in hill farming; and if he will evaluate the affect this will have on hill farm incomes.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The environmentally sensitive areas scheme includes provisions for annual payments to farmers for the regeneration of heather moorland and other upland habitats. Some 22,000 acres of land are being managed under those tiers of the scheme in Wales. Other schemes also provide assistance to hill farmers for habitat enhancement but it is not possible to quantify the area of land benefiting from those schemes. It is not possible to isolate the effect which any of these measures will have on hill farm incomes.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of total farm incomes is represented by *(a)* hill livestock compensatory allowance payments and *(b)* sheep annual premiums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information for 1992–93 is as follows:

Type of subsidy	*Percentage of net farm income Hill and upland (LFA) livestock farms*
Hill livestock compensatory allowances	35·8
Sheep annual premium	89·7

Estimates of farm incomes for 1993–94 and forecasts for 1994–95, together with details of subsidies, are due to be published as part of the autumn hill review on 29 November.

Cadw

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments agency annual report for 1993–94.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The report which was laid in draft before the House on 1 November has been published today.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 25 November 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Children Act

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines have been issued to the judiciary and family courts on section 8 orders of the Children Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Guidelines are available to the judiciary and family courts in a range of authoritative commentaries on the Children Act, which will include section 8 in the form of law reports on decided cases and, notably, the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, published by HMSO. In addition, in its last report, the Children Act advisory committee highlighted important cases, which included section 8 cases. Copies of the report are sent to all family judiciary.

Legal Aid

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will issue the consultation paper setting out proposals for change to the legal aid system; if he will alter the legal aid means of assessment; how much public money has been granted in criminal and civil cases in each of the last 10 years to applicants in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the cases for each of the next three years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A consultation paper on eligibility for legal aid will be issued shortly that will canvass a number of proposals for change. The legal aid cost of civil and criminal cases, including the cost of legal advice and assistance, in each of the last 10 years, in £ million, was as follows:

1984–85	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
271	317	360	427	474	566	683	906	1,093	1,210

It is estimated that the number of legal aid acts of assistance will grow to more than 4 million over the next three years.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take concerning the waiting times and reliability of bus services in London.

Mr. Norris: We are taking action in a number of areas. The London bus passengers charter incorporates tough quality of service targets which we set London Transport, covering areas such as waiting times and reliability of bus services. The charter provides a clear framework for bus operators to improve performance by focusing on the needs and views of their customers.

Privatisation of the London Transport bus operating companies will bring the innovation and market responsiveness of the private sector to the provision of all London's bus services. Competitive tendering of London Transport's bus routes will ensure that services are provided as efficiently and cost effectively as possible.

We will continue to support the development of a wide range of bus priority measures, with the aim of improving bus flows and making the bus a more attractive option for passengers. London Transport has installed electronic countdown signs on a number of London bus routes showing when to expect the next bus. The New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991 provides for the establishment of street works registers, which will enable London Transport to devise the most effective measures to reduce the impact of essential roadworks on bus services.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a list of average waiting times for a bus in each of the London boroughs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows. It covers performance in quarter 2 1994–95, 26 June – 17 September 1994:

Boroughs	*Average Actual Waiting Time (mins)*
Barking and Dagenham	7.04
Barnet	6.44
Bexley	7.40
Brent	6.03
Bromley	7.01
Camden	6.13
City	6.95
Croydon	6.40
Ealing	6.19
Enfield	5.40
Greenwich	7.48
Hackney	6.03
Hammersmith and Fulham	6.75
Haringey	5.95
Harrow	7.01
Havering	6.56
Hillingdon	6.13
Hounslow	6.56
Islington	6.12
Kensington and Chelsea	6.59
Kingston	6.77
Lambeth	6.88
Lewisham	6.97
Merton	8.02
Newham	7.06
Redbridge	6.95
Richmond	6.36
Southwark	6.87
Sutton	7.02
Tower Hamlets	6.87
Waltham Forest	7.00
Wandsworth	7.56
Westminster	6.22

Those figures relate only to high frequency services, for which a timetable is not generally published and most of which have weekday peak frequencies of five buses per hour or more.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish for each London borough the percentage chance of waiting 10 to 30 minutes for a bus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Information on waiting times is as follows. It covers performance in quarter 2 1994–95, 26 June–17 September 1994:

Chance of Waiting Per cent.

Boroughs	*Less than 10 minutes*	*10–20 minutes*	*20–30*	*Over 30 minutes*
Barking and Dagenham	75.12	21.80	2.59	0.49
Barnet	79.38	17.94	2.22	0.46
Bexley	73.27	22.23	3.57	0.83
Brent	80.75	16.76	2.12	0.37
Bromley	75.04	21.00	3.20	0.77
Camden	80.07	17.03	2.40	0.50
City	75.28	20.34	3.38	1.00
Croydon	78.58	18.18	2.72	0.52
Ealing	80.43	17.18	2.03	0.36
Enfield	85.60	13.02	1.22	0.16
Greenwich	71.63	23.08	3.96	1.03
Hackney	80.79	16.47	2.23	0.51
Hammersmith and Fulham	76.41	19.49	3.23	0.87
Haringey	82.39	15.48	1.72	0.40
Harrow	74.58	22.41	2.71	0.30
Havering	78.55	19.02	1.98	0.45
Hillingdon	80.70	17.18	1.90	0.23
Hounslow	78.20	18.13	3.07	0.60
Islington	80.31	16.77	2.41	0.51
Kensington and Chelsea	77.11	18.48	3.44	0.97
Kingston	77.15	19.61	2.79	0.46
Lambeth	75.50	19.62	3.83	1.05
Lewisham	74.70	21.14	3.38	0.78
Merton	68.77	24.53	5.33	1.37
Newham	74.94	21.32	2.96	0.79
Redbridge	75.72	20.98	2.69	0.62
Richmond	79.08	17.69	2.74	0.50
Southwark	75.35	20.22	3.54	0.89
Sutton	74.73	21.90	2.86	0.51
Tower Hamlets	75.63	20.37	3.15	0.85
Waltham Forest	75.92	20.87	2.58	0.62
Wandsworth	71.72	22.23	4.58	1.47
Westminster	79.50	16.96	2.82	0.73

This information relates to high frequency services, for which a timetable is not generally published, and most of which have weekday peak frequencies of five buses per hour or more.

Airports

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the provision of assistance to United Kingdom airports under the plans for the trans-European network.

Mr. Norris: The Commission proposal for a trans-European transport network and the related financing proposal are still under discussion and are not expected to be agreed until the middle of next year.

Foreign Lorries

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which Governments intend to, or already have, imposed transit taxes on British trucks using their roads; at what rates; what representations he has made *(a)* to the Governments concerned and *(b)* to the EEC Commission to stop such taxes; and whether he intends to impose similar taxes on foreign lorries using United Kingdom roads.

Mr. Norris: Within the European Union Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and the Netherlands intend to introduce in 1995 a joint scheme for charging goods vehicles over 12 tonnes gross weight for the use of any part of the motorway network in those countries. The scheme will apply to all such vehicles, without discrimination, including those registered in those five countries. An annual permit will cost 1,250 ecu, approximately £980, for vehicles with four or more axles and 750 ecu, approximately £590, for vehicles with two or three axles. Permits will also be available for a month, a week or a day at roughly proportional rates. The scheme is permitted under Council directive 93/89/EEC on the taxation and charging of heavy goods vehicles. The principles of the scheme and the rates to be charged were fully discussed by the Transport Council before it adopted the directive.

On joining the Union Austria will adapt the road charging scheme it has operated for heavy goods vehicles for many years. Vehicles are charged per tonne of payload per kilometre travelled on Austrian roads up to a maximum of 300 schillings—approximately £17·50—per tonne of payload per month. Austria will make phased reductions in its charges over two years to align them with the maximum permitted in the directive.

Subject to identifying suitable technology, we intend to introduce a system of electronic motorway tolling in Britain for all vehicles, which would apply to foreign as well as British registered vehicles.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a report on the European Union's trans-European transport network listing the United Kingdom airports involved in the Community connecting points.

Mr. Norris: The European Commission presented a proposal for the development of a trans-European transport network at the Transport Council on 18 April 1994. The proposal covers general principles and the components of the network. The trans-European airport network would comprise airports of common interest situated within the territory of the Community which are open to commercial air traffic and which comply with specified criteria. On the basis of these criteria, airports would be grouped into three categories according to their function in the network. The Community connecting points would be the largest airports, whose main function is described in the proposal as linking the Community to the rest of the world. Negotiations on the airports network are not yet complete.

Under the criteria proposed by the European Commission, the United Kingdom airports qualifying as Community connecting points, on the basis of 1993 traffic levels, would be the London airport system—Gatwick, Heathrow and Stansted—and Manchester and Glasgow airports.

Stations (Safety)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all stations on British Rail and former British Rail networks and London Underground which are not staffed for any period when they are open to the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: No London Underground stations are planned to be unstaffed during the traffic day. The information requested in respect of British Rail and former British Rail networks is not held centrally and is therefore not readily available.

I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were the victims of assault on *(a)* a Network SouthEast train, *(b)* a Network SouthEast station, *(c)* a British Rail station in Greater London and *(d)* a British Rail train in Greater London for each year from 1979; and how many in each year were women.

Mr. Watts: The former Network SouthEast operational area fell within two of the British Transport Police's operational areas—London north and London south. The tables show reported crime on British Rail and the London Underground for London north and London south for the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1994. Comparable information before April 1992 is not readily available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

All Crimes

Year	Month	London (North)	London (South)
1992	(from April)	12,570	13,926
1993		15,214	18,481
1994	(to March)	3,536	4,218
1992	April	1,207	1,196
	May	1,341	1,317
	June	1,376	1,528
	July	1,439	1,695
	August	1,422	1,656
	September	1,481	1,636
	October	1,654	1,726
	November	1,355	1,647
	December	1,292	1,510
1993	January	1,329	1,538
	February	1,248	1,541
	March	1,511	1,569
	April	1,262	1,435
	May	1,142	1,534
	June	1,380	1,513
	July	1,403	1,626
	August	1,228	1,584
	September	1,279	1,587
	October	1,272	1,493
	November	1,178	1,547
	December	982	1,453
1994	January	1,040	1,360
	February	1,052	1,236
	March	1,434	1,622

(i), (ii): Sexual Offences

London North

Offence	1992 (April–December)	1993	1994 (January–March)
Rape	1	2	1
Indecent assault	44	57	7
Indecent exposure	60	101	20
Other	7	16	8

London South

Offence	1992 (April–December)	1993	1994 (January–March)
Rape	1	3	2
Indecent assault	69	116	15
Indecent exposure	131	120	37
Other	41	97	16

(iii), (iv): Violent Crimes

London North

Offence	1992 (April–December)		1993		1994 (January–March)	
	Staff	Public	Staff	Public	Staff	Public
Attempted murder	—	1	—	1	—	—
Grievous bodily harm	1	12	8	19	2	6
Wounding	5	19	6	28	2	52
Actual bodily harm	45	136	59	197	—	—
Common assault	16	25	28	58	8	20
Assault on Police	17	—	24	—	3	—
Other	1	9	3	3	—	1

London South

Offence	1992 (April—December)		1993		1994 (January–March)	
	Staff	Public	Staff	Public	Staff	Public
Attempted murder	—	—	—	—	—	1
Manslaughter	—	1	—	—	—	—
Grievous bodily harm	1	16	2	22	—	6
Wounding	3	16	3	19	—	8
Actual bodily harm	74	229	85	266	22	99
Common assault	36	71	47	117	23	26
Assault on Police	7	—	25	—	8	—
Other	2	6	1	15	1	6

(v): Robberies

London North

Offence	1992 (April–December)		1993		1994 (January–March)	
	Staff	Public	Staff	Public	Staff	Public
Robbery	6	159	11	302	2	100
Assault with intent to rob	—	19	1	24	—	5

London South

Offence	1992 (April–December)		1993		1994 (January–March)	
	Staff	Public	Staff	Public	Staff	Public
Robbery	5	381	26	495	10	126
Assault with intent to rob	1	4	2	17	1	21

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the planned 25 type 317 sliding door trains, or other replacement trains, will be available for service on the London, Tilbury and Southend line.

Mr. Watts: It is intended that replacement trains for the London, Tilbury and Southend line will become available following the entry into service of the new Networker trains currently on order under the £150 million leasing concession authorised last year. The timing of entry into service depends on detailed programming of associated infrastructure works.

Trains (First Aid)

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the proportion of British Rail trains carrying first aid kits; and if he will take steps to secure the provision for such kits in all trains in the future.

Mr. Watts: It is a requirement of railway group standards that all passenger trains carry first aid kits as part of their standard safety equipment. On freight trains, the crew are issued with personal first aid kits.

East London River Crossings

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, as part of his evaluation of possible new east London Thames crossings, he will obtain and publish estimates of the cost of *(a)* adding a single track of the docklands light railway to the proposed east London river crossing between Beckton and Thamesmead and *(b)* a singletrack tunnel for the docklands light railway on a similar alignment to the proposed road bridge.

Mr. Norris: It would be for the proposer of any such schemes to make their estimates available.

Central Line

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the causes of the near miss on the Central line on Saturday 8 October between Leytonstone and Stratford.

Mr. Norris: There was no near miss incident on the Central line between Leytonstone and Stratford on 8 October 1994.

MV Derbyshire

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under which provisions of which Merchant Shipping Acts he has decided to delay publication of the marine accident investigation branch's most recent investigation into the loss of MV Derbyshire; when the marine accident investigation branch completed its report; and when he expects to publish the latest report.

Mr. Norris: No investigation into the loss of MV Derbyshire has been carried out by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

Under the provision of section 33(7) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, the chief inspector of marine accidents was requested by my right hon. Friend to review the sonar and video material provided by the International Transport Workers Federation. The chief inspector expects to submit his findings and advice by the end of November, following which my right hon. Friend will announce what further action he intends to take.

ENVIRONMENT

Homelessness

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish the most recent available figures for outcomes from local authority inquiries in Great Britain under the homelessness legislation.

(2) if he will publish the most recent figures for the number of homeless households in Great Britain, found accommodation by local authorities, analysed by priority need category.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest available information on homeless households dealt with by local authorities in England is for the quarter ending June 1994. During the quarter, notifications of completed inquiries were issued in 67,880 cases. Of these, 30,680 households were accepted for permanent rehousing, 29,680 of whom were in priority need; 16,150 households were found to be homeless but not in priority need and were given advice and assistance; 19,940 households were found not be homeless; and 1,110 households were found to be intentionally homeless.

The number of households accepted for permanent rehousing in each of the priority need categories were as follows:-

Household with dependent child(ren)	17,420
Household member pregnant	3,440
Household member vulnerable:	
Old age	1,540
Physical handicap	1,630
Mental illness	1,680
Young	960
Domestic violence	1,740
Other	1,010
Homeless in emergency	260
Total accepted and in priority need	29,680

For information about Wales and Scotland I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department employs four special advisers. Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. There are, however, normally paid on a special adviser's salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary reflects this.

Radioactive Wastes

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received a copy of the report on the disposal of radioactive wastes in deep repositories prepared by the Royal Society; and what plans he has to respond to the report's recommendations.

Mr. Atkins: The Department obtained a copy of the report on its day of publication and is considering its contents. Since the report was not made to Government, we do not propose to issue a response.

Damping Grant

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about his Department's proposal to withdraw damping grant from London local authorities; if he will list the impact of such a proposal for each London local authority in *(a)* total cash terms and *(b)* the amount necessary to add to council tax bills equivalent to the amounts withdrawn; and if he will make a statement about his intentions.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received a number of representations from London local authorities on future plans for payment of SSA reduction grant. My right hon. Friend will announce his proposals for SSA reduction grant for 1995–96 very shortly as part of his statement on the local government finance settlement for England.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what arrangement she has made to monitor educational spending on different ethnic groups arising from the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

We shall expect adequate monitoring arrangements to be put in place to ensure that those sections of the community intended to benefit from SRB-supported projects do so.

Clinical Waste

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what advice he has given to manufacturers of women's sanitary products on the use of plastics in these products;

(2) If he intends to issue guidelines to manufacturers of women's sanitary products on the use of plastics in these products;

(3) If his Department has investigated the impact of the use of plastics in the manufacture of sanitary products upon marine pollution;

(4) What assessment he has made of the extent of the marine pollution problem caused by the use of plastics in women's sanitary products;

(5) If he will hold talks with representatives of water authorities over the use of plastics in women's sanitary products.

(6) what measures his Department has taken to encourage women to bag and bin sanitary products rather than dispose of such products through the sewerage system.

Mr. Atkins: Discussions have been held with the Association of Sanitary Protection Manufacturers, the sewerage undertakers and other interested parties on ways to reduce the environmental problems posed by disposal of these products through the sewerage system. Product design, instructions to consumers on the methods of disposal and improvements to sewerage systems have been discussed. The provision of treatment for all significant discharges of sewage to the sea is expected to bring a major reduction of the problem. The Department

supports action to persuade consumers to dispose of used products in ways which respect the environment, and is encouraging a national "bag it, bin it" campaign, which is being developed by the water industry. The need for up-to-date and accurate information for the public on issues of this sort will also be addressed through the Government's "Going for Green" initiative.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has considered declassifying women's sanitary products and nappies as clinical waste.

(2) what considerations apply to the disposal of women's sanitary products *(a)* via the sewerage system and *(b)* in household waste; what advice his Department issues on the subject; and if he will make a statement.

(3) if he will review the list of objects classified as clinical waste;

(4) if he has considered the practical problems caused by the classification of sanitary products and nappies as clinical waste.

Mr. Atkins: Clinical waste is now defined in the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992. Guidance on what may fall within the definition of clinical waste is given in waste management paper 25. This guidance has been reviewed and a draft of revised guidance was issued for consultation in August last year.

The Department considers that small quantities of sanitary waste from healthy households are non-hazardous and do not need to be dealt with in the same way as, for example, wastes from hospitals. The revised edition of waste management paper 25, to be published shortly, will urge a pragmatic approach to be taken by the regulatory authorities to this controlled waste stream. It will make it clear that disposal with normal household waste, if securely wrapped, can be an acceptable option.

The Department supports action to persuade consumers to dispose of used products in ways that respect the environment and is encouraging a national "bag it, bin it" campaign being developed by the water industry.

Humberside

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to lay the orders relating to the abolition of the county of Humberside.

Mr. Curry: We expect the order will be ready to be laid in the early new year.

Timberwolf Crossbreed Dogs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *14*, how many timberwolf crossbreed dogs are rgistered under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *66*.

County Hall

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the proposal from the Shirayama Shukosan Company to convert County hall, London SE1, into a Pacific-Asia centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None, apart from what has been reported in the news media.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call in the original planning consent secured by the Shirayama Shukosan Company to convert County hall, London SE1; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There are no powers to call in a planning application once consent has been granted. In the case of County hall, consents were granted after a public inquiry following planning appeals to my right hon. Friend.

New Towns

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who is to be the new chairman of the Commission for the New Towns.

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Dr. John Bradfield CBE as the new chairman of the Commission for the New Towns, with effect from 1 February 1995. In the meantime, Sir Neil Shields will remain as chairman until 31 January 1995.

I am delighted that Dr. Bradfield has accepted this appointment, and I am looking forward to working with him as CNT chairman. I am sure he will bring a great deal of energy and expertise to the job of completing the new towns programme.

At the same time I would like to pay warm tribute to Sir Neil Shields who has brought outstanding skills of leadership and diplomacy to his 13 years as chairman of the commission. Those years have seen enormous changes as the new town development corporations have been wound up and the sale of assets has gained momentum. Sir Neil has transformed the commission and coped with all these changes magnificently, while notching up a significant number of achievements for the new towns movement and building a strong base for the future.

I would also like to pay tribute to Lord Finsberg. His role in the Council of Europe and the West European Union has restricted what he can do for CNT but his commitment to its work has been most important, and I am very pleased that he is prepared to continue as deputy chairman of the commission, thus providing the continuity which is so important at this time of significant change.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Schemes

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average payment made to providers in *(a)* North Norfolk Action, *(b)* Workstart and *(c)* all other similar schemes; and what was the total amount paid to all providers in the last year for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department does not collect information centrally on the number of programme providers and the amounts paid to each of them. The fee paid to the providers per place per week in 1994–95 is:

a) for North Norfolk Action, £52

b) for Community Action, £40

The total amount paid to all providers in 1993–94 was:

a) for North Norfolk Action, £215,840

b) for Community Action , £5·6 million

As community action began in July 1993, the figure does not represent the payments for a complete year.

Workstart is a scheme designed to encourage employers to recruit long-term unemployed people. It pays employers £60 a week per recruit for the first six months and £30 per week for the second six. In 1993–94, £206,397 was paid to employers.

Youth Training

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 to 18-year-olds receive two days or more of quality training as a percentage of that age group.

Mr. Paice: Estimates from the spring 1994 labour force survey for Great Britain show that 76 per cent. of those aged 16 to 18 were in full-time education, on a Government employment or training programme or doing a recognised trade apprenticeship. Quality assurance procedures are in place for all Government training programmes funded by the Department but information on the quality of other training is not available.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Miss. Widdecombe: The Department employs one special adviser.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special adviser's salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether, under the proposed jobseeker's allowance, an unemployed claimant will be entitled, without incurring a payment sanction, to *(a)* decline a job offer without showing good cause where the hours of work would be less than 24 hours per week and *(b)* whether it will be a good cause for turning down a job offer where (i) the travelling time is excessive or (ii) the work-based expenses a person would incur would represent an unreasonably high proportion of their wages; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: These matters are still under consideration.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the jobseeker's allowance will be made available to all of those actively seeking work or training, including those under 18 years of age.

Miss Widdecombe: Our proposals for the jobseeker's allowance are that, as now, unemployed people must seek work actively in order to receive benefit.

All 16 and 17–year-olds are guaranteed a suitable youth training place and most young people under 18 are, therefore, excluded from benefit. These arrangements will continue when jobseeker's allowance is introduced.

Those 16 and 17–year olds required to be available for work and youth training who fall into specified categories or who are at risk of unavoidable severe hardship will be paid within the structure of the jobseeker's allowance.

Work Directives

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what directives are expected to be issued by the European Commission over the next six months which effect rights and conditions at work; and when they are due to be published.

Miss Widdecombe: The European Commission's recent White Paper on the future of European social policy states that a new work programme will be presented during 1995 following consultations on the White Paper's proposals. It is not yet known whether draft directives affecting rights and conditions at work will form part of that work programme, and the White Paper makes it clear that there is no consensus between member states about the need for further legislation on labour standards at European level.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what dates in the next 12 months he expects to meet other European employment Ministers; under what auspices; and what subjects are likely to be discussed.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will meet other European employment Ministers in Brussels at the forthcoming Social Affairs Council on 6 December. There will be further Council meetings over the next 12 months under the French and Spanish presidencies and we anticipate a range of bilateral contacts with out opposite numbers. These discussions will cover a range of employment and social affairs issues.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what reasons for the delay in extraditing Brendan Smyth were advanced by officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office during the contacts his officials had with them on 20 September 1993;

(2) what reasons for the delay in extraditing Brendan Smyth were advanced by officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office during the contacts his officials had with them on 18 November 1993

(3) what reasons for the delay in extraditing Brendan Smyth were advanced by the Irish Attorney-General's office during the contacts his officials had with them on 14 October 1993;

(4) what reasons for the delay in extraditing Brendan Smyth were advanced by officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office during the contacts his officials had with them on 6 December 1993;

(5) if during their contacts with officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office on 20 September 1993, his officials made a specific request for the early extradition of Brendan Smyth;

(6) if during their contacts with officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office on 14 October 1993, his

officials made a specific request for the early extradition of Brendan Smyth;

(7) if during their contacts with officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office on 18 November 1993, his officials made a specific request for the early extradition of Brendan Smyth;

(8) if during their contacts with officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office on 6 December 1993, his officials made a specific request for the early extradition of Brendan Smyth.

The Attorney-General: It is not customary to divulge dialogue on departmental business between United Kingdom officials and those of a foreign Administration.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration he gave to interceding personally with the Irish Attorney-General when it became clear that the extradition request, in respect of Brendan Smyth, made by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in April 1993 was not being responded to positively by the office of the Irish Attorney-General; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I consider that the contacts made by my officials with officials of the Irish Attorney-General's office, the dates of which have already been supplied to the hon. Member, were appropriate to the circumstances of the case.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General on which date in 1992 the first approach was made to the Garda or the office of the Irish Attorney-General by the RUC or his office about the possible extradition of Brendan Smyth.

The Attorney-General: I am not aware of any such approach in 1992.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General who intimated to his office, and when, that Brendan Smyth was likely on his own volition to surrender himself to the authorities in Northern Ireland.

The Attorney-General: The likelihood was intimated by his solicitor to the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland towards the end of November 1993, and that information was passed to officials of my Department on 29 November 1993.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Prior to the establishment of the agencies, no single posts were responsible for the duties now carried out by the individual chief executives. Direct comparisons are not therefore possible. The details of the grades and staff involved and their salaries are as follows:

Historic Royal Palaces (established 1 October 1989):
Work previously occupied part of the duties of a Grade 3 office (salary at 1 October 1989: £40,900 plus £2,000 London bonus), and part of the duties of a Grade 5 officer (salary at 1 October 1989: £33,991).

The Royal Parks (established 1 April 1993):
Work previously occupied one full time Grade 6 officer (salary at 1 April 1993: £44,390) and part of the duties of a Grade 5 officer (salary at 1 April 1993: £49,790)

All salary figures quoted are the scale maxima for London, but exclude any performance pay. It is not possible to estimate the amount of time spent on agency business by those officers only spending part of their time on it.

In addition to the posts detailed above, a small amount of the time of a grade 2 officer and the Permanent Secretary would also have been taken up with matters now dealt with by the chief executive.

Sports Stadiums

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the grants and loans currently available for the erection and development of sports stadiums for Football Association and other sports grounds.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Government funds for the erection and development of sports stadiums are mainly channelled through the Football Trust for Football, and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts elsewhere. In addition, Sportsmatch, the Governments's business sponsorship incentive scheme for sport, can award pound-for-pound matching funding for new or increased sponsorship of capital schemes aimed at grass roots sports, including sports grounds. The Sports Council may from time to time make grants towards capital projects at sports grounds. The council may also make interest-fee loans of up to £10,000 to assist in the provision of new or improved sports facilities or social amenities.

A table detailing the various grant and loan regimes administered by these bodies follows;

Type of grant/loan regime	*Grant/loan*	*Eligibility*
Football Trust		
Major Projects Scheme (Capital projects to meet the recommendations of the Taylor Report)	Grant	FA Premier League, Football League, Scottish Football League clubs, and the National Stadia.
Safety Scheme (Capital projects to meet local authority safety certification requirements) eg. CCTV, Floodlighting, PA Systems.	GrantFA Premier League, Football League, and Scottish Football League clubs.	
Ground Improvements Scheme eg. Toilets, Family Facilities, Facilities for People with Disabilities.	Grant	FA Premier League, Football League, and Scottish Football League clubs.
Transport Improvements Scheme	Grant	FA Premier League, Football League, and Scottish Football League clubs.
Police Charges and Stewarding	Grant	Football League, Scottish Football League, and GM Vauxhall Conference clubs.

Type of grant/loan regime	Grant/loan	Eligibility
FA Contribution Account (Capital projects associated with; staging Euro '96, meeting the recommendations of the Taylor Report, and encouraging the development of the grassroots game)	Grant	FA Premier League, and Football League clubs.
Scottish FA Contribution Account (Capital projects associated with meeting the recommendations of the Taylor Report, and encouraging the development of the grassroots game)	Grant	Scottish Football League clubs.
FA Premier League Grant Scheme (Capital projects to meet either; local authority safety certification requirements, the recommendations of the Taylor Report, or ground grading criteria)	Grant	FA Premier League clubs.
FA Premier League Loan Scheme (Capital projects to meet local authority safety certification requirements.	Loan	FA Premier League clubs.
Football League and Scottish Football League loan scheme (Capital projects to meet the recommendations of the Taylor Report)	LoanFootball League and Scottish Football League clubs.	
GM Vauxhall Conference Scheme (Capital projects to meet local authority safety certification requirements).	Grant	GM Vauxhall Conference clubs.
Pyramid Safety Scheme (Capital projects to meet local authority safety certification requirements).	Grant	Non-League Football clubs (except GM Vauxhall Conference).
Foundation for Sport and the Arts		
Capital and Revenue sports schemes	Grant	All sports grounds, except football
Sportsmatch		
Capital and Revenue grassroots sports schemes, matching funds secured from business sponsorship.	Grant	Grassroots sports organisations.
The Sports Council		
Capital Projects at sports grounds.	Grant	All sports grounds.
Sports Facilities/Social Amenities	Loan	All sports grounds.

EDUCATION

Student Loans

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will issue guidelines to colleges and universities to ensure that no such establishment shall withhold or delay the issuing of an achieved diploma or certificate until a student loan has been repaid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend does not intend to issue such guidelines. College and university regulations covering the issue of academic awards are for institutions to determine.

Exclusions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for the last school year the number of exclusions from schools in each local authority area together with a summary of the principal reasons for such exclusions if available.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available centrally. Reports on maintained schools published by Ofsted do, however, include details of the number of exclusions in the 12 months preceding the school's inspection.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to publish data on school exclusions.

Mr. Forth: Reports on maintained schools published by Ofsted include information about exclusions in the 12 months preceding the school's inspection. My right hon. Friend is considering whether there is a need to supplement that information with any further published data on school exclusions.

Student Maintenance Awards

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information she has regarding the comparative levels of Government spending per student or otherwise on student maintenance awards, excluding the payment of tuition fees, in each of the member states of the European Union.

Mr. Boswell: Systems of financial support for students undertaking higher education courses vary widely across the EU, and the information requested is not available in a comparable form. The guide "The Main Systems of Financial Assistance for Students in Higher Education in the European Community", published by EURYDICE, provides a useful summary of the system in each member state. Copies were placed in the Library earlier this year.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current level of the United Kingdom grant-in-aid for the running costs of the Student Loans Company Ltd.

Mr. Boswell: Provision in the Supply estimates for the running costs of the Student Loans Company is £19·392 million for the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many representations she has received in the current academic year regarding delays in the processing of applications for student loans by the Student Loans Company Ltd.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received three letters about delays in the processing of loans. The Department has also received a number of telephone calls from both students and higher education institutions.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether the Student Loans Company is on target for repayments in 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: The Student Loans Company has been set a target of collecting 94.5 per cent. of all moneys due by the end of the 1994–95 financial year. As at 31 October 1994, it had collected 93.5 per cent. of moneys due at that date. The company estimates that it will achieve the target for the financial year.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to charge asylum seekers full overseas student fee levels in respect of courses undertaken part-time in institutions of higher education.

Mr. Boswell: We are currently consulting institutions of further and higher education, and bodies concerned with student welfare, refugees and asylum seekers, about a proposal to amend the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations to allow institutions to recoup full-cost fees from part-time overseas students, to fall in line with the regulations for full-time students. This could potentially affect asylum seekers as well as other students from overseas, but not those already granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain. Institutions would not, however, be obliged to charge a higher fee and would be free to use their discretion.

The consultation period ends on 30 November and a decision on possible amendment of the regulations will be made in the new year.

Further Education Colleges (Governors)

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on how many occasions she has given written approval to governing bodies of further education colleges for the remuneration of governors for their activities as governors and/or the taking and holding of an interest in college property in the current and two preceding financial years.

Mr. Boswell: None.

Teaching Qualifications

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what plans she has to introduce new competency-based vocational teaching qualifications for further education lecturers;

(2) what instructions she has given to the Further Education Development Association to prepare for the creation of an education lead body for vocational teaching qualifications.

Mr. Boswell: A preliminary review of the occupations in the further education sector and closely related areas will be undertaken during the first half of 1995. It is envisaged that the project steering committee for this work will be chaired by the chief executive of the Further Education Development Association.

The outcome of the review will help inform decisions on any future lead body arrangements to consider vocational teaching qualifications in the further education sector.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much of the underspend in grant-maintained schools in 1993–94 contained in class X, vote 1 of the appropriation accounts 1993–94 will be returned to local authorities to spend on schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The accounts report an underspend in provision voted for recurrent expenditure on grant-maintained schools in 1993–94 of £102.674 million. Of that underspend, £88.348 million was in annual maintenance grants and £14.326 million in other grants.

Expenditure by the Department on annual maintenance grants is recouped in full from local authorities. The reduction in the amount of grant required to be paid therefore resulted in a corresponding reduction in the amount required to be recouped. As a result, the underspend on annual maintenance grants remained within local authority budgets.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will break down the expenditure on grant-maintained schools, class X, vote 1 of the appropriation accounts 1993–94 to give the Department's contribution and the element of local government total standard spending involved.

Mr. Robin Squire: Total recurrent expenditure on grant-maintained schools in 1993–94 breaks down as follows:-

	£ million
Annual maintenance grants	1,011.652
Other grants	54.692
Total recurrent expenditure	1,066.344

Expenditure on annual maintenance grants was recouped from local authority budgets. Thus, the remaining £54.692 million represents the Department's net contribution.

College Lecturers

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the total number of lecturers employed in further education colleges.

Mr. Boswell: The total number of academic staff in LEA maintained colleges of further education in England in 1992–93 was 59,830; figures for part-time staff have been converted to full-time equivalents.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost to public funds of *(a)* a further education lecturer and *(b)* a higher education lecturer taking early retirement on health grounds.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is not available. However, the average pension and retirement lump sum of all teachers and lecturers retiring on health

grounds within the teachers' superannuation scheme is shown in the table.

	Average Pension £	*Average Lump Sum* £
Male	8,912	26,738
Female	7,174	21,518

Secondary Schools (Admission Procedures)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will publish guidance to secondary schools on whether they should, in appropriate circumstances, include an interview with parents in their admission procedures.

Mr. Robin Squire: Guidance on the use of interviews in school admission procedures is contained in circular 6/93, "Admissions to maintained schools". This was issued to all schools in July 1993.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the ratio of academic staff to students in further education colleges in each of the last five years.

Mr. Boswell: Information for the most recently available five years is as follows.

LEA-maintained colleges: Further Education Student Staff Ratios[1]

	1988–89[2]	1989–90[2]	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93
LEA-maintained colleges	10·2	10·8	11·1	12·0	12·6

Sources:
DFE surveys; Further Education Student Record, teachers in the maintained sector return (Form 618G) and the Annual Monitoring Survey.
Notes
[1] Part-time students and members of staff heve been converted pro-rata to full-time equivalents;
[2] The figures for 1988–89 and 1989–90 include the FE element of PCFC colleges.

Grants for Education Support and Training

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary for Education if she will list, for each local authority, for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994—95 the amount of money received from the training of youth and community workers category of GEST.

Mr. Boswell: The expenditure supported through the GEST programme for training for youth and community work for each local education authority in each year is set out in the table.

GEST allocations to LEAs for training of youth and community workers

LEAs	*1992–93 (£000)*	*1993–94 (£000)*	*1994–95 (£000)*
Corporation of London	0.0	0.0	0.0
Camden	5.0	5.0	4.4
Greenwich	5.0	6.3	5.7
Hackney	5.0	5.8	3.0
Hammersmith	5.0	5.0	1.9
Islington	5.0	5.0	2.7
Kensington and Chelsea	5.0	5.0	1.5
Lambeth	5.0	5.9	2.3
Lewisham	5.0	6.1	4.9
Southwark	5.0	6.1	3.6
Tower Hamlets	5.0	5.0	4.1
Wandsworth	5.0	6.0	2.4
Westminster	5.0	5.0	3·0
Barking	5·0	5·0	3·7
Barnet	5.0	9.1	6.7
Bexley	5.0	5.9	5.9
Brent	5.0	6.9	4.2
Bromley	5.0	8.2	2.5
Croydon	5.0	9.0	7.0
Ealing	5.0	7.9	3·1
Enfield	5.0	7.5	7.1
Haringey	5.0	5.0	3.7
Harrow	5·0	5·7	4·1
Havering	5.0	6.4	6.6
Hillingdon	5.0	6.4	2.0
Hounslow	5.0	5.8	5.7
Kingston upon Thames	5·0	5·0	2·8

GEST allocations to LEAs for training of youth and community workers

LEAs	*1992–93 (£000)*	*1993–94 (£000)*	*1994–95 (£000)*
Merton	5.0	5.0	3.4
Newham	5.0	6.0	5.3
Redbridge	5·0	6·2	6·2
Richmond upon Thames	5.0	6.0	2.7
Sutton	5.0	5.0	2.8
Waltham Forest	5.0	5.7	4.8
Birmingham	11.5	29.4	25.6
Coventry	5.0	8.8	7.6
Dudley	5·0	8·4	6·9
Sandwell	5.0	8.3	7.2
Solihull	5.0	6.0	6.4
Walsall	5.0	7.6	6.8
Wolverhampton	5.0	7.2	5.7
Knowsley	5.0	5.0	3.5
Liverpool	5·3	13·4	11·8
St.Helens	5·0	5·6	5·2
Sefton	5.0	8.5	7.8
Wirral	5.0	9.7	8.9
Bolton	5.0	8.0	6.9
Bury	5.0	5.1	4.2
Manchester	5.3	12.6	9.9
Oldham	5.0	6.6	6.5
Rochdale	5.0	6.5	4.9
Salford	5.0	6.6	5.3
Stockport	5·0	8·3	7.9
Tameside	5.0	6.1	5.4
Trafford	5.0	5.8	4.3
Wigan	5.0	9.2	8.4
Barnsley	5.0	6.5	4.5
Doncaster	5.0	8.7	8.1
Rotherham	5·0	7·5	7·3
Sheffield	5·7	13·6	10·4
Bradford	5·7	14·6	13·0
Calderdale	5·0	5·8	4·7
Kirklees	5·0	11·2	9·9
Leeds	8·1	20·1	17·5
Wakefield	5·0	9·0	7·6
Gateshead	5·0	5·6	4·8
Newcastle upon Tyne	5·0	7·7	6·1
North Tyneside	5·0	5·2	5·1
South Tyneside	5·0	5·0	3·5

GEST allocations to LEAs for training of youth and community workers

LEAs	1992–93 (£000)	1993–94 (£000)	1994–95 (£000)
Sunderland	5·0	9·0	7·3
Isle of Scilly	0·0	0·0	0·0
Avon	10·7	26·2	22·0
Bedfordshire	6·1	16·1	13·4
Berkshire	9·9	23·0	16·3
Buckinghamshire	7·7	20·4	16·3
Cambridgeshire	8·1	20·0	15·2
Cheshire	10·8	27·8	26·5
Cleveland	6·5	15·9	16·4
Cornwall	5·0	13·6	11·8
Cumbria	5·4	13·9	10·5
Derbyshire	10·2	26·4	21·3
Devon	11·3	30·2	23·0
Dorset	6·9	18·9	12·7
Durham	6·9	16·5	15·1
East Sussex	7·5	19·6	15·0
Essex	16·9	43·9	30·8
Gloucestershire	5·9	16·0	7·9
Hampshire	18·1	48·3	35·4
Hereford and Worcester	8·1	21·6	17·6
Hertfordshire	11·6	29·4	24·8
Humberside	10·2	25·7	23·8
Isle of Wight	5·0	5·0	3·2
Kent	17·7	46·3	30·8
Lancashire	15·5	41·4	31·4
Leicestershire	10·8	26·1	24·5
Lincolnshire	6·3	17·2	9·5
Norfolk	8·4	21·7	16·3
North Yorkshire	8·3	21·4	18·2
Northamptonshire	6·8	18·3	13·0
Northumberland	5·0	8·8	9·1
Nottinghamshire	11·4	28·1	25·4
Oxfordshire	7·5	18·2	13·1
Shropshire	5·0	13·2	11·0
Somerset	5·8	14·9	10·1
Staffordshire	11·5	29·4	26·1
Suffolk	7·7	20·1	16·0
Surrey	11·7	29·4	18·7
Warwickshire	5·7	13·8	10·7
West Sussex	8·0	20·7	18·0
Wiltshire	6·5	17·5	12·6
Total	700·0	1,400·00	1,100·00

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many authorities bid for funds from the reducing truancy category of GEST for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95; and if she will list the successful authorities and the amount they received for both years.

Mr. Forth: The "Reducing Truancy" category of the grants for education support and training scheme was introduced in 1992 and expanded into a "Truancy and Disaffected Pupils" category in 1993. In the first, 1993–94, round there were 82 bids and 74 were successful. For the 1994–95 round, there were 101 bids, of which 86 were successful. Details of individual allocations are as follows:

GEST scheme 1993–94: Reducing Truancy
Approved Expenditure (on which DFE pays 60 per cent. grant)

LEA	Allocation (£ 000's)
Barnsley	106.7
Bedfordshire	166.0
Berkshire	94.3
Birmingham	282.3
Bradford	200.0

GEST scheme 1993–94: Reducing Truancy
Approved Expenditure (on which DFE pays 60 per cent. grant)

LEA	Allocation (£ 000's)
Brent	250.0
Camden	148.7
Cheshire	130.0
Cleveland	130.0
Coventry	167.5
Croydon	102.4
Derbyshire	165.4
Devon[1]	157.5
Doncaster	99.8
Dorset	71.1
Dudley	185.0
Durham[1]	160.0
East Sussex	60.0
Enfield	118.0
Gateshead	160.0
Gloucestershire	116.0
Greenwich	216.7
Hackney	205.0
Hammersmith	70.0
Hampshire	192.0
Haringey	145.0
Hertfordshire	83.0
Hillingdon	45.0
Hounslow	50.4
Humberside	139.0
Isle of Wight	19.2
Islington	156.6.
Kensington	117.1
Kent	96.5
Kirklees[1]	153.5
Knowsley	195.0
Lancashire	208.2
Leeds	352.9
Leicestershire	224.1
Lewisham	114.0
Liverpool	181.6
Manchester	357.3
Merton	31.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	200.0
Newham	150.0
Norfolk	65.4
North Tyneside	80.6
Northamptonshire	83.0
Nottighamshire	200.0
Oldham	83.4
Oxfordshire	150.0
Rochdale	120.0
Rotheram	74.3
Salford	77.8
Sandwell	184.0
Sefton	68.9
Sheffield	90.0
Solihull	10.0
South Tyneside	81.5
Southwark	68.7
Staffordshire	23.8
Stockport	200.0
Sunderland	24.3
Tameside	161.0
Tower Hamlets	213.0
Trafford	40.0
Wakefield	95.0
Walsall	152.5
Waltham Forest	37.5
Wandsworth	158.0
Warwickshire	51.0
Westminster	16.0
Wirral	107.5
Wolverhampton	116.3
74 LEAs Total allocations:	9,607.5

[1]subsequently indicated unable to take up allocation.

Gest scheme 1994–95 truancy and disaffected pupils approved expenditure (on which DFE pays 60 per cent. grant)

LEA	Allocation (£ 000's)
Avon	116·0
Barking and Dagenham	60·5
Barnet	43·5
Barnsley	144·4
Bedfordshire	162·0
Berkshire	99·4
Bexley	48·5
Birmingham	501·2
Bradford	270·3
Brent	320·0
Buckinghamshire[2]	111·7
Bury	71·5
Cambrid geshire	189·4
Camden	185·1
Cheshire	211·0
Cleveland	130·0
Cornwall	168·0
Coventry	191·2
Croydon	104·0
Cumbria	170·0
Derbyshire	233·3
Devon	179·5
Doncaster	132·8
Dorset	124·2
Dudley	215·0
Ealing	112·0
East Sussex	268·0
Essex	130·5
Gateshead	160·0
Hammersmith and Fulham	145·0
Hampshire	480·3
Haringey	171·0
Harrow	73·1
Havering	59·7
Hertfordshire	197·9
Hillingdon	47·0
Hounslow	53·4
Humberside	175·0
Isle of Wight	12·0
Islington	216·3
Kensington and Chelsea	132·0
Kent	188·7
Kirklees	225·7
Knowsley	342·0
Lambeth	138·0
Lancashire	336·6
Leeds	550·2
Leicestershire	206·3
Lewisham	208·5
Lincolnshire	25·0
Liverpool	255·0
Merton	175·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	235·9
Newham	255·2
Norfolk	111·5
Northamptonshire	101·3
North Tyneside	90·3
Nottinghamshire	205·0
Oxfordshire	150·0
Rotherham[2]	89·3
St. Helens	128·0
Salford	122·6
Sandwell[2]	355·0
Sefton	127·5
Sheffield	90·0
Shropshire	59·2
Solihull	13·0
Somerset	47·0
South Tyneside	201·0
Southwark	87·3

Gest scheme 1994–95 truancy and disaffected pupils approved expenditure (on which DFE pays 60 per cent. grant)

LEA	Allocation (£ 000's)
Staffordshire	270·0
Stockport	210·0
Suffolk	75·0
Sutton	81·2
Tameside	161·0
Tower Hamlets	362·2
Trafford	36·0
Wakefield	118·6
Wandsworth	157·4
Warwickshire	115·0
Westminster	34·0
West Sussex	156·0
Wigan	230·0
Wiltshire	25·0
Wirral	104·7
Wolverhampton	180·6
86 LEAs Total allocations:	14,052·5

[2] subsequently indicated unable to take up all or part of allocation.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many authorities bid for youth action funds from GEST for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994—95; and if she will list the successful authorities and the amount they received for each year.

Mr. Boswell: Funding for the youth action scheme through the GEST programme began in 1993–94. Bids were received from 94 authorities in 1993–94 and 34 in 1994–95.

The successful authorities and the amount of expenditure supported in each year are set out in the table.

GEST allocations to LEAs for youth action schemes

LEAs	1993–94 (£000)	1994–95 (£000)
Corporation of London	0.0	0.0
Camden	139.0	105.0
Greenwich	147.0	93.0
Hackney	0.0	0.0
Hammersmith	0.0	0.0
Islington	0.0	0.0
Kensington & Chelsea	0.0	0.0
Lambeth	0.0	0.0
Lewisham	0.0	0.0
Southwark	0.0	0.0
Tower Hamlets	147.0	104.0
Wandsworth	0.0	0.0
Westminster	0.0	0.0
Barking	0.0	0.0
Barnet	0.0	0.0
Bexley	0.0	0.0
Brent	0.0	0.0
Bromley	0.0	0.0
Croydon	0.0	0.0
Ealing	147.0	90.0
Enfield	147.0	97.0
Haringey	147.0	93.0
Harrow	147.0	83.0
Havering	0.0	0.0
Hillington	0.0	0.0
Hounslow	0.0	0.0
Kingston upon Thames	0.0	0.0
Merton	0.0	0.0
Newham	147.0	93.0
Redbridge	0.0	0.0
Richmond upon Thames	0.0	0.0
Sutton	108.2	113.0

GEST allocations to LEAs for youth action schemes

LEAs	1993–94 (£000)	1994–95 (£000)
Waltham Forest	147.0	91.0
Birmingham	0.0	0.0
Coventry	147.0	93.0
Dudley	147.0	133.0
Sandwell	0.0	0.0
Solihull	99.0	72.0
Walsall	0.0	0.0
Wolverhampton	73.5	60.0
Knowsley	0.0	0.0
Liverpool	0.0	0.0
St Helens	0.0	0.0
Sefton	0.0	0.0
Wirral	0.0	0.0
Bolton	0.0	0.0
Bury	0.0	0.0
Manchester	147.0	109.0
Oldham	0.0	0.0
Rochdale	0.0	0.0
Salford	0.0	0.0
Stockport	0.0	0.0
Tameside	0.0	0.0
Trafford	0.0	0.0
Wigan	0.0	0.0
Barnsley	0.0	0.0
Doncaster	143.0	105.0
Rotherham	138·3	132·0
Sheffield	0·0	0·0
Bradford	147·0	131·0
Calderdale	0·0	0·0
Kirklees	0·0	0·0
Leeds	0·0	0·0
Wakefield	0·0	0·0
Gateshead	147·0	0·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	0·0	0·0
North Tyneside	147·0	91·0
South Tyneside	0·0	0·0
Sunderland	0·0	0·0
Isles of Scilly	0·0	0·0
Avon	0·0	0·0
Bedfordshire	0·0	0·0
Berkshire	0·0	0·0
Buckinghamshire	0·0	0·0
Cambridgeshire	147·0	91·0
Cheshire	147·0	97·0
Cleveland	0·0	0·0
Cornwall	0·0	0·0
Cumbria	147·0	130·0
Derbyshire	0·0	0·0
Devon	0·0	0·0
Dorset	0·0	0·0
Durham	0·0	0·0
East Sussex	0·0	0·0
Essex	0·0	0·0
Gloucestershire	147·0	92·0
Hampshire	0·0	0·0
Hereford and Worcester	0·0	0·0
Hertfordshire	147·0	156·0
Humberside	0·0	0·0
Isle of Wight	0·0	0·0
Kent	0·0	0·0
Lancashire	147·0	135·0

GEST allocations to LEAs for youth action schemes

LEAs	1993–94 (£000)	1994–95 (£000)
Leicestershire	0·0	0·0
Lincolnshire	0·0	0·0
Norfolk	0·0	0·0
North Yorkshire	0·0	0·0
Northamptonshire	0·0	0·0
Northumberland	0·0	0·0
Nottinghamshire	147·0	105·0
Oxfordshire	147·0	108·0
Shropshire	0·0	0·0
Somerset	147·0	98·0
Staffordshire	0·0	0·0
Suffolk	0·0	0·0
Surrey	0·0	0·0
Warwickshire	0·0	0·0
West Sussex	0·0	0·0
Wiltshire	0·0	0·0
TOTAL	4,082·0	2,900·0

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many authorities bid for funds from the raising standards in inner-city schools category of GEST for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95; and if she will list the successful authorities and the amount they received for each year.

Mr. Robin Squire: Bids for funds from the grant "Raising Standards in Inner City Schools" were received from 52 authorities in 1992–93, 47 in 1993–94 and 38 in 1994–95.

The successful authorities and the amount of expenditure supported for each year are set out in the table. The allocations were paid from the Department's GEST programme in 1992–93 and 1993–94. Allocations for 1994–95 are being paid under the auspices of the single regeneration budget, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

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Raising standards in inner city schools allocations to LEAs

LEA	1992–93 ESG (£000)	LEATG (£000)	Total (£000)	1993–94 ESG (£000)	LEATG (£000)	Total (£000)	1994–95 SRB (£000)
Greenwich	110.8	82.5	193.3	98.7	117.0	215.7	160.8
Hackney	52.3	70.0	122.3	118.4	61.0	179.4	305.2
Hammersmith	179.5	42.5	222.0	240.2	120.1	360.3	277.0

Raising standards in inner city schools allocations to LEAs

LEA	1992–93 ESG (£000)	1992–93 LEATG (£000)	1992–93 Total (£000)	1993–94 ESG (£000)	1993–94 LEATG (£000)	1993–94 Total (£000)	1994–95 SRB (£000)
Islington	256.8	87.5	344.4	186.0	139.3	325.3	191.2
Lambeth	146.7	105.5	252.2	279.7	136·3	416·0	276·9
Lewisham	162·5	87·5	250·0	162·2	96·6	258·8	258·8
Southwark	78 0	72·0	150·0	121·5	60·8	182·3	142·9
Tower Hamlets	353·2	38·4	391·6	339·1	218·5	557·6	528·3
Wandsworth	103·0	69·0	172·0	296·0	129·0	425·0	469·9
Brent	129·0	36·0	165·0	282·0	52·7	334·7	336·6
Haringey	—	—	—	104·3	52·1	156·4	—
Newham	—	—	—	212·7	33·8	246·5	—
Birmingham	192·3	77·7	270·0	351·6	44·4	396·0	680·6
Dudley	202·5	92·2	294·7	229·3	112·0	341·3	327·1
Walsall	—	—	—	14·0	3·5	17·5	—
Wolverhampton	254·6	51·8	306·4	186·1	93·0	279·1	366·7
Knowsley	—	—	—	71·5	38·5	110·0	—
St Helens	36·0	38·3	74·4	61·4	31·0	92·4	98·5
Wirral	126·8	141·4	268·2	151·6	140·0	291·6	289·8
Bolton	—	—	—	41·0	21·9	62·9	—
Manchester	484·9	15·1	500·0	544·5	91·3	635·8	555·2
Barnsley	111·0	54·0	165·0	187·4	12·6	200·0	538·9
Doncaster	102·1	58·9	161·0	73·3	93·2	166·5	25[illegible] 0
Rotherham	25·5	73·6	103·1	79·5	27·5	107·0	108·8
Sheffield	134·0	66·0	200·0	150·0	75·0	225·0	265·0
Bradford	163·0	337·0	500·0	328·6	296·4	625·0	343·0
Kirdklees	—	—	—	73·2	39·4	112·6	—
Leeds	271·3	30·0	301·3	247·6	12·4	260·0	272·3
Gateshead	134·0	66·0	200·0	138·7	68·3	207·0	207·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	212·9	65·2	278·1	202·6	60·0	262·6	279·0
North Tyneside	125·0	29·8	154·8	121·1	17·0	138·1	131·7
South Tyneside	—	—	—	130·0	70·0	200·0	—
Avon	88·1	43·0	131·1	—	—	—	—
Cheshire	—	—	—	134·0	66·0	200·0	—
Cleveland	97·5	52·5	150·0	107·9	58·1	166·0	127·0
Derbyshire	—	—	—	125·0	58·0	183·0	—
Humberside	—	—	—	130·0	70·0	200·0	—
Lancashire	—	—	—	397·0	192·0	589·0	—
Nottingham	180·0	120·0	300·0	380·4	128·1	508·5	173·1
Total	4,517·4	2,103·4	6,620·8	7,098·1	3,136·8	10,234·9	7,965·1

NORTHERN IRELAND

Emergency Hospital Admissions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a table showing the number of emergency hospital admissions by region for each of the last five years.

Mr. Moss: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	Number of emergency admissions in Northern Ireland (excluding psychiatric and mental handicap specialities
1989–90	120,234
1990–91	118,148
1991–92	123,402
1992–93	121,336
1993–94	125,988

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the turnover of each NHS trust in each year since its inception.

Mr. Moss: Six trusts were established in Northern Ireland from 1 April 1993. The turnover of each trust for 1993–94 was as follows:

	£'000
Belfast City Hospital Trust	79,678
Eastern Ambulance Trust	6,491
Greenpark Trust	41,414
Royal Group of Hospitals Trust	113,621
Ulster, North Down & Ards Hospitals Trust	48,951
Craigavon Group of Hospitals Trust	39,883

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which NHS trusts failed to *(a)* break even, *(b)* keep within the external financing limit and *(c)* record a 6 per cent. return on capital; and by what percentage and sum in each year since their inception.

Mr. Moss: Six trusts were established in Northern Ireland from 1 April 1993. No trust failed to break even, or failed to keep within its external financing limit. The Royal Group of Hospitals trust was the only trust which did not record a 6 per cent. return. Its return was 5.9 per cent.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what surpluses or deficits were recorded by each individual NHS trust in each year since its inception.

Mr. Moss: Six trusts were established in Northern Ireland from 1 April 1993. Surpluses were recorded by each individual health and social services trust in 1993–94 as follows:-

	£ (000's)
Belfast City Hospital Trust	2,628
Eastern Ambulance Trust	88
Greenpark Trust	876
Royal Group of Hospitals Trust	1,594
Ulster, North Down & Ards Hospitals Trust	797
Craigavon Group of Hospitals Trust	686

NHS Private Facilities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients have been treated in NHS hospitals' private facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Moss. Information is not held in the form requested. The table provides details on the numbers of treatments carried out on a private basis in public hospitals in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Year	Ordinary admissions	Day cases	Outpatient attendances
1989–90	1636	948	2863
1990–91	1983	933	3221
1991–92	1971	1115	2573
1992–93	1938	1291	2419
1993–94	2101	1781	2813

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide an estimate for the value of fundholding allocations retained by general practitioner fundholders at the year end in each of the last four years, by region.

Mr. Moss: It is estimated that in 1993–94, the first year of fundholding in Northern Ireland, GP fundholders underspent by approximately £2·7 million—8·8 per cent. of their total budget. Discussions about the level of savings to be retained by practices are not yet completed.

Patient Complaints

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patient complaints there were in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Moss: There were 1,590 hospital patient complaints in Northern Ireland in 1993–94.

Information about complaints made against family health services practitioners in Northern Ireland is not collected centrally. Information is available on those complaints which were investigated formally under the Health and Personal Social Services (Services Committee) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973 and is given in the table.

Year	Number of complaints investigated formally
1989	12
1990	16
1991	13
1992	11
1993	25

NHS Private Patient Facilities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much income has been generated by NHS hospitals' private patient facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Moss: Private patient income by health and social services board and trust was as follows:-

Board	1989–90 £	1990–91 £	1991–92 £	1992–93 £	1993–94 £
Eastern	1,278,235	1,510,981	1,776,835	2,344,038	137,259
Western	175,220	97,578	138,514	198,426	243,298
Northern	273,708	258,672	330,825	347,427	253,680
Southern	226,982	182,672	183,600	289,549	140,718

Trust	
Belfast City Hospital Trust	412,499
Eastern Ambulance Trust	1,233
Greenpark Trust	314,857
Royal Group of Hospitals Trust	1,308,380
Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals Trust	463,060
Craigavon Group of Hospitals Trust	227,339

The six trusts were established on 1 April 1993.

Legal Actions

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the total costs incurred by each health board and each education and library board in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years in defending actions assisted through legal aid which have arisen from *(a)* fair employment and *(b)* equal opportunities legislation.

Mr. Moss: The information is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Measles

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the current vaccination campaign against measles; and what assessment she has made of the risk that some children may not be immune to the disease.

Mr. Sackville: It is too early to assess the effectiveness of our immunisation campaign against measles, but by the end of the third week of the campaign we estimate that more than 4·5 million children had been immunised. Initial reports from districts estimate that about 90 per cent. of the target population are being immunised in the initial phase of the campaign.

Public Health Laboratory Service data based on extensive national surveillance has revealed that measles susceptibility in the school age population is sufficient to sustain a measles epidemic of the size forecast.

Rubella Vaccine

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when her Department first became aware of the research leading to the production of the rubella vaccine.

Mr. Sackville: Rubelle vaccine was developed from a cell line, MRC5, taken from a foetus terminated at a national health service hospital in 1966. This information has been in the public domain since the vaccine was introduced in 1970. Details of the MRC5 cell line were published in an article in "Nature Magazine" in 1970 and the origin of the vaccine is mentioned in the memorandum, "Immunisation against Infectious Disease", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what authorisation was given by *(a)* Department and *(b)* any other official group charged with monitoring the ethics of research to the development of the rubella vaccine from the cells of an aborted child.

(2) who authorised clinical trials of the rubella vaccine; and when these were conducted.

Mr. Sackville: This research and the clinical trials were conducted nearly 30 years ago and the information requested is not available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clinical trials of the rubella vaccine derived from the cells of an aborted child were conducted on children; what were the processes for consent; and if volunteers were informed of the vaccine's origin.

Mr. Sackville: The research was undertaken by vaccine manufacturers and such details are not available. The hon. Member may wish to contact the manufacturers of the vaccine who are listed in the memorandum "Immunisation against Infectious Disease", copies of which are available in the Library, for such information.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the medical grounds under which the unborn child, whose cells were taken to culture the rubella vaccine, was aborted.

Mr. Sackville: The cell line from which the rubella virus was cultivated was taken from a foetus which was terminated in a national health service hospital for psychiatric reasons. The foetus was not terminated to provide the source of the cell line.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who conducted the research and development of the rubella vaccine.

Mr. Sackville: The research was conducted by Professor S. Plotkin at the Wistar insitute, Philadelphia.

Rubella

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will quantify the risk of an under 16-year-old contracting rubella this winter.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds her Department has concluded that a rubella epidemic is imminent; and when her Department first arrived at this conclusion.

Mr. Sackville: A rubella epidemic is not imminent. In 1993, outbreaks of rubella in unimmunised older boys and young men led to a rise in cases of rubella in pregnant women. Rubella vaccine has been included in the present measles and rubella schools immunisation campaign to bring forward the elimination of rubella in pregnancy by five years and thereby hasten the eradication of the congenital rubella syndrome. Immunising girls and boys against rubella protects both from the disease. It is especially important for girls but also for boys as unprotected boys who catch rubella can transmit the disease to susceptible pregnant women.

Measles Vaccine

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the reasons for the shortage of supply of the measles only vaccine.

Mr. Sackville: Measles vaccine has not been in routine use in this country since the introduction of the measles/mumps and rubella vaccine in 1988. It has only been available on a "named-patient" basis. Manufacturers have therefore had no need to retain large stocks.

Health Authority Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff have been employed by category by each district health authority in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by her Department and Government agencies answerable to her Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. Sackville: Disaggregrated information of this nature is not available. Any such costs which may arise are covered by the hospitality expenditure of the Department which is published in the annual report, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many official Christmas cards she and her Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if she will place in the Library

a sample copy of the official Christmas card she intends to send this year.

Mr. Sackville: Some 2,300 charity Christmas cards, copies of which will be placed in the Library, will be sent at an estimated purchase and postal sum of £1,360.

Equal Opportunities

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the results of the survey on the ethnic origin of nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff are yet available.

Mr. Sackville: Ethnic group data on nursing and midwifery staff were collected in September 1993 non-medical work force census. The results were published in October in the statistical bulletin 1994/11, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Community Care

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the budget allocated to community care is being spent on *(a)* residential nursing homes and *(b)* nursing homes by each health authority; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Health authority accounts and financial returns do not provide information on whether long-term healthcare is provided in a national health service hospital or independent nursing home.

Cancer Services

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how and when she plans to respond to the consultation on the document "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services".

Mr. Sackville: The Department is currently assessing responses to the consultation. We expect to make decisions early in 1995.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz : To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in her Department.

Mr. Sackville: The Department employs one special adviser.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pills are in each unit which manufacturers supply to pharmacists for NHS use of *(a)* temazepam, *(b)* zopiclone, *(c)* other benzodiazepines and *(d)* other anti-depressants.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Although an applicant for a product licence for any medicine is required to submit details of proposed pack sizes to the licensing authority the decision on which of those sizes is marketed at any time rests on their commercial judgment.

Blood Transfusion Centre, Brentwood

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will tabulate *(a)* the advantages and *(b)* the disadvantages for clinicians and patients in Newham of the proposed closure of the Brentwood blood transfusion centre.

Mr. Sackville: The National Blood Authority has made it clear that under its proposals services to clinicians, to patients and to donors in all areas will be maintained or improved. The authority has undertaken a thorough and widespread consultation on its proposals and the results will be carefully considered before decisions are made.

NHS Work Shifts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what controls exist on the length of work shifts or the numbers of hours worked each week in *(a)* paramedic emergency services or *(b)* NHS patient transport services; and to what extent these differ between direct NHS providers of such services and subcontractors.

Mr. Sackville: There are no central controls on the length of shifts worked by ambulance staff, apart from the requirements of the drivers' hours regulations.

Health Care in London (Leaflet)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the leaflet, "Changing the Focus of Health Care in London", is to be distributed to all London households.

Mr. Malone: It is not intended to distribute the leaflet to all London households.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many leaflets, "Changing the Focus of Health Care in London" have been printed; what was the cost of *(a)* design and production, *(b)* printing and *(c)* distribution of these leaflets; how many other such leaflets have been produced and distributed in each year since 1979; and if she will list their names, quantities produced and total cost of each leaflet.

Mr. Malone: Twenty thousand leaflets have been printed. The cost of design and layout was £4,530. The cost of printing was £2,482—giving a cost per leaflet of 35p. All figures are exclusive of value added tax.

A sample copy of the leaflet has been distributed at first-class letter rate to 65 key managers in the national health service and local authorities in inner London. The managers have been asked to state how many further copies they will require in order to make the leaflet available to members of the public in hospitals, clinics, health centres, general practitioner surgeries, local libraries and neighbourhood resource centres. If necessary, a further print run will be undertaken to meet demand.

In addition I have written to London Members of Parliament with a copy of the leaflet. The London primary health care forum has not previously published or circulated any other literature.

Copies of "Changing the Focus of Healthcare in London" will be placed in the Library.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the measures announced in the statement made on 13 May relating to a voluntary agreement on tobacco

advertising have so far been *(a)* agreed with the industry and *(b)* implemented; and what is the timescale for (i) agreement and (ii) implementation of each of the remaining measures.

Mr. Sackville: The new voluntary agreement on tobacco products advertising and promotion will be published shortly. It will set out the details of implementation of the measures announced on 13 May.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will name the chief executives of NHS trusts and authorities in Devon and Cornwall.

Mr. Sackville: The chief executives in the Cornwall and Devon area are as follows: Cornwall and Isles of Scilly district family health services authority, Mr. Ron Spencer; Cornwall healthcare NHS trust, Mr. Philip Sanders; Cornwall and Isles of Scilly learning disabilities NHS trust, Mrs. Gina Brocklehurst; Royal Cornwall hospitals NHS trust, Mr. Brian Milstead; Plymouth and Torbay health authority, Mr. W. Jennings; Exeter and North Devon health authority, Mr. Peter Jackson; Exeter and District community health services NHS trust, Mr. Thomas Grady; Northern Devon healthcare NHS trust, Mrs. Julie Acred; Plymouth community services NHS trust, Mrs. Sue DeGilio; Royal Devon and Exeter healthcare NHS trust, Mr. Mark Taylor; South Devon healthcare NHS trust; Mr. Tony Parr; and Westcountry ambulance services NHS trust, Mr. Mike Willis.

Junior Doctors and Dentists

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many junior doctors and dentists by region in England are contracted for more than 72 hours a week in on-call posts; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: At 30 September 1994, the returns from the 14 English regional task forces on junior doctors' hours were as follows:

Region	*Hard-Pressed posts contracted for over 72 hours a week*
Northern	242
Yorkshire	653·5
Trent	184
East Anglian	170.5
NW Thames	315
NE Thames	492
SE Thames	213
SW Thames	206
Wessex	110
Oxford	140
South Western	46
West Midlands	293
Mersey	194
North Western	615
Total	3,874

This represents a fall of over 40 per cent. in the number of posts in this category since March.

I am very pleased with this significant increase in the rate at which these posts are being eliminated. This is evidence of the hard work done by regional task forces and by hospitals in tackling the problem of long hours.

There are, however, still too many posts where junior doctors are being asked to work long hours and the Government will continue to work with the medical profession and NHS managers to ensure that the "New Deal on Junior Doctors' Hours", a copy of which is in the Library, is implemented in full.

Blood Transfusion Service

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representation she has received regarding blood transfusion centres in the north west; and if she will make a statement.

(2) what assessment she has made on the affect on services in Lancashire and Cumbria if the closure of Lancaster blood transfusion centre is to be allowed to go ahead.

Mr. Sackville: Six parliamentary questions have been asked by hon. Members concerning the National Blood Authority's proposal for blood transfusion centres in the north-west and Ministers have received 109 letters as at 23 November.

The National Blood Authority has made it clear that, under its proposals for reorganisation of the transfusion centres, current levels of service in Lancashire and Cumbria would be maintained and improved. The authority has undertaken a thorough and widespread consultation on its proposals. Full consideration will be given to the results of the consultation before decisions are made.

Burnley Health Care Trust

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received in the last three months arising from problems with the management of Burnley healthcare NHS trust; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 1 November, *Official Report*, column *1084-85*. Since then, we have received some further representations about Burnley healthcare national health service trust, including a petition comprising some 7,000 signatures. This calls for the reinstatement of Mr. Ian Mahady, and has been forwarded to the investigation team.

Munchausen's Syndrome

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *87*, if she will list those hospitals *(a)* where research projects are in progress into the effectiveness of covert video surveillance in cases of suspected Munchausen's syndrome by proxy and *(b)* where the same technique is in use but not as part of a research project.

Mr. Bowis: The research covers all methods used by paediatricians in identifying suspected Munchausen's syndrome by proxy. The only hospital using covert video surveillance of which we are aware is the North Staffordshire hospital centre.

Malaria

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is taking against the incidence of malaria.

Mr. Sackville: Malaria is not endemic in the United Kingdom. The Department gives advice about the precautions that should be taken when travellers from the United Kingdom are travelling to endemic areas in the Department's free booklet, "Health Advice for Travellers", which is updated as necessary on Prestel. Guidance on appropriate prophylaxis against malaria for specific parts of the world is available to doctors and practice nurses from the Public Health Laboratory Service malaria reference laboratory, which also has a helpline for travellers.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department employs two special advisers.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Vetting Procedures

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to provide information to embassies concerning the practice of enforced subject access to criminal records in the vetting of United Kingdom citizens; what United Kingdom embassies abroad use a similar procedure to vet foreign nationals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: There are no plans to provide such information to embassies in the United Kingdom. United embassies abroad are not instructed to employ these or similar procedures.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to introduce enforced subject access procedures as part of his Department's assessment of those individuals who are not positively vetted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: There are no plans to introduce such procedures.

Macedonia

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards the establishment of an association agreement between the European Union and Macedonia; what is the policy position of Her Majesty's Government with particular reference to the Greek stance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom and other member states have urged an early solution to the bilateral dispute between the Macedonians and Greece. This would enable the EU to develop its relations with the Macedonians, for example by concluding a trade and co-operation agreement.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the position of Her Majesty's Government regarding the exclusion of Macedonia from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe because of a Greek veto; and what representations he has made to the Greek Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We support Macedonia's immediate admission to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe as a full participating state. We have expressed our concern at its exclusion repeatedly and will do so again at the meeting of CSCE heads of state and Government in Budapest on 5 to 6 December. The Greek Government are in no doubt about our position. We have urged them to lift their block.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the progress that has been made to establish an international tribunal on genocide following recent events in Rwanda; what crimes against humanity will be investigated by the international tribunal on genocide in Rwanda; and what contribution the United Kingdom is making to the establishment of the international tribunal on genocide in Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Security Council established an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda by resolution 955 of 8 November 1994, which we co-sponsored.

Under the statute, the tribunal has jurisdiction over persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of Rwanda and Rwandan citizens responsible for such violations committed in the territory of neighbouring states, between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994. Its jurisdiction includes genocide and serious violations of the laws of war as well as certain crimes against humanity committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population on national, ethnic, racial or religious grounds.

The Secretary-General will shortly make recommendations as to the practical arrangements for the tribunal. We will consider any United Kingdom contributions in the light of his report.

Slovenia

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards the establishment of an association agreement between the European Union and Slovenia; what is the policy position of Her Majesty's Government with particular reference to the Italian stance; and if he will make a statement

Mr. Baldry: The content of a negotiating mandate for an association agreement with Slovenia has been agreed, but a bilateral problem between Italy and Slovenia has prevented the Foreign Affairs Council from approving the mandate. We have made it clear, including to the Slovenian Prime Minister on his recent visit to London, that we want this mandate to be agreed as soon as possible and have urged the parties to resolve their differences.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present programme of activity of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Sudan; and if he is receiving any co-operation from the Government of Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN special rapporteur, Dr. Biro, has presented a second interim report on the human rights situation in Sudan to the UN general assembly. The Sudanese Government have not responded to Dr. Biro's request for co-operation

Lithuania

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues were discussed with the Prime Minister of Lithuania, Mr. Adolfus Slezevicius, on his recent visit here; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Discussions with Prime Minister Slezevicius covered developments in the Lithuanian economy, prospects for increased trade between Britain and Lithuania and Lithuania's relations with Russia.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British high commissioner in Nairobi last visited the Rift valley area in Kenya; and what conclusions he came to about the security and human rights position in the area.

Mr. Baldry: Our high commissioner in Nairobi visited Rift Valley province in October and November this year. Security has improved markedly. Displaced victims of inter-ethnic fighting in 1992–93 have begun to return to their homes with the help of a Government of Kenya-sponsored joint programme supported by UNDP, NGOs and bilateral donors, including the Government.

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Extradition

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that evidence presented during extradition proceedings is made subject to cross examination.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I have been asked to reply.

Extradition is the means by which individuals are returned to stand trial for offences allegedly committed in another country. It is for the courts of the country where the offence is alleged to have occurred to test the evidence and decide on guilt.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration is given to the possible treatment of an individual after extradition in deciding on an extradition order.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I have been asked to reply.

The Government enter into extradition arrangements only where they are satisfied as to the fairness of the criminal justice system of the country concerned.

Under section 12 of the Extradition Act 1989 the Secretary of State cannot order the surrender of an individual where it would be unjust or oppressive to do so.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members.

Mr. Goodlad: The quangos for which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is responsible for appointing members are:

Foreign and Commonwealth Office;
Britain-Russia Centre;
British Association for Central & Eastern Europe;
British Council;
Commonwealth Institute;
Great Britain-China Centre;
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission;
Westminster Foundation for Democracy;
Diplomatic Service Appeals Boards;
Wilton Park Academic Council;
Wilton Park International Advisory Council;
Foreign Compensation Committee;
Overseas Development Administration;
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission;
Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board;
Advisory Committee on Overseas Economic and Social Research

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members have stood as candidates for borough, city, district or county councils for *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Goodlad: Candidates are not asked to provide information on their political careers unless holding of political office is a prerequisite of their appointment.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members currently serve as councillors representing *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Goodlad: Candidates are not required to provide information on their political careers unless their political career is a prerequisite of the appointment or the holding of political office disbars them from the appointment in question.

Rwanda and Burundi

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had to discuss the situation in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary most recently discussed these subjects with the Belgian and French Foreign Ministers on 11 and 18 November respectively, and with President Moi of Kenya on 16 November. My noble Friend, the Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, discussed these matters with President Moi when he called on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 November and with the Belgian Foreign Minister yesterday. Today she will discuss these issues

with her European counterparts during the Development Council in Brussels.

Burundi

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received regarding violation of human rights in Burundi; what representations he has made to the Government of Burundi on these reports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Burundi Government submitted their own report to the United Nations human rights committee in July, and a report by Amnesty International of 17 May 1994 also alleged widespread human rights violations. My noble Friend, Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, discussed these matters during wide-ranging talks with the Burundi Government in Bujumbura in August. The UN centre for human rights has established an office in Bujumbura and is providing technical assistance, to which we are contributing.

WALES

Royal National Eisteddfod

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the precise reason for the absence of a Welsh Office Minister from the royal national eisteddfod in 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: It was with regret that I had to decline the royal national eisteddfod's invitation to attend this year's eisteddfod because of a long-standing personal commitment. I very much look forward to attending the 1995 Colwyn eisteddfod, which will be held in my constituency.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: The public bodies abolished since 1979 are as follows:

Executive

Cwmbran Development Corporation
Welsh Water Authority

Advisory

(1)Agricultural Regional Panels for North and South Wales (2)
Careers Service Advisory Council for Wales
Celtic Sea Advisory Committee
Committee for Under Fives Initiative
Committee on Opportunities for Volunteering
Health Education Advisory Committee for Wales
(2)Housing Management Advisory Panel for Wales
Perinatal Mortality Survey Group
Review Group on Mental Illness Services in Dyfed
Review of Community Nursing Services for Wales
Training, Enterprise and Education Advisory Group for Wales
Wales Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education Standing Working Group
Welsh Committee of the Health Services Board
Welsh Committee on Alcohol Misuse
Welsh Committee on Drug Misuse
Welsh Computer Strategy Committee
Welsh Council
Welsh Language Translation Advisory Panel

Tribunals

Milk and Dairies Tribunal for Wales

(1)Replaced in 1980 by the Agriculture Advisory Panel for Wales

(2)The final meeting of the Panel was held on 29 July 1994; no successor body is planned.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows:

	Executive	*Advisory*	*Tribunal*	*Total*
(a) 1979	16	21	3	40
(b) 1994	24	28	11	63

These figures exclude the NHS, and include eight new valuation tribunals.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many members of quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members have stood as parliamentary candidates for *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party.

(2) how many members of quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members have stood as candidates to borough, city, district or county councils for *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party.

(3) how many members of quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members have previously served as councillors representing *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many known members of *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party currently serve on quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members.

Mr. Redwood: Appointments to public bodies are made on the basis of merit, aptitude and suitability to meet the demands of the post.

Nominees on the Welsh Office register of candidates, from which appointees are drawn, are not required to give details of any political affiliation. Some 93 per cent. of nominees do not volunteer any information, and therefore no information about their affiliation is held.

The analysis of serving members of public bodies appointed by the Welsh Office who have volunteered, at the time of their nomination to the register, the nature of their political affiliation is as follows:

Political	*Number*	*Percentage of Appointees*
Conservative	36	4·5
Labour	9	1·1
Liberal Democrat	1	0·1
Plaid Cymru	1	0·1

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members.

Mr. Redwood: The information is given in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales 1 September 1994" which is available in the Library of the House.

Hospital (Private Patients)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much income has been generated by NHS hospitals' private patient facilities in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Richards: The information, by district health authority area, is given in the following table:

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Clwyd	227	319	356	440	605
Dyfed	228	297	308	369	539
Gwen	220	252	209	436	451
Gwynedd	149	211	147	294	265
Mid Glamorgan	363	426	577	777	975
Powys	29	48	53	54	96
South Glamorgan	486	493	589	644	848
West Glamorgan	220	275	305	266	328
Wales	1,922	2,321	2,544	3,280	4,107

[1] It includes complaints concerning the hospital and community health service and family health services. Pembrokeshire figures are included with east Dyfed as Dyfed FHSA covers both health authority areas.

Munchausen's Syndrome

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had to approve *(a)* the use of covert video surveillance in hospital wards with children with parents suspected of Munchausen's syndrome by proxy and *(b)* a code of practice to be agreed with the area child protection teams with respect to such surveillance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the data he has on TEC performance on *(a)* youth training, *(b)* training for work and *(c)* other schemes.

Mr. Redwood: The inter-TEC comparison tables were published on 25 August 1994. These tables covered the seven key performance indicators for all 82 TECs in England and Wales. A copy of the publication has been placed in the Library of the House.

Custom House School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects a decision concerning a property in the curtilage of Custom House CP school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office wrote to Clwyd county council on 20 October seeking clarification on a number of points in connection with this matter. A decision will be reached as soon as possible after the council has responded.

Freight Traffic

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to encourage freight traffic to use rail services rather than road.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: On 17 October 1994, my right hon. Friend relaunched the freight facilities grant scheme. This is an environmental grant available from the Welsh Office to encourage firms to take heavy lorries off the roads by helping them to invest in rail freight facilities.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultation he has had with the chairman of the NRA Wales region concerning the numbers of salmon and seatrout/sewin taken by water bailiffs in the River Taff for the purposes of assisted fertilisation at the hatchery; and what evaluation has been made of the relative strength of the homing instinct of naturally spawned salmon in the Taff catchment headwaters relative to those spawned in the hatchery;

(2) what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Wales region of the NRA in relation to the numbers of migratory salmonoid in the River Taff crossing *(a)* Black weir, *(b)* Llandaf weir and *(c)* Radyr weir on spawning runs for each year since 1985; and if he will give the figures for this year to date;

(3) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Wales region of the NRA in relation to the effectiveness of the Taff fish passes installed at *(a)* Black weir, *(b)* Llandaf weir and *(c)* Radyr weir since their construction; in what year each was installed; what evaluation has been made of their effectiveness; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what consultations he had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority Wales region and the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the impact of the piling operations for the Cardiff Bay barrage on salmon and seatrout/sewin spawning runs into *(a)* Taff and *(b)* Ely during 1995 and 1996.

Mr. Redwood: None.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether, in seeking the agreement of members of the panel on assessment of incapacity to publication of

their names, he informed them of the statements made by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People *(a)* in his answer on 20 January, *Official Report,* column *800,* that the report on the proposed medical test would include the membership of the panel, and *(b)* to Standing Committee E on 1 February, that their names would be publicly available; and if he will invite those who did not agree to publication to reconsider the matter in the light of those statements.

Mr. Hague: No. Panel members were made aware of our wish to publish their names in the report. I believe it is appropriate to respect the wish of any panel member that their name should not be made public. I have no plans to ask them to reconsider the matter.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many members of the panel on assessment of incapacity were, or are, employed or contracted by *(a)* the Benefits Agency medical service, *(b)* the Department of Social Security and *(c)* the Department of Health.

Mr. Hague: Fifteen members of the panel are employed by the Benefits Agency medical services, two members by the Department of Social Security and two by the Department of Health.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number or percentage of claimants are expected to be eligible for incapacity benefit in the Porth, Tonypandy, Aberdare and Pontypridd areas.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available.

The number of sickness benefit and invalidity benefit claimants in Great Britain expected to transfer to incapacity benefit is just under 2 million.

Compensation (Reclaim of Benefits)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances state benefits are reclaimed from recipients of tribunal awards for dismissal from the services for pregnancy, on the same basis as they are reclaimed from recipients of industrial injury compensation; and how much has been reclaimed from such recipients of compensation.

Mr. Evans: The recoupment of benefits for industrial tribunal awards is operated by the employment services. Recoupment applies if benefits are paid as a result of an unfair dismissal from work for which compensation is later awarded. Unlike the compensation recovery scheme, which covers awards made for industrial injury and is administered by Benefits Agency, recoupment is not dependant on the size of settlement. Information on total amounts reclaimed in these circumstances is not available.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* requests for reviews and *(b)* appeals concerning attendance allowance have been received by his Department since April 1992.

Mr. Hague: For the period 1 April 1992 to 31 October 1994, the information is in the table.

Attendance Allowance

Requests for reviews	375,000
Appeals	8,9000

Note:
Source: Analytical Services Division, DSS

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes there have been in all national insurance contributions in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The rates for each class of contribution are in the table:

	Class 1		*Class 2*	*Class 3*	*Class 4*
Date from	*Employee*[1] *per cent.*	*Employer*[1] *per cent.*	*Weekly rate £*	*Weekly rate £*	*per cent.*
6 April 1980	6.75	13.7[2]	2.50	2.40	5
6 April 1981	7.75	13.7[2]	3.40	3.30	5.75
6 April 1982	8.75	13.7[2]	3.75	3.65	6
6 April 1983	9	11.95[2]	4.40	4.30	6.3
6 April 1984	9	11.45[2]	4.60	4.50	6.3
6 April 1985	9	10.45	4.75	4.65	6.3
6 October 1985	5 7 9[3]	5 7 9 10.45[3]	3.50	3.40	6.3
6 April 1986	5 7 9	5 7 9 10.45	3.75	3.65	6.3
6 April 1987	5 7 9	5 7 9 10.45	3.85	3.75	6.3
6 April 1988	5 7 9	5 7 9 10.45	4.05	3.95	6.3
6 April 1989	5 7 9	5 7 9 10.45	4.25	4.15	6.3
5 October 1989	2 plus 9[4]	5 7 9 10.45	4.25	4.15	6.3
6 April 1990	2 plus 9	5 7 9 10.45	4.55	4.45	6.3
6 April 1991	2 plus 9	4.6 6.6 8.6 10.4	5.15	5.05	6.3
6 April 1992	2 plus 9	4.6 6.6 8.6 10.4	5.35	5.25	6.3
6 April 1993	2 plus 9	4.6 6.6 8.6 10.4	5.55	5.45	6.3
6 April 1994	2 plus 10	3.6 5.6 7.6 10.2	5.65	5.55	7.3

Notes:
[1] Not Contracted-out rates shown.
[2] Includes the National Insurance surcharge under the National Insurance Surcharge Act 1976. The surcharge was gradually reduced from 3.5 per cent. until its abolition on 1 October 1984.
[3] Lower employee and employer contribution rates were introduced for employees on lower earnings. The Upper Earnings Limit for employers' contributions was abolished.
[4] A revised structure for employee contributions was introduced. Employees now pay an initial contribution of 2 per cent. on earnings up to the Lower Earnings Limit and then a main contribution rate of 9 per cent. (now 10 per cent.) on the balance of earnings up to the Upper Earnings Limit.
[5] A new Class 1A contribution was introduced in 1991-92. It is paid by employers, at the highest contribution rate, on the cash equivalent for tax purposes of the benefit of cars and fuel provided to their employees for private use.

Income Support

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his calculation of the amount that will be paid in each of the next five years in income support job seeker's allowance, presuming that unemployment remains at its present level, and of the amount that would be paid if the present system of income support/unemployment benefit remained in force.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the form requested. I refer the hon. Member to the social security department report, CM2513, for the latest published estimates of expenditure on benefits for unemployment, and to the reply given to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) on 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *279*, which provides an estimate of the savings resulting from the introduction of the job seeker's allowance.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many annual periodic review notices have been sent out by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. John Spellar, dated 24 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the total number of annual periodic review notices sent out by the Child Support Agency.

At present, this information could only be collected at disproportionate cost. Data on the number of periodic review forms issued will be collected on a regular basis in the future, although figures are unlikely to become available before April 1995.

Since August 1994, the Agency has been collecting figures on the number of periodic review forms returned. Latest available figures show that 1,478 forms were returned during August.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security from what source and when the money was raised to reimburse the £4,800 of public funds spent on the lunch held at Plymouth Child Support Agency centre on 25 March; and what disciplinary action was taken against the staff responsible.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 24 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the party held at the Agency's Plymouth Centre.

Staff disciplinary action within the Agency, like the rest of the Department of Social Security is a confidential matter between management, personnel and the staff involved. I cannot therefore provide you with any further details which would not breach that confidentiality. I repeat that appropriate disciplinary action was taken against those officials who had shown poor judgement. The £4,880 involved was privately donated within the Agency to avoid any loss to public funds. Again, it would not therefore be appropriate for me to provide further information.

Benefit Payments, Lewisham

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants have been prevented from receiving benefits as a result of the habitual residence test in the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford for each month since its inception; of those refused how many went on to appeal; and how many won their appeals.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information about income support as is available. Information about housing benefit and council tax benefit is collected annually from local authorities and is not yet available.

Letter from Mr. Michael Bichard to Ms Joan Ruddock dated 24 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for details of the application of the Habitual Residency Test in Lewisham, Deptford since its inception in August 1994.

The full range of information requested for Income Support (IS) is not routinely collected in the format requested. This is because Benefits Agency boundaries do not correspond with those of Parliamentary constituencies. However, I have placed at Annex A information which has been obtained from the Lewisham District Office which comprises the offices of Lewisham, Brixton, Greenwich, Hither Green and the Oval and handles IS claims from customers resident in the London postcode areas SE6, SE10, SE12, SE23, SE8, SE4, SE14 and part of SE13.

Since 1 August 1994, 34 appeals have been received by the Lewisham District Office following the disallowance of IS as a result of the application of the Habitual Residence Test. To date none of these appeals have been heard by the Social Security Appeals Tribunal.

Information on Housing and Council Tax Benefits is not yet available and is collected by the Department of Social Security from local authorities annually. In the meantime you may wish to contact the London Borough of Lewisham direct.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the compensation recovery unit has recovered from individuals with an asbestos-related disease in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Mr. Michael Bichard to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 24 November:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how much the Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) has recovered from individuals with an asbestos related disease in each of the last five years by region.

The full range of information you requested is not available. This is because the CRU's computer system records cases involving victims of asbestosis rather than asbestos related diseases. In addition, information relating to cases settled prior to 1993 is no longer held on the computer system and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Information is not readily available to break the data that is available down into regions and to obtain this would also be at a disproportionate cost.

The total amounts recovered by CRU relating to victims of asbestosis is:

1 April 93–31 March 1994 — £408,665.

1 April 94–21 November 1994 — £651,164.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Tobacco Projects

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Overseas Development Administration aid has been given to tobacco projects since 1985.

Mr. Baldry: On account of increasing evidence to show that health risks associated with tobacco consumption will affect developing countries severely, it has been Her Majesty's Government's policy since early 1991 that the overseas aid programme should not be used for any purpose which identifiably supports the tobacco sector, despite its importance as a source of export earnings in some countries. Prior to the introduction of this policy, £1·65 million was committed between 1989 and 1991 to two tobacco projects in Malawi.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about money being made available for educational purposes in Kenya by the Overseas Development Administration; and if he will indicate which projects are aimed at primary, secondary and higher education and the amounts of money allocated to each sector.

Mr. Baldry: Apart from a small amount of continuing assistance to the Kenya and Mombasa polytechnics, and some training, ODA's commitment to higher education in Kenya will end in 1994–95. There is no allocation for secondary education. The focus of our programme now is to strengthen primary education.

Total disbursements this financial year in the education sector are expected to be some £3 million, of which nearly two thirds will be for primary education.

Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the percentage of gross domestic product spent on overseas aid in each of the European Union countries for the years 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Baldry: Figures for the percentage of gross domestic product spent on aid in each of the European Union countries on a financial year basis are not available.

Figures for net ODA expenditure as a percentage of GNP for these countries in 1992 and 1993 are as follows:-

	1992	*1993*
Belgium	0.38	0.39
Denmark	1.03	1.03
France	0.63	0.63
Germany	0.39	0.36
Greece	N/A	N/A
Ireland	0.16	0.19
Italy	0.31	0.30
Luxembourg	0.29	0.32
Netherlands	0.86	0.81
Portugal	0.31	0.30
Spain	0.28	0.27
United Kingdom	0.31	0.31

Source:
OECD
Note:
These figures exclude assistance to the non-developing countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to ensure that aid money is spent on poverty relief, humanitarian aid and economic development.

Mr. Baldry: Aid money will continue to be spent on activities aimed at promoting the economic and social development of other countries, and the welfare of their people. All projects are subject to economic, social and environmental appraisal.

Indonesia

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been given to Indonesia in each year since 1979 and in total.

Mr. Baldry: The requested information is given in the table following.

British bilateral aid to Indonesia 1979–1993/94 (£ thousand)

	ODA Programme	*CDC*	*Other*[1]	*Gross Public Expenditure*
Calendar Year				
1979	7,485	2,811	1,424	11,728
1980	7,954	1,635	1,601	11,190
1981	5,809	7,535	2,006	15,350
1982	8,891	6,055	2,273	17,219
1983	7,422	2,843	2,273	12,538
1984	10,546	15,473	2,273	28,292
1985	[2]29,507	1,869	2,273	33,649
1986	5,190	1,435	2,273	8,898
1987	7,121	2,829	2,273	12,223
Total	89,925	42,485	18,669	151,079
Finacial Year[3]				
1987–88	7,850	4,537	2,273	14,668
1988–89	10,743	4,350	2,273	17,366
1989–90	9,003	9,707	2,273	20,983

British bilateral aid to Indonesia 1979–1993/94 (£ thousand)

	ODA Programme	CDC	Other[1]	Gross Public Expenditure
1990–91	17,564	5,550	2,273	25,387
1991–92	21,200	10,952	2,273	34,425
1992–93	21,398	9,041	2,251	32,690
1993–94[4]	22,207	10,439	2,227	34,874
Total	109,965	54,576	15,843	180,385

Source:
British Aid Statistics
Notes
[1] This is mainly debt relief, but also includes small amounts of drug related assistance funded by the Home Office and the FCO.
[2] This was the final year in which ATP projects were financed as mixed credits. Thereafter they were funded as soft loans. ATP expenditure fell from £15·7 million in 1985 to £0·5 million in 1986.
[3] From 1987–88 onward expenditure is only available on a financial year basis. It is not possible to separately allocate 1987–88 expenditure to 1987 and 1988. For this reason it is not possible to give a total figure for expenditure since 1979.
[4] The figure for 1993–94 are provisional.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid and trade projects are currently being financed in Indonesia; and to what individual and total value.

Mr. Baldry: The following aid and trade provision projects are currently being financed in Indonesia.

Project	£ million Export Value	ATP Value
Steel Bridging	9·930	6·642
Navigational Aids	9·906	6·386
Bandung Television Studio	11·735	9·734
Cigading Port Extension	17·280	13·266
Scattered Diesels	6·887	5·891
Citayam/Cibinong Railway	23·000	20·105
Cigading/Serpong Railway Rehabilitation	31·861	24·690
Radio Communication System for the Ministry of Forestry	37·234	34·111
Radio Studio Rehabilitation	6·330	5·040
Shortwave Radio Transmitters	29·000	26·911
Flight Simulator Consultancy	0·439	0·439
Western Universities Equipment	14·284	13·671
Bali and Medan Airport Security	11·452	10·455
Jambi Power Station	5·740	5·345
Flight Simulator	4·969	4·659
Steel Bridging II	3·831	3·669
Cikampek/Padalarang Toll Road Consultancy	1·700	1·700
Western Universities Training Centre Consultancy	2·214	2·214
Total	227·792	194·928

Development Packages

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for extending long-term development packages to *(a)* the countries of the former Soviet Union and *(b)* other low income countries.

Mr. Baldry: Although the majority of countries of the former Soviet Union are not classified as low-income, they need technical assistance to further their transition to democracy and market economies alongside the resources available from the private sector, the international financial institutions and the European Union. We will continue to provide such assistance through our much respected know-how fund. Concurrently, we will continue to provide substantial long-term development assistance to low-income countries.

Russia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of British Government aid to Russia; and what plans there are to increase this sum, to help the Russian Government to improve safety within the Russian nuclear industry.

Mr. Baldry: We have committed a total of £1·2 billion in assistance to Russia bilaterally and through the European Union. We also contribute through international financial institutions. There are no current plans to increase this sum to improve safety in the Russian nuclear industry. Though the fundamental responsibility for nuclear safety lies with the Russian Government, we have to date contributed £24·5 million through the nuclear safety account and through EU nuclear safety programmes.

Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in meeting United Nations aid expenditure targets.

Mr. Baldry: In 1993, United Kingdom net assistance totalled £1,945 million, equivalent to 0.31 per cent. of GNP—higher than the average for all OECD development assistance committee donors of 0.29 per cent. The UN target is 0.7 per cent. Similarly, in 1992, the latest year for which figures are available, the United Kingdom's net assistance to the least-developed countries was 0.10 per cent. of GNP, compared to the DAC average of 0.09 per cent. The UN target is 0.15 per cent.

The Government have not accepted any timetable for reaching these targets. Future levels of aid will continue to depend upon our economic circumstances and on other calls on public expenditure.

Rwanda

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to facilitate the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction in Rwanda to ensure peace and stability in the region.

Mr. Baldry: A co-ordinated international effort is needed to rehabilitate and reconstruct Rwanda. We have encouraged the IMF and IBRD to act quickly; missions have already visited. Britain was the first to support the UN programme for human rights monitors. We will play

an active part in regional meetings to promote peace and stability planned for early 1995.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps are being taken to provide bilateral humanitarian aid to *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* to neighbouring countries which have been adversely affected by the influx of Rwandan refugees; and if he will make a statement.

(2) what measures he has initiated in order to assist the plight of the refugees who have fled Rwanda and who remain displaced within Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry: Since the start of the crisis we have committed £60 million of humanitarian aid for Rwanda and for Rwandan refugees in neighbouring countries. We continue to monitor the situation closely and since May 1994 five separate assessment missions have visited the region.

Aid and Trade provision

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set up a departmental review of the criteria used in making decisions about funding of projects under the aid and trade provision.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) gave on 21 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *24*, to the hon. Member for Cyon Valley (Mrs Clwyd). As a result of the ATP review the decision-making processes for aid and trade provision projects have been brought into line with those applied for other bilateral aid projects.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House on 17 November, the Overseas Development Administration is reviewing carefully all the projects and activities it funds, including those under the aid and trade provision, to see whether there are any others approved under our previous understanding of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 which might also fall outside the interpretation of the Act given by the High Court recently. The Government have no plans for a further review of the criteria for decisions about funding of projects under the aid and trade provision.

SCOTLAND

NHS Trusts

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce his decision on the fourth wave of NHS trust applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Following public consultation on the eight fourth wave trust applications, reports have been submitted to me by Argyll and Clyde, Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Greater Glasgow, and Lanarkshire health boards and by the Common Services Agency. These reports did not identify any serious flaws in the proposals for trust status.

As with all trust applications, these have been considered against the published criteria of benefits for patients, management competence, the involvement of clinicians and other healthcare professionals in management, and financial viability.

The proposed trust arrangements meet these criteria and therefore I have decided to give my approval to the trust applications from Argyll and Bute unit, Borders Community Health Services, Borders General hospital, Dumfries and Galloway community services unit, Glasgow dental hospital and school, Lanarkshire Healthcare, Dumbarton unit which will become Lomond Healthcare NHS trust, and the Scottish Ambulance Service. These trusts will become operational from 1 April 1995.

I have also approved the proposal by Greater Glasgow health board that its care for the elderly unit should be integrated with the existing acute trusts in the city.

The result of my decisions is that all units on the mainland of Scotland will be operating as NHS trusts from 1 April 1995. There are no plans for the units managed by the three islands health boards, the Scottish Blood Transfusion Service and the state hospital to become NHS trusts at the present time.

The trusts are achieving considerable success and are quickly demonstrating greater benefits to the public with record numbers of patients being treated, waiting lists and waiting times coming down and new services being developed in hospitals and in the community.

Health Care International

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who was responsible for monitoring differing aspects of Health Care Intenational development in Clydebank in Scottish Enterprise National, Scottish Office, Locate in Scotland and Dunbartonshire Enterprise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Officials in the relevant organisations monitored the assistance offered to the company in accordance with the normal procedures relating to the schemes in question. With regard to the offer of regional selective assistance—the largest single element of the assistance package offered to the company—my right hon. Friend's officials made appropriate checks to ensure that the company was complying with the terms of the offer prior to the release of each instalment of grant.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he was first aware of economic difficulties at Health Care International in Clydebank; and what action he took.

Mr. Stewart: Officials of Locate in Scotland and Scottish Enterprise have been involved in discussions about the company's financial position over the last three months and my right hon. Friend has been kept informed of developments.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account he took of the Irish Industrial Development Authority's decision on support of Health Care International when he agreed to support Health Care International in Clydebank.

Mr. Stewart: Decisions to offer financial assistance to Health Care International were made after the same rigorous appraisal as applies to all decisions in respect of such assistance, and determined by reference to the same criteria. In the context of the appraisal process, decisions taken by inward investment agencies in other countries are taken into account where, for example, they affect the

level of grant necessary to secure a mobile project. In this particular case, as the company had already made it clear that its preference was for a Scottish location, no specific account was taken of the indicative offer which the company had previously received from the Irish industrial development authority.

Glasgow

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is now the policy of Locate in Scotland as regards the promotion of the City of Glasgow district council area as a location for consideration for inward investment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Locate in Scotland is fully aware of the many advantages Glasgow offers as a business location and continues to market it—and all other parts of Scotland—to potential investors.

Planning

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that financial considerations will not override consideration of other criteria such as architectural and landscape heritage in planning appeal decisions.

Mr. Stewart: Planning appeal decision are made on the basis of a series of considerations put forward by the parties involved. As required by statute, the first among these is the contents of the approved development plan, if relevant; other material considerations, involving environmental, employment and financial considerations, are taken into account. The weight to be attached to each will be a matter of judgment, based on the facts and circumstances of each case.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to alter the level of resources allocated to local authorities for planning responsibilities as a result of the current review of the planning system.

Mr. Lang: Central Government support for local authority revenue expenditure—aggregate external finance—is, with the exception of the specific grants component, not hypothecated to particular local authority services. There are no plans to alter the methodology underpinning the distribution of that support.

Teachers

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students have been awarded *(a)* a postgraduate certificate in teaching and *(b)* a bachelor of education in each year since 1990–91; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table below:

	Number of students awarded:	
Year	*PGCE*	*BEd*
1990–91	1,139	620
1991–92	1,412	538
1992–93	1,442	858

There continues to be a health level of interest in teaching as a career. Through our controls over student places on courses of initial teacher training we seek to keep the number of trainee teachers broadly in balance with projected teacher requirements.

Sustainable Development

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress he has made towards ensuring that plans for development in Scotland will include sustainable development considerations as a necessary feature for approval to be granted by local authorities.

Mr. Lang: Sustainable development is a key theme in our national planning policy guidelines. Planning authorities must take account of these in the preparation of development plans and in determining planning applications.

To date, we have published NPPGs on the planning system, business and industry, land for housing, land for mineral working, archaeology and planning and renewable energy. Drafts have been issued on waste, roadside facilities and A9 policy. Others currently in preparation cover retailing, planning and transport, sport and recreation and skiing.

Physical Education Teachers

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average annual cost of employing a physical education teacher.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information about teaching costs is not held centrally by subject specialism. The average cost of employing a secondary school teacher is estimated to be £25,296. This figure is derived from the total teacher costs, including promoted staff and employer overheads, which are generally estimated to be about 16.5 per cent. of the total pay bill.

Tariff Rebate Subsidies Scheme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the amount of public money paid out by his Department under the tariff rebate subsidies scheme between 1 January 1992 and 31 August 1993, in respect of the carriage southbound for Orkney or Shetland of empty containers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* No such estimate has been made.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what systems his Department has operated to monitor and scrutinise tariff rebate subsidy claims made by or on behalf of *(a)* P and O Scottish Ferries Ltd., *(b)* Shetland Line (1984) Ltd. and Orkney Line and *(c)* Orcargo Ltd.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Since 1 February 1994 each of the shipping companies has had to submit claims for tariff rebate subsidy in a standard format. Each company is required to submit a subsidy claim which has been certified by its auditors as fairly stated and properly and reasonably made in accordance with the conditions of the scheme. To assist the reporting accountants in this task, a comprehensive guidance note covering the rules and regulations of the TRS scheme has been issued. In addition to statutory annual accounts the companies are also required to prepare an approved services account and audit certificate which details total income and expenditure, including subsidy, in relation to approved services. The Department also retains the right to carry

out spot checks on each company's records to ensure adherence to the rules and regulations currently in force.

Prior to 1 February 1994, all companies within the scheme, with the exception of P and O Scottish Ferries Ltd., were required to submit to the Department copies of invoices relating to freight shipments. P and O was required to submit regular information on carryings but was not required to submit copies of individual invoices because of the large number of invoices processed by that company. In all cases the companies were required to submit annually an approved services account and audit certificate.

Shipping Subsidies

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the time spent by the management consultants engaged by his Department to conduct studies to inform his shipping subsidies review in interviewing representatives of *(a)* P and O Scottish Ferries Ltd., *(b)* Streamline Shipping Co. Ltd. and *(c)* Orcargo Ltd. and *(d)* users of the bulk cargo shipping services to and from Orkney and Shetland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* None. This was a matter for the consultants.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to his Department of the consultant's inquiry into the shipping subsidy review in respect of the ferry services to northern and western isles.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* It was £137,500.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions officials of his Department discussed the future of the shipping subsidy scheme with representatives of *(a)* P and O Scottish Ferries Ltd., *(b)* Streamline Shipping Co. Ltd. and *(c)* Orcargo Ltd. after receipt of the report on the shipping subsidies review and prior to his announcement of the proposed new subsidy arrangements on 28 October; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Discussions took place on a number of occasions with a P and O Scottish Ferries Ltd about the operation of possible new subsidy arrangements in relation to passengers and accompanied cars. Prior to the decision to announce the withdrawal of freight subsidies with effect from 1 May 1995, information was obtained from P and O Scottish Ferries, the Streamline Shipping Group and Orcargo Ltd.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what notice was given by his Department inviting tenders to carry out the studies needed to inform his review of shipping subsidies in respect of the ferry services to Orkney, Shetland and the Western isles.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend on 26 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *587*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) where he indicated that the Scottish Office industry department would shortly be inviting tenders for the necessary studies. A number of suitable firms were subsequently invited to tender on 7 June 1993.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's planned expenditure on shipping subsidies on routes to and from Orkney and Shetland in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* In relation to 1994–95 I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend on 23 March 1994, *Official Report*, Column *237*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr Gallie). An announcement will be made in due course in relation to 1995–96 following the conclusion of the current public expenditure round.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Eight agencies have been established by my Department. In seven of them, civil servants previously doing comparable work were paid on the same pay bands as current chief executives. In the remaining case, there was no one single individual doing the job that the chief executive now has.

Non-domestic Rates

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total payment by his Department in respect of reduction of Scottish non-domestic rates in respect of each year since 1990–91; and from which budget the said payments were drawn.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The total amounts spent each year on the Government's unified business rates policy are as follows:

	£ million
1990–91	80
1991–92	100
1992–93	100
1993–94	100
1994–95	60
Total	440

Local authorities have been asked to contribute a total of £59 million towards the above sum by means of efficiency savings. The remainder of the sum was allocated by increasing the level of revenue support grant to offset the reduction in no-domestic rate income within the total of aggregate external finance payable to local authorities in the years in question. The Scottish Office contribution to this shift in the balance between RSG and NDR1 was funded from the Scottish block.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Terms of Protection Directive

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what manner he proposes to implement the EC terms of protection directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: It is intended to lay regulations implementing the EC directive on unfair terms in consumer contracts before Parliament before the end of the year.

Copier Contracts

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will make a statement on deceptive copier contracts;

(2) if he will enact the Office of Fair Trading recommendation in its report on unfair copier contract terms that a new proposal form should make clear all the information buyers need to evaluate quotations.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Director General of Fair Trading published a report on photocopier selling practices in March of this year. He announced that he would undertake a further review early in 1995, and we will consider in the light of the recommendations of this review whether further action by Government is necessary.

In the meantime, the Director General is continuing to monitor business practices in the photocopier sector closely.

Dual-use Goods

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made on the introduction of an EU-wide regulation covering export controls on certain dual-use goods and technologies.

Mr. Ian Taylor: In June 1994, member states agreed a text of a European regulation setting up a Community regime for the control of exports of dual-use goods. An associated inter-governmental decision in the form of a joint action under the common foreign and security policy provisions in the treaty on European Unity was also agreed. The decision covers a number of operational annexes listing controlled goods, destinations and guidelines to be taken into account by the authorities of all member states when considering export licence applications. The regulation and decision are due to apply on 1 January 1995.

In the period since June, member states have been finalising the contents of the annexes, and discussing practical aspects of the regulation with a view to ensuring uniform application throughout the Community.

The annexe to the decision listing controlled goods which will require a licence for export from the Community is lengthy and technical. The task of translating it into all Community languages is being undertaken primarily by the Commission's translation service in Brussels. A combination of last-minute changes to the contents of that annexe and difficulties in scheduling the translation has meant that the task is still unfinished. As a result, the formal adoption of the regulation and decision has been postponed from October.

The Commission has assured member states that all is being done to complete the translation work by the end of November, so that adoption can take place in early December, with implementation on 1 January 1995 as planned. We shall therefore know shortly if that timetable can be kept or whether implementation will have to be put back a little further in 1995.

European Funding

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount of money from *(a)* the European regional development fund and *(b)* the European social fund which has been paid in each financial year between 1988–89 and 1993–94 to (i) all agencies receiving those funds in the United Kingdom, (ii) all local authorities with the United Kingdom (iii) all urban development corporations within the United Kingdom and (iv) all training and enterprise councils with the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Post Office

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many responses he has received to his consultation document on the Post Office; and how many were in favour of full or partial privatisation.

Mr. Eggar: Some 15,400 responses were received on the Green Paper, including some 2,000 received after the close of the consultation period. The majority took the form of standard form letters and postcards issued by organisations campaigning against the Government's proposals. About 60 responses in total were positively in favour of full or partial privatisation, although a wide variety of views were expressed and not all letters could easily be categorised.

Marketing Your Business

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give the cost to his Department of producing the booklet "Marketing Your Business" in respect of *(a)* payments to consultants *(b)* printing costs and *(c)* other costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The business skills seminar workbook entitled "Marketing Your Business" was originally written on behalf of the Training Agency. The printing, publishing and sale of business skills seminar workbooks is licensed by Her Majesty's Stationery Office to Vector Business Development and involves no cost to my Department.

Overseas Investment

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide figures for *(a)* the value of overseas investment, *(b)* the number of projects created and *(c)* the number of jobs created by standard planning region, in each year since 1985.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The table sets out the number of inward investment decisions notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau and the number of total jobs these investments are expected to create and safeguard. These figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of the decision to invest and take no account of subsequent developments and are collected on a financial year basis. Figures for the value of this investment are not available since firms are not obliged to reveal this information.

Inward investment projects by year and region as notified to Invest in Britain Bureau 1985–1994

Year	*Region*	*Number of projects*	*Total new jobs*	*Total number of jobs safeguarded*
1985–86	East Midlands	23	1,114	20
	North East	26	2,223	2,263
	Northern Ireland	22	813	1,265
	North West	39	2,500	1,800
	Scotland	52	4,905	5,517
	South East	94	4,253	5,692
	South West	19	2,077	—
	Wales	47	2,862	1,277
	West Midlands	83	6,369	1,862
	Yorkshire/Humberside	15	2,270	2,995
Total for year		420	29,386	22,771
1986–87	East Midlands	10	382	—
	North East	38	2,553	2,040
	Northern Ireland	21	799	2,629
	North West	24	1,172	1,403
	Scotland	35	2,267	341
	South East	66	2,359	1,154
	South West	11	445	528
	Wales	64	3,807	2,752
	West Midlands	67	5,278	2,256
	Yorkshire/Humberside	20	368	418
Total for year		356	19,430	13,521
1987–88	East Anglia	2	28	23
	East Midlands	12	489	418
	North East	22	3,514	491
	Northern Ireland	16	1,050	1,662
	North West	33	1,955	6,235
	Scotland	56	5,514	4,378
	South East	59	10,057	6,502
	South West	11	908	250
	Wales	61	4,837	2,137
	West Midlands	64	3,538	7,161
	Yorkshire/Humberside	27	1,948	965
Total for year		363	33,838	30,222
1988–89	East Anglia	1	18	32
	East Midlands	22	1,422	1,838
	North East	37	2,786	503
	Northern Ireland	23	2,808	1,449
	North West	40	2,079	4,289
	Scotland	43	4,849	726
	South East	34	2,504	840
	South West	6	393	120
	Wales	45	4,995	1,234
	West Midlands	74	3,898	4,894
	Yorks/Humberside	23	1,810	146
Total for year		348	27,562	16.071
1989–90	East Anglia	3	300	20
	East Midlands	14	6,305	4,775
	North East	39	4,021	1,386
	Northern Ireland	23	1,956	9,459
	North West	60	3,076	10,016
	Scotland	35	7,828	569
	South East	15	780	550
	South West	6	1,498	40
	Wales	66	3,978	5,299
	West Midlands	95	7,237	8,541
	Yorkshire/Humberside	19	2,018	1,340
Total for year		375	38,997	41,995
1990–91	East Anglia	6	445	743
	East Midlands	12	1,689	372

Inward investment projects by year and region as notified to Invest in Britain Bureau 1985–1994

Year	Region	Number of projects	Total new jobs	Total number of jobs safeguarded
	North East	40	2,164	647
	Northern Ireland	20	923	1,820
	North West	67	2,279	9,258
	Scotland	40	5,701	928
	South East	17	805	24,422
	South West	3	580	—
	Wales	62	3,356	5,065
	West Midlands	71	4,618	7,514
	Yorkshire/Humberside	26	1,260	10,131
Total for year		364	23,820	60,900
1991–92	UK-wide	1	70	—
	East Anglia	11	591	4,210
	East Midlands	5	314	110
	North East	39	3,700	2,466
	Northern Ireland	11	364	732
	North West	75	1,501	8,481
	Scotland	38	3,884	891
	South East	29	1,166	2,227
	South West	9	2190	790
	Wales	71	5,195	5,634
	West Midlands	46	1,872	3,676
	Yorkshire/Humberside	17	1,656	1,806
Total for year		352	22,503	31,023
1992–93	East Anglia	8	363	10,632
	East Midlands	7	183	405
	North East	35	2,312	3,210
	Northern Ireland	12	2,742	1,357
	North West	27	992	2,783
	Scotland	61	4,497	4,198
	South East	20	1,212	6,128
	South West	7	285	995
	Wales	65	2,382	4,489
	West Midlands	43	1,568	2,669
	Yorkshire/Humberside	44	1,286	5,529
Total for year		329	17,822	42,395
1993–94	East Anglia	13	462	1,231
	East Midlands	22	3,218	210
	North East	38	2,256	3,981
	Northern Ireland	16	2,475	601
	North West	30	2,112	1,517
	Scotland	88	7,645	4,654
	South East	19	896	5,950
	South West	12	1,172	1,008
	Wales	64	3,913	2,651
	West Midlands	84	3,370	43,069
	Yorkshire/Humberside	40	2,329	3,998
Total for year		426	29,848	68,870

Licensed Premises

Mr. Tyler: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to propose legislation to ensure that leases for licensed premises are consistent with the treaty of Rome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: *[holding answer 24 November 1944]:* I assume that the hon. Member has in mind articles 85 and 86 of the treaty of Rome. These provisions are directly applicable in the United Kingdom and are enforceable by national courts. Legislation would therefore not be appropriate.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufamn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the salary and other emoluments of the civil servant who did the work of, or work comparable to that of, the chief executive of each next steps agency established by his Department before the agency was established.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The jobs are not the same and therefore comparisons are impossible.

Mineworkers Pension Scheme

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of reports that licensed mine owners are defaulting on pension contributions in order to deprive their employees of protected pension status in transferring to the industry-wide mineworkers pension scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Participating employers in the mineworkers' pension scheme are bound by the provisions of the scheme to pay over to British Coal all contributions by, or in respect of, their employees who are members of the MPS, for as long as they remain participating employers. It is for British Coal to collect such contributions and for the trustees of the MPS to establish whether a company has, for the purposes of the scheme, withdrawn as a participating employer.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will monitor the procedure for licensed miners to transfer to the industry-wide mineworkers pension scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* My Department has written to all participating employers in the mineworkers' pension scheme individually about the establishment of the new industry-wide mineworkers' pension scheme. Mine licensees participating in the MPS will owe a statutory duty to allow their employees who are participants in the MPS when the IWS-MPS is established to join the new scheme. My Department will be sending "Deeds of Adherence" to participating employers in the MPS shortly for their signature in order that they may become participating employers in the IWS-MPS.

Electricity Consumption

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will calculate average figures for the level of consumption of electricity required for heating for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Wales, *(e)* Northern Ireland and *(f)* the English regions.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Information on domestic electricity consumption for the main end uses—space heating, water heating, lights and appliances, and cooking—has been estimated by the Building Research Establishment for the housing stock of Great Britain, using the BRE housing model for energy statistics. The most recent estimates relate to 1991 and show the following distribution.

	Petajoules
Space heating	84.5
Water heating	41.4
Lights and appliances	190.8
Cooking	25.3
Total	342.0

Estimates of electricity use for heating by region are not available.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* My Department has conditions of service for staff which incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties, not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others, and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years, when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Identification Cards

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary for the Home Department (1) if he will list those European countries that currently have a system of compulsory identification cards; and which of these countries also have a written constitution;

(2) which European countries currently have a system of voluntary identification cards; and which of these countries also have a written constitution;

(3) which European countries do not have a system of voluntary or compulsory identification cards.

Mr. Maclean: Within the European Union, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg and Spain have compulsory identity cards. France, Italy and the Netherlands have voluntary schemes. Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom do not have identity card schemes. All except the United Kingdom have written constitutions.

Information about countries outside the European Union is not readily available.

Police (Best Practice)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures he is taking to ensure that all police forces operate best practice;

(2) what are the total estimated efficiency savings for the next five years from police operating best practice.

Mr. Maclean: The operation of good practice throughout the police service is encouraged by a variety of mechanisms which include regular publications, helpdesks and conferences. Other organisations, such as Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, the Audit Commission and the Association of Chief Police Officers have a valuable role to play in this process.

The process itself is both continuous and varied. It is, therefore, not possible to identify what efficiency savings might result in the next five years.

Criminal Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has made a decision to award the

contract for the back-record conversion of criminal records for input to the Phoenix system; if the successful contractor could carry out some of the work in a third-world country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I announced the award of the contract for Phoenix back record conversion on 8 July *Official Report,* Column *330-31.* None of the work will be carried out overseas. The project is now underway and is expected to be finished in 18 months.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation which permits embassies to access criminal records held on the police national computer; when he expects to announce his policy with respect to the wider access to criminal records; and if he will summarise the drawbacks of the practice of enforced subject access.

Mr. Maclean: While legislation would not be necessary to permit embassies to access criminal records held on the police national computer, there are no plans to do so. I hope to announce the results of our review of access to criminal records for employment vetting purposes in spring 1995.

Enforced subject access is widely criticised as an abuse of a right conferred by the Data Protection Act 1984 on individuals for other purposes.

Cumbria and Lancashire Constabularies

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his intention to promote the amalgamation of the Cumbria and Lancashire constabularies.

Mr. Maclean: No.

Intelligence Service

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish the report into the National Criminal Intelligence Service by Her Majesty's inspector Geoffrey Dear.

Mr. Maclean: Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary's report on the national criminal intelligence service was sent to chief officers of police, heads of regional crime squads and members of the NCIS standing committee on 9 November. To give the report a wider circulation would risk placing in the public domain information which could be of use to the criminal world.

Wheelclamping

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his current plans to bring forward proposals to control the off-street clamping of vehicles.

Mr. Maclean: Following the consultation process completed last year, the Government are considering what action it would be appropriate to take in respect of wheelclamping on private land. We will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Crewe Bridge

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations have been held with the police authorities before proposed closures of the Crewe bridge area of Nantwich road in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency.

Mr. Maclean: The Cheshire Constabulary has been involved in discussions concerning the closure of the Crewe bridge area of Nantwich road at various stages since the initial meeting held on 21 July 1993.

Haverigg Prison

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long Her Majesty's prison Haverigg has been a prison establishment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter form Mr. Derek Lewis to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 25 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the length of time Haverigg prison has been a Prison Service establishment.

The land on which Haverigg prison now stands was purchased in 1939 by the Air Ministry and was used as a wartime aerodrome. In 1966 it passed to the Prison Service who converted the site for use as a category C establishment.

The first governor was appointed on 3 July 1967 and the first inmates were received into the prison on Wednesday 22 November 1967.

Police, Cumbria

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on the new funding formula for Cumbria's police budget; and what will be the change in funding.

Mr. Maclean: The budget for Cumbria police is a matter for the Cumbria police authority.

We have listened very carefully to the many concerns which have been expressed about the version of the new funding formula for the police which was exemplified in September. We have substantially revised the formula.

Funding levels for police forces in 1995–96 will be issued shortly after the Budget statement.

Offences Against Children

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to require the notification of education and health authorities throughout the United Kingdom of persons convicted of offences against children and young persons and to ensure that all persons seeking employment involving contact with children and young persons are screened through a centrally held register of convicted persons.

Mr. Maclean: We are currently reviewing the arrangements in England and Wales for the protection of children and young people through criminal record checks—this review may be followed up by legislation—but checks are, of course, already available throughout the United Kingdom on those seeking to work in many areas of child care. Arrangements are in place for the police to inform employers involved in child care when an employee or volunteer receives a conviction or caution which could affect their suitability to work with children, and lists of individuals considered unsuitable to work with children are held centrally and can be consulted by employers.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many awards have been made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority in each of the tariff bands since 1 April;

(2) how much has been paid by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority to applicants since 1 April relating to applications made *(a)* before and *(b)* after 1 April;

(3) how much money has been spent on *(a)* administration and *(b)* awards to applicants by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority since 1 April;

(4) how many payments have been made or decided upon to applicants to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority for each month since 1 April for applications made *(a)* before and *(b)* after 1 April;

(5) how many claims for compensation the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority has received since 1 April.

Mr. Maclean: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority came into being on 1 April 1994 and is responsible only for applications for compensation received from this date. Applications received before 1 April 1994 are dealt with by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

The legal challenge to the introduction of the tariff scheme, which has not yet been finally resolved, had the practical effect of deferring the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority's consideration of cases lodged since 1 April for some months. Once it became clear that the legal challenge would take some time to resolve, the authority began offering awards on a provisional, without prejudice, basis in accordance with an undertaking given to the court when leave to apply for judicial review was granted. Claimants have three months in which to decide whether to accept the award offered, or whether to appeal against the authority's decision.

The following information has been provided by CICA and reflects the position as at 21 November 1994.

Breakdown of awards provisionally offered by tariff band since 1 April 1994

Band	*Value*	*Offered*
1	£1,000	120
2	£1,250	19
3	£1,500	87
4	£1,750	8
5	£2,000	46
6	£2,500	13
7	£3,000	71
8	£3,500	11
9	£4,000	9
10	£5,000	11
11	£6,000	5
12	£7,500	26
13	£10,000	2
14	£12,500	—
15	£15,000	1
16	£17,500	5
17	£20,000	2
18	£25,000	—
19	£30,000	—
20	£40,000	—
21	£50,000	—
22	£75,000	—
23	£100,000	—
24	£175,000	—
25	£25,000	1

The total amount paid by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board since 1 April 1994, in respect of applications lodged prior to that date, is £102,984,288. The amount paid by CICA, in respect of applications lodged on or after that date, is £325,421.

It is not possible to differentiate precisely as between expenditure on administration incurred by CICB, CICA and the appeals panel since, in the interests of administrative efficiency, economy and effectiveness, many of the same administrative staff serve all three bodies at different times according to need. However, total expenditure on administration in the period 1 April 1994 to 18 November 1994 was £9,631,332. The total value of awards offered to claimants under the tariff scheme is £1,392,750.

Breakdown of number of payments made by CICB and CICA since 1 April 1994

Month	*CICB*	*CICA*
April	2,229	—
May	3,214	—
June	6,106	—
July	3,157	—
August	2,140	—
September	4,509	—
October	4,109	3
November (1st–18th)	3,093	30

CICA has received 41,259 applications under the tariff scheme.

Drugs

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Italian nationals are currently being held in prison in Britain on drugs-related charges; and what plans there are for repatriating them to Italy to complete their sentences or to receive treatment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Gareth Wardell, dated 25 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners of Italian nationality imprisoned on drugs related charges and the plans that exist for them to be repatriated to Italy to complete their sentence or for them to receive medical treatment.

On 30 September 1994, there were four Italian nationals in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales under sentence for drugs offences excluding fine defaulters; a further two had no specific offence recorded.

The Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984 provides for the transfer of prisoners between the United Kingdom and foreign jurisdictions subject to the existence of an international agreement for this. Both the United Kingdom and Italy have ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the transfer of sentenced persons and this enables prisoners to transfer between the two jurisdictions in order to serve their sentences close to home.

Prisons (Privatisation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the present list of Her Majesty's prisons in England and Wales which are now under consideration for privatisation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 25 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about those prisons that are being considered for market testing.

We are not considering privatising any prisons. Privatisation means removing an activity from the sphere of the government responsibility with full responsibility and ownership, being transferred to private sector. That is not what we are doing with regard to the management of prisons. Contracts have been awarded to private companies for the management of for prisons: Wolds, Blakenhurst, Doncaster and Buckley Hall. The contracted out prisons remain part of the Prison Service: I am accountable to the Home Secretary four contracted out as well as directly managed prisons and the Home Secretary remains accountable to Parliament for them.

Six new prisons are to be built in the next few years using private sector finance. Sites have been identified in South Wales and Merseyside for the first two, which are expected to open in 1997–98 and tenders have been issued for contracts for the design, construction, management and finance of these prisons.

We are also considering twelve existing establishments with a view to selecting one or more of them for market testing. In-house bids will be allowed and therefore market testing may or may not lead to contracting out depending on whether the in-house bid is successful.

The twelve establishments are as follows:

Aylesbury	Huntercombe
Coldingley	Northallerton
Erlestoke	Reading
Everthorpe	Rochester
Feltham	Shepton Mallet
Hollesley Bay	Styal

Magistrates' Courts

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the most up-to-date annual figures for *(a)* the rate of conviction and *(b)* the average sentences for cases heard by Barking magistrates court relating to (i) all crimes of theft, (ii) all juvenile crimes and (iii) crimes of theft committed by juveniles;

(2) what are the most up-to-date figures for *(a)* the rate of conviction and *(b)* the average sentence for cases heard by Havering magistrates court in relation to (i) all crimes of theft, (ii) all juvenile crimes and (iii) crimes of theft committed by juveniles;

(3) what are the most up-to-date annual figures for *(a)* the rate of conviction and *(b)* the average sentence for cases heard by Redbridge magistrates court relating to (i) all crimes of theft, (ii) all juvenile crimes and (iii) crimes of theft committed by juveniles.

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1993 is given in the table.

Conviction rates and average sentence length (months) given for the offences of theft and handling stolen goods and all offences in the Barking, Havering and Redbridge Petty Sessional Divisions by age group, 1993

	Theft and handling stolen goods			All offences		
	10–17	18+	All ages	10–17	18+	All ages
Barking PSD						
Conviction rate (Per cent.)	75	52	52	36	61	61
Average sentence length (months	3.0	2.7	2.7	3.0	3.5	3.5
Havering PSD						
Conviction rate (Per cent.)	75	66	67	60	77	77
Average sentence length (months)	—	3.3	3.3	3.0	3.4	3.4
Redbridge PSD						
Conviction rate (Per cent.)	60	53	54	60	71	71
Average sentence length (Months)	—	3.0	3.0	3.7	3.6	3.7
England and Wales PSDs						
Conviction rate (Per cent.)	62	63	63	58	70	69
Average sentence length (Months)	3.9	3.0	3.1	3.8	3.2	3.2

All offences - Indictable, summary non-motoring and summary motoring.
Percentage based on less than 50 defendants and average sentence length based on less than 50 sentenced to immediate custody.

Prison Escapes

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* escapes and *(b)* escape attempts from prisons there have been for each of the last 12 months from gaols in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 25 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about escapes and escape attempts from prisons for each of the last 122 months from gaols in England and Wales.

This information is shown in the following table.

	Escapes	*Attempted Escapes*
November 1993	21	24
December 1993	27	36
January 1994	5	12
February 1994	10	18

	Escapes	Attempted Escapes
March 1994	5	8
April 1994	15	28
May 1994	10	15
June 1994	9	14
July 1994	21	6
August 1994	21	17
September 1994	24	17
October 1994	10	27
Total	178	222

Crime Victims

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who will be responsible for informing the victims of violent crime of the proposed home leave of their attackers;

(2) how the views of victims on the temporary release of their attackers will be taken into account; and on what grounds victims will be able to object;

(3) what plans he has to inform the offender of a victims successful objection against his temporary release; and what protection will subsequently be given to victims.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answers 22 November 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr Derek Lewis to Ms Ann Coffey, dated 25 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the consultation and notification of victims on application for temporary release and home leave.

As part of the current risk assessment to be carried out before a prisoner can be granted temporary release and home leave, current Instructions to Governors, CI 43/1992 and IG 70/1994, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library require the concerns and position of known victims and the community to be fully assessed. The Governor may write to the victim or may seek the assistance of the local probation service or the police to ascertain their view, depending on the circumstances of the case. In addition, from the beginning of next month, victims of crime can contact the Prison Service Victim Helpline and register their concerns which will be passed immediately to the prison concerned.

The views expressed by known victims will be taken fully into consideration by either the temporary release or home leave board set up to consider any initial application made by a prisoner. The recommendation of the Board is then submitted to the Governor who has responsibility for deciding the application.

Where the victim is at the address to which the prisoner intends being temporarily released and does not wish the prisoner to return there, the wishes of the victim must be respected and the application must be refused. Where the victim lives nearby or in the neighbourhood, the Governor must take full account of the concerns expressed and consider the extent to which any fears could be reduced if the application is granted. This might include making it a condition to the temporary release licence that the prisoner avoid certain areas or individuals.

Where the Governor decides to refuse an application for temporary release or home leave in the light of the concerns expressed by a victim, this is not disclosed to the prisoner.

The outcome of any application for temporary release in which a victim made representations would normally be made known to the victim either directly by the prison or by the probation service or police, depending on the circumstances of the case.

Police Cells

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of remand and convicted prisoners expected to be in police cells in Greater Manchester over Christmas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, dated 25 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the estimated number of remand and convicted prisoners expected to be in police cells in Greater Manchester over Christmas.

On 21 November this year there were 105 remand and 11 convicted prisoners in police cells in Greater Manchester. The number of prisoners held in police cells in Greater Manchester over Christmas will depend on how many prisoners are remanded or convicted by the courts during the preceding weeks. It is not possible to make a reliable forecast of this number.

DEFENCE

Royal Marines School of Music

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the cost of running over complement at units to which military personnel would be reassigned if the Royal Marines school of music were to be relocated to Portsmouth in each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000.

Mr. Soames: There would be no extra costs involved, since there would be no over-complementing at other sites as a result of the relocation. All the band service personnel at Deal would be reassigned within the new overall ceiling for the service of 358. The 79 service posts at Deal involved in administration and security would be lost on closure. There would, however, be no over-complementing elsewhere as the reductions would be managed by natural wastage within the Royal Marines.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the costs that would arise in each year from 1994–95 to 1996–97 if the Royal Marines school of music were to be relocated from Deal to Portsmouth, in respect of *(a)* planning and the proposed relocation, *(b)* relocation and installation of furniture, fittings and other equipment and *(c)* personnel.

Mr. Soames: Planning of the proposed move would be undertaken by existing staff at no extra cost. The physical costs of such a move would be approximately £35,000, incurred in financial year 1995–96. No extra service personnel costs would be incurred as a result of the move, since such transfers are anyway a part of the normal cycle of service life and are as applicable at Deal as they would be at Portsmouth.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what other options exist for utilising the Royal Naval detention quarters if the Royal Marines school of music does not relocate to Portsmouth; and what assessment he has made of the benefits of those other options.

Mr. Soames: No other options for using the Royal Naval detention quarters have been identified.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a fully costed requirement has been developed for building works which would be necessary at the Royal Naval detention quarters at Portsmouth if the Royal Marines school of music were to relocate there from Deal.

Mr. Soames: We would not expect the cost of building works to exceed the figure of £450,000 quoted in the consultative document.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the costs associated with efficiency losses that would be incurred as the Royal Marines school of music adapted to a new location if the proposed relocation to Portsmouth takes place.

Mr. Soames: It is not possible to cost the short-term disruption which would inevitably occur. Pre-planning will, however, keep this disruption to a minimum. The investment appraisal supporting our proposals does, however, demonstrate the large savings over the next five years of relocating the Royal Marines school of music from Deal.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the property management costs to be incurred at Portsmouth, of transferring the Royal Marines school of music from Deal in each year from 1995–96 to 1999–2000, with particular reference to the refurbishment of accommodation and the percentage of total current costs at Portsmouth that these figures represent.

Mr. Soames: In financial year 1995–96, £450,000 has been allowed for initial refurbishment costs. Thereafter, £47,000 per annum is allowed for continuing property management purposes. This represents 0·8 per cent. of the total current property management budget for HMS Nelson Portsmouth.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the running costs of buildings other than the Royal Naval detention quarters which would be incurred at Portsmouth in each year from 1995–96 to 1999–2000 if the Royal Marines school of music is moved from Deal; and what percentage of total costs at Portsmouth these costs represent.

Mr. Soames: For financial year 1995–96 costs are nil. From 1996–97 onwards, additional annual running costs at HMS Nelson attributable to the presence of Royal Marines school of music facilities in buildings other than the Royal Naval detention quarters amount to just over £40,000. This represents 0·1 per cent. of the total estimated running costs of HMS Nelson.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the manpower cost at Portsmouth of transferring the Royal Marines school of music from Deal in terms of *(a)* general administration, *(b)* supplies, *(c)* property management and maintenance, *(d)* catering and accommodation and *(e)* transport etc., in each year from 1995–96 to 1999–2000; and what percentage of total costs at Portsmouth in each year these figures represent.

Mr. Soames: HMS Nelson currently administers some 3,000 service personnel. The 34 service posts transferring with the school and the 27 civilian posts will carry out tasks specifically related to the school's training activities. Because of the very considerable size of the existing and projected Naval infrastructure in Portsmouth, no further posts under the headings set out in the question are envisaged as a result of the arrival of this comparatively very small music school organisation.

Royal Navy Detention Quarters

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the floor area of the Royal Naval detention quarters at Portsmouth.

Mr. Soames: The floor area of the Royal Naval detention quarters is 3102 sq. m.

RNAD Coulport

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether any handling, practice in handling or training exercises have been conducted with live or dummy Trident nuclear warheads in the explosives handling jetty at Royal Navy armaments depot Coulport; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what progress has been made in obtaining a full and complete nuclear safety case for the explosives handling jetty at RNAD Coulport;

(3) whether clearance for handling live nuclear warheads at the explosives handling jetty at RNAD Coulport has been obtained; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: All safety clearances for the explosives handling jetty at RNAD Coulport which are necessary to support HMS Vanguard's forthcoming deployment, including clearance to handle nuclear warheads, have been obtained. Comprehensive handling and training exercises using inert warheads have been undertaken in the jetty.

David Hart

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work Mr. David Hart is now doing in his Department.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the Answer that I gave the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 23 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *148*.

Retirement and Redundancies

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the numbers of *(a)* early retirements and *(b)* redundancies of civilian staff in his Department in each of the last five years; and what has been the total cost of the retirement and redundancy packages, including pension enhancements.

Mr. Freeman: Information on redundancy and early retirement numbers by year is set out below. The total cost of the redundancy package from 1989 to the end of 1993–94 financial year is some £78 million.

	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Early Retirement	153	146	381	585	399
Redundancy	886	1,522	1,853	2,421	2,639

Health Centre, Cambridge

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider the release of Army land near the Cambridge military hospital, Aldershot, for the establishment of a new health centre.

Mr. Soames: My Department would be happy to consider the release of suitable land for this purpose, although any disposal must of course take place on the open market.

Prohibited Air Space

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reports have been received since 1990 of infringements by aircraft of the Coulport-Faslane prohibited airspace.

Mr. Soames: Since 1990 three alleged infringements of the Coulport-Faslane prohibited airspace have been reported: two by military aircraft and one by a civil aircraft. In neither case of alleged infringement by military aircraft was a breach found to have taken place. The incident involving a civil aircraft occurred in June 1994 and is still being investigated by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Garelochhead Training Area

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of weapons which are authorised for *(a)* live firing and *(b)* inert firing in the Garelochhead training area; and if he will list the expenditure rates of each weapon type in the Garelochhead training area since 1990.

Mr. Soames: The weapons which are authorised for live and inert firing in the Garelochhead training area are as follows:

Weapon	Live	Inert
7.62 and 5.56mm Rifle	Yes	Yes
GPMG/LSW	Yes	Yes
Pistol	Yes	No
SMG	Yes	No
Shot guns	Yes	No
6mm LAW	Yes	No
94mm LAW	Yes	Sub-calibre mm round
Grenade	Yes	No
Explosive on demolitions range up to ¼lb charges only	Yes	No
Thuderflashes	Yes	No

Statistics are only available on expenditure rates from 1992 for live firing only and are as follows:

Expenditure rates per year since 1992

Weapon	Rate
1992	
7·62 mm	219,270
5·56 mm	308,490
9 mm	16,125
94 mm LAW	93
66 mm LAW	67
Grenade L2	943
Shotgun	3000 (Estimate)
Explosives in ½ lb charges	130 lbs (Estimate)
Thunderflashes	1000 (Estimate)
1993	
7·62 mm	76,400
5·56 mm	116,220
9 mm	414
94 mm LAW	79
66 mm LAW	274
Grenade L2	744
Shotgun	3000 (Estimate)
Explosives	130 lbs (Estimate)
Thunderflashes	1000 (Estimate)
1994	
7·62 mm	134,600
5·62 mm	85,490
9 mm	NIL
94 mm LAW	10
66 mm LAW	NIL
Grenade L2	207
Shotgun	3000 (Estimate)
Explosives	130 lbs (Estimate)
Thunderflashes	1000 (Estimate)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for *(a)* expansion of the boundaries of the Garelochhead training area and *(b)* changes to the types of training authorised on the Garelochhead training area.

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans at present to expand the boundaries of the Garelochhead training area, or to change the type of training carried out there.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reports have been received since 1990 of infringements by aircraft of the danger area over the Garelochhead training area.

Mr. Soames: None.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training man-days have been conducted on the Garelochhead training area in each year since 1988; and what is the capacity, in terms of annual training man-days of the training area.

Mr. Soames: The following training man-days have been conducted on the Garelochhead training area each year since 1988:

Year	
1988–89	71,967
1989–90	95,875
1990–91	71,929
1991–92	82,345
1992–93	102,866
1993–94	63,289
1994–95	[1]58,289

[1] To date the potential capacity in annual training man days of the training area is approximately 130,000, although this depends on the type of training, availability of personnel and weather conditions.

NATO Armaments Depot

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the peak tonnage of armaments stored at the NATO armaments depot, Glen Douglas *(a)* in 1990 and *(b)* in 1994.

Mr. Soames: The peak tonnage of armaments stored at the NATO armaments depot—Glen Douglas was approximately 21,500 tonnes in 1990 and 27,400 tonnes in 1994.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* United Kingdom civilians, *(b)* non-United Kingdom civilians, *(c)* United Kingdom military and *(d)* non-United Kingdom military personnel were employed at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation armaments depot, Glen Douglas, in 1990; what are the equivalent figures for 1994; and what are the planned employment levels for 1995.

Mr. Soames: The complemented posts for each year are shown in the table. The figures for 1995 do not allow for any changes which may be implemented as a result of defence costs study decisions.

	1990	*1994*	*1995*
United Kingdom civilians	97	117	117
Non-United Kingdom civilians	—	—	—
United Kingdom military	—	2	2
Non-United Kingdom military	19	—	—

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tonnage of armaments is being transferred to the NATO armaments depot, Glen Douglas, from other military establishments as a result of base closures and realignments; when he expects the transfers to be completed; and if he will list those categories of armaments for which Glen Douglas is now responsible.

Mr. Soames: Approximately 8,800 tonnes of armaments have been transferred into NATO armaments depot, Glen Douglas from RAF Chilmark, the final load arrived on 3 November 1994. Additionally, some 680 tonnes were transferred from RNAD Trecwn; that task is also complete. Consideration is being given to the transfer of a small amount of conventional ammunition from RNAD Beith to Glen Douglas as part of defence costs study proposals announced on 14 July, but final decisions have not yet been taken. NATO armaments depot, Glen Douglas holds a range of conventional armament stores, the main categories of which are shells, pyrotechnics, cartridges, bombs and rockets.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total expenditure on capital projects at the NATO armaments depot, Glen Douglas, in each year since 1985; and what proportion of these sums have been financed by NATO.

Mr. Soames: Figures for the past three financial years are as listed. Details for earlier years are no longer held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The figures include works costs, fees and VAT. All expenditure shown was recoverable from NATO with the exception of VAT, which is a national responsibility.

FY 1991–92 £	FY 1992–93 £	FY 1993–94 £
1,265,000	645,000	1,434,000

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total tonnage of armaments delivered into and out of the NATO armaments depot, Glen Douglas, in each year since 1990; and what proportion was transported by *(a)* road, *(b)* sea and *(c)* rail.

Mr. Soames: Approximate information is given in tonnes in the table. Overall, 3 per cent. was transported by road, 88 per cent. by sea and 9 per cent. by rail.

Year	*In*	*Out*	*Total*
1990	4,726	7,008	11,734
1991	1,809	10,988	12,797
1992	5,528	8,011	13,539
1993	2,516	5,458	7,974
1994[1]	11,238	4,208	15,446

[1] to the end of October

Goose Bay

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the amount paid to the Canadian Government in the financial year 1993–94 for Royal Air Force use of Canadian forces base Goose bay; what is the estimated amount payable for the financial year 1994–95; and if he will make a statement on the discrepancy between the figures for the period 1987–88 to 1992–93 provided to the hon. Member for Dumbarton on 25 October 1993, *Official Report,* column *489,* and those provided to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 21 January, *Official Report,* column *934.*

Mr. Soames: The amount paid in the financial year 1993–94 was £14,300,000 and it is estimated that £12,300,000 will be payable in 1994–95.

The figures provided to the hon. Member for Dumbarton reflected the actual payments made each year to the Canadian Government. The table of figures provided to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) was, however, based on the actual costs incurred in each financial year, as it would not otherwise have been possible to provide the information in the format requested. Payments to the Canadian Government are based on estimated costs, with the subsequent adjustments being made to reflect the actual costs involved. These adjustments sometimes have to be made after the financial year to which they relate, and it is this that primarily accounts for the difference between the two sets of figures provided.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Royal Air Force's future requirement for practice firing of forward-firing ordnance by aircraft deployed to Canadian forces base, Goose bay for training.

Mr. Soames: The Royal Air force has no plans at present to undertake such training at Goose bay, Labrador.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals have been submitted to the Canadian authorities for training using portable surface-to-air defence systems in the training areas at Goose bay, Labrador.

Mr. Soames: The possibility of RAF regiment Rapier units being deployed to the practice training area was discussed at a Goose bay users' meeting in 1993; consideration of this has, however, been deferred until after the completion of the Canadian federal environmental assessment review process.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training sorties were flown by Royal Air Force aircraft from Canadian forces base Goose bay in 1994; and by which types of aircraft.

Mr. Soames: RAF aircraft have flown 1,299 training sorties during the 1994 flying season at Goose bay—1,277 by Tornado GR1s and 22 by Hercules aircraft.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the national statement of requirements for facilities at Goose bay which was submitted to the Canadian authorities in 1991; and if he will list any changes made to the stated requirements since then.

Mr. Soames: It is not our practice to release internal planning documents of this kind.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Royal Air Force's requirements for ground-controlled interception training for aircrew deployed to Canadian forces base Goose bay.

Mr. Soames: The Royal Air Force has at present no plans to conduct ground-controlled interception training at Goose bay.

Clyde Submarine Base

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civil and *(b)* military personnel were employed at the Clyde submarine base in each year since 1990; and how many of the civil employees were engaged on construction work.

Mr. Soames: Estimated number of MOD civilians and shore-based military staff employed at the Clyde submarine base, Faslane, in each year since 1990 are as follows. The construction of the Trident facilities was carried out by contractors. There was only limited involvement of MOD civilian staff in this work, details of which are not held centrally.

Year	*Civilian personnel*	*Military personnel*
1990	2,183	1,581
1991	2,310	1,551
1992	2,224	1,486
1993	2,362	1,418
1994	2,460	1,357

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will seek to obtain from his American counterpart the evidence presented to the United States Department of Defence by Gulf war veterans of statistically significant rates of increased morbidity in children born to Gulf war veterans and of genetic deformations in offspring born to Gulf war veterans; and if he will institute an inquiry into the mortality and morbidity statistics of children born to British Gulf war veterans since they returned from service in the Gulf.

Mr. Soames: My Department remains in close contact with the United States authorities over all aspects relating to the alleged Gulf war illnesses. We are aware of claims of increased birth defects and childhood illnesses among the families of certain United States armed forces units and understand that these have been investigated by the appropriate authorities and shown to be unfounded. Wider statistics relating to birth defects reported by United States Gulf veterans indicate that the incidence of such defects is no higher than among the general population. In the United Kingdom, similarly, there is currently no evidence to suggest that the incidence of genetic defects and mortality among the children of Gulf veterans' families is any higher than the national average. We do, however, urge those who are concerned to come forward for assessment to allow us to increase the statistical and clinical database available to us.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available;

(2) which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Soames: A full list of non-departmental public bodies, in existence for each year since 1979, is available in the following publications: "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies", Pliatzky Report, Cm 7797, January 1980, "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: Facts and Figures 1980", and "Public Bodies", published annually from 1982. Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

For each year since 1986, lists have been prepared centrally of public bodies which have been created and abolished. Copies will be sent to the Libraries of both Houses. Such summary data for the years 1979 to 1985 were not prepared and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Medical Officers

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances it would be possible for a civilian junior hospital doctor with full medical registration to take up a post in a Royal Air Force medical centre as a Royal Air Force medical officer without attending the courses at RAF Cranwell, RAF Halton and RAF Farnborough.

Mr. Soames: None. Before a civilian junior hospital doctor with full medical registration can take up a post in a RAF medical centre as an RAF medical officer, he or she must attend a specialist entrant and re-entrant commissioning course at RAF Cranwell, followed by medical officer training at RAF Halton and RAF Farnborough.

Personal Weapons Test

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of all infantry personnel completed their annual personal weapons test in 1993–94; and what was the pass rate achieved by infantry soldiers.

Mr. Soames: In 1993–94, 93 per cent. of all infantry personnel completed the annual personal weapons test; the pass rate achieved by infantry soldiers was 91 per cent.

Fuses

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the orders, and their value, which have been placed by his Department for the L56 105mm fuse and the LS8 120 mm fuse, or their equivalents, since 1984.

Mr. Freeman: We have assumed that the question relates to the L56 and L58 fuse. No orders for these fuses, or any equivalent fuse, have been placed by my Department since 1984.

Western European Union

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards the Western European Union following the Noordwijk Council of Ministers meeting.

Mr. Soames: We remain committed to developing the Western European Union as the means to strengthen the European pillar of the alliance and as the defence component of the European Union. We shall continue to contribute to the development of its operational planning, and to other aspects of its work.

Future Large Aircraft

Dr. David Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart concerning the future large aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence met Mr. Leotard at Chartres on 18 November 1994, when they had a wide-ranging discussion on topics of mutual interest, including the future large aircraft.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of the senior British experts who are to study possible British participation in the future large aircraft; what will be their terms of reference; when they will start their study; and what time scale they will have before reporting their findings.

Mr. Freeman: The chief of defence procurement, Dr. Malcolm McIntosh, will be the senior British representative. The first meeting is expected to be early next month and the terms of reference for the study will be decided then. A date for the study report has yet to be decided.

Management Consultants

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which firms are currently hired by his Department to carry out management consultancy work.

Mr. Freeman: A central list of companies providing management consultancy work to my Department does not exist and could be drawn up only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to date of management consultants hired to analyse the privatisation of the royal dockyards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Payments made or outstanding specifically for management consultancy advice given on the proposed privatisation of the royal dockyards between 18 October 1993, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced our policy on the future management of the dockyards—*Official Report*, 18 October 1993, columns *39–41*—and 31 October 1994 total some £2·2 million.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards the use of management consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility and accountability for the employment of external management consultants have been largely delegated in my Department to budget holders at all levels. These budget holders take fully into account their obligations for the proper and economical use of their resources, including the use of competition, when considering in what circumstances and to what extent they should call on such services.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of management consultants hired by his Department in each of the past five years.

Mr. Freeman: Individual budget holders in my Department have delegated powers to employ external assistance as they think fit within the limit of their resources. No central figure for the costs of this assistance is available and one could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Trident

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the announcement by the United States' Deputy Defence Secretary, on 16 August, regarding United Kingdom plans to buy Trident D5 missiles.

Mr. Freeman: The statement attributed to the United States Defence Secretary concerned United States plans for its 1996 budget and referred to current United Kingdom planning assumptions. Final decisions have yet to be taken on further missile purchases.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest estimate of the cost of the total D5 missile purchases.

Mr. Freeman: The current total estimated cost of Trident D5 missile purchases is £1,275 million at 1993–94 prices.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been committed to the purchase of Trident D5 missiles from the United States to date.

Mr. Freeman: At the end of August 1994, some £718 million at outturn prices had been committed on the purchase of Trident D5 missiles from the United States.

Procurement

Dr. David Clark: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning European procurement co-operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department's policy concerning European procurement co-operation is set out in paragraphs 433 and 434 of the "statement on the Defence Estimates 1994," Cm 2550.

Gulf War Syndrome

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if members of the armed forces serving in the Gulf war were made aware of the medical implications

and side effects of taking nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets.

Mr. Soames: All United Kingdom military personnel routinely take part in nuclear, biological and chemical defence training. This training includes instruction on the purpose and proper administration of nerve agent pre-treatment set—NAPS—tablets. Specific reference to side- effects was not made during Operation Granby, since, when taken at the stated dose, side-effects occur only in a minority of individuals, are minor in nature and cease when the tablets are no longer taken. Instructions on the NAPS packet make clear that the stated dose should not be exceeded and this point is emphasised in training.

Nerve Agents

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets administered to members of the British armed forces in the Gulf war had been put through the normal medical trials; and if he will make a statement;

(2) What tests were carried out at the Chemical and Biological Weapons Establishment at Porton Down to analyse the effects of prolonged use of nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets.

Mr. Soames: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, under its framework document. I have asked its chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Dr. Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 25 November 1994:

QUESTION 25, ORDER PAPER DATED 22 NOVEMBER 1994

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what tests were carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down to analyse the effects of prolonged use of nerve agent pretreatment set tablets has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As such it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of medical countermeasures.

3. A number of studies were carried out using Service volunteers to evaluate the acceptability of using pyridostigmine bromide and whether such use had adverse side effects or was affected by the nature of the duties of the Service personnel. These studies which lasted for up to eight weeks included the assessment of the effects of NAPS on volunteers undergoing strenuous exercise and of a thermally stressful environment. No significant differences were found between subjects who had received a placebo and those who had received pyridostigmine bromide.

4. These studies concluded that pyridostigmine bromide in NAPS gives considerable protection against all organophosphorus nerve agents with no significant adverse effects. These results formed part of the Ministry of Defence's license application to the Medicines Control Agency which resulted in pyridostigmine bromide in NAPS being licenses under Product License Number 4537/0003.

QUESTION 24, ORDER PAPER DATED 22 NOVEMBER 1994

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if the nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets administered to members of the British Armed Forces in the Gulf War had been put through the normal medical trials, and if he will make a statement has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As such it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of medical countermeasures.

3. One of the current in-service medical countermeasures to nerve agents is the Nerve Agent Pretreatment Set (NAPS) which contains pyridostigmine bromide. This has been put through the normal medical trials and is a licensed drug. This only entered service after careful and considered evaluation. Following a series of animal studies pyridostigmine bromide was chosen for evaluation as an oral pre-treatment in man as it was a British Pharmacopoeial drug which appeared to combine efficacy and duration of action within an acceptable safety ratio.

4. Volunteer studies were carried out at CBDE to identify the effective oral dose regimen which in conjunction with therapy would provide protection against nerve agent poisoning whilst producing minimal or nil side effects under a range of conditions. The conclusion was that 8 hourly dosing with 30 mg of pyridostigmine bromide was acceptable.

5. Pyridostigmine bromide is listed in the British Pharmacopoeia and has been licensed in the United Kingdom since 1955 by Roche Products Limited as a treatment for myasthenia gravis, paralytic ileus and post-operative urinary retention. In adults with myasthenia gravis the usual daily dose is in the range 300-1200 mg, often over a period of many years or for life. The NAPS daily dose is 90 mg.

6. Pyridostigmine bromide is licensed to the Ministry of Defence by the Medicines Control Agency under Product License Number 4537/0003 for use in the pre-treatment of Service personnel at risk from poisoning from organophosphorus nerve agent.

TREASURY

Income Tax

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the net revenue forgone as a result of the reduction in personal income tax for higher rate taxpayers introduced by the Finance Act 1988; and what has been the total number of beneficiaries in each year, by region.

Sir George Young: Cutting tax rates has improved incentives at all levels and has encouraged entrepreneurial initiative upon which the nation depends. The figures in the table take no account of any behavioural changes resulting from the changes in the higher rates of tax. We believe that if the former higher rates of tax had continued fewer people would now have achieved incomes on which the higher rates would be payable.

Information for 1992–93 is given in the table. Figures for earlier years were given in the reply to the hon. Member on 17 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *970*. The table shows the direct revenue costs for a full year, compared with re-introduced tax rates of 45, 50, 55 and 60 per cent. The band widths for the tax rate schedule have been calculated by uprating the corresponding parts of the 1987–88 regime by movements in the retail prices index as in the statutory indexation formula. The estimates have been calculated to reflect only the changes in the higher rates of tax and exclude any effects of the introduction of independent taxation in 1990–91 and the restriction of mortgage interest relief to the basic rate from 1991–92. Some regional estimates are based on small samples and all amounts are given to the nearest £50 million.

Region of residence	Number of taxpayers benefiting and change in tax revenue resulting form abolition of rates in excess of 40 per cent. Numbers thousands	Amount £ million
North	40	100
Yorkshire and Humberside	70	200
North west	90	200
East Midlands	70	200
West Midlands	90	200
East Anglia	40	100
South east	620	2,300
South west	90	250
Wales	30	50
Scotland	80	200
Northern Ireland	20	50
United Kingdom[1]	1,240	3,900

[1] includes members of the forces and merchant navy and a small number of civil servants serving overseas who are not all allocated to regions.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* share transactions and *(b)* property transactions are recorded on which stamp duty was paid in the catchment area of each stamp duty office for the last three full years and in the first half of the current year.

Mr. Nelson: The following tables show the total number of transactions processed by local stamp office and, so far as figures are available, the number of callers using the public counter services.

Stamp duty Numbers of transactions processed	1992–93 Property	Securities	Other	Total	1992–93 Property	Securities	Other	Total
Belfast	49,884	5,257	17,692	72,833	52,952	4,664	15,122	72,738
Birmingham	173,015	98,661	3,455	275,131	102,441	118,326	14,816	235,583
Bristol	130,074	65,894	26,770	225,738	88,157	53,311	22,441	163,909
Cardiff	90,266	36,470	26,702	156,438	65,189	30,942	21,462	117,593
Edinburgh	90,209	163,736	28,375	282,320	50,245	118,728	18,929	187,902
Leeds[1]	159,708	34,936	34,533	234,177	96,113	30,332	39,144	167,589
Liverpool	139,092	93,060	23,630	255,782	87,096	86,886	12,765	186,747
London	194,132	727,416	315,803	1,237,351	179,489	771,319	136,761	1,087,569
Manchester	165,125	50,524	15,627	231,276	97,533	37,438	15,198	150,169
Newcastle	101,786	31,095	19,479	152,360	59,745	29,367	13,799	102,811
Nottingham[1]	159,751	15,897	25,897	201,545	88,300	14,211	31,843	134,354
Total	1,458,042	1,322,946	542,963	3,324,951	969,280	1,295,524	342,280	2,607,064

[1] Offices closed March 1993.

Stamp duty Numbers of transactions processed	1993–94 Property	Securities	Other	Total	1994–95 (Up to September) Property	Securities	Other	Total
Belfast	56,371	5,539	17,460	78,370	47,132	3,784	233	51,149
Birmingham	141,908	98,631	10,706	251,245	63,717	65,342	6,954	136,013
Bristol	120,311	76,119	31,446	227,876	72,518	49,739	12,098	134,355
Cardiff	86,702	35,304	26,233	148,239	55,436	16,632	3,463	75,531
Edinburgh	45,161	128,678	17,810	191,648	20,085	90,048	8,441	123,524
Leeds*	6,522	2,539	1,416	10,477	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	132,649	93,854	19,497	24,600	82,147	60,638	4,619	147,404
London	245,867	383,667	116,125	1,200,659	132,924	517,286	35,686	685,896
Manchester	158,115	68,153	26,779	253,047	83,097	42,785	10,368	136,190
Newcastle	89,197	38,284	16,796	144,277	63,066	18,005	3,671	84,762
Nottingham[1]	5,730	1,101	2,733	9,584	—	—	—	—
Total	1,087,533	1,386,869	287,001	2,761,403	625,032	864,259	85,533	1,574,924

[1] Offices closed March 1993

Counter customers	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95 (To September)
Belfast		13,084	13,818	5,605
Birmingham		10,389	11,171	5,979
Bristol		5,925	6,034	3,066
Cardiff		2,091	2,160	1,137
Edinburgh		10,884	10,625	5,705
Leeds[1]		4,164	329	—

Counter customers	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95 (To September)*
Liverpool		5,610	6,406	3,509
London		70,940	70,220	35,882
Manchester		9,390	9,787	5,108
Newcastle		3,927	4,159	2,063
Nottingham[1]		3,444	249	—
Total	—	140,848	134,958	68,094

[1] Offices closed March 1993

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury has abolished the following non-departmental public bodies since 1979:

Body	Year abolished
The Property Advisory Panel	1980
Committee to Review the Functioning of Financial Institutions (The Wilson Committee)	1980
National Economic Development Council and Office	1992

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Mr. Nelson: In each of the years requested my Department was responsible for the following number of non-departmental public bodies:

(a) 10 in 1978–79, as listed in the "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies" (Pliatzky Report Cm 7797, January 1980); and

(b) 9 in 1993, as shown in Public Bodies 1993 (including the Royal Mint Advisory Committee). In addition to those bodies shown in Public Bodies 1993, I also have some responsibility for making or approving appointments to a further 12 non-departmental public bodies.

Tobacco and Alcohol

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates his Department has made of the effect of tobacco duty on the family budgets of top, middle and lower-income families.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Data from the 1993 family expenditure survey suggest that top-income families spend around 1 to 2 per cent. of their total expenditure on tobacco, middle-income families spend around 2 to 3 per cent. and lower-income families around 3½ per cent. Duty is only part of the price of tobacco.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the new reliefs from, offers against, and exclusion from inheritance tax that he has announced since April 1992; and in each case what is the expected number of beneficiaries in a full year and the cost of the relief.

Sir George Young: The following changes to inheritance tax have been announced since April 1992:

Announced March 1993:

Extension from three years to four years of the qualifying period after death during which land and buildings may be sold and the sale price substituted for the value at death.

Where an estate contains investments with quotations that have been suspended within a year after death, the investment, if unsold, may be valued for inheritance tax purposes at the value one year after death.

Announced November 1993:

Extension from one year to three years of the period during which business and agricultural property gift in lifetime may be sold and replaced by the donee with similar qualifying property without loss of relief.

Announced January 1994:

Provisions relating to settlements without interest in possession not to apply to assets held by corporate Lloyd's underwriters in premiums trust funds or ancillary trust funds.

Each of those four measures has a negligible cost and the total cost is estimated at less than £5 million in a full year. About 200 estates benefit from the extended qualifying period for the sale of land and buildings. The remaining changes have very few beneficiaries. The has been no change to the inheritance tax threshold, which has remained at £150,000 since March 1992.

Third-World Debts

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been granted in tax relief to the United Kingdom banks against possible default on third-world debts in each of the last 10 years.

Sir George Young: Provisions by banks operating in the United Kingdom for doubtful sovereign debt—mostly of third-world countries but which may include relatively small amounts for other countries—are estimated to have reduced corporation tax receipts in the last eight years by the following amounts:

	£ million
1986–87	70
1987–88	190
1988–89	530
1989–90	510
1990–91	780
1991–92	120
1992–93	120
1993–94[1]	120

Estimates for earlier years are zero or small.
[1] Provisional.

Inflation

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the increase in inflation for the year to September 1994 was due to changes in the price of *(a)* food, *(b)* housing and *(c)* other factors.

Mr. Nelson: Contributions to changes in all items RPI over the 12 months to September 1994 are given in table 3 of the publication "Retail Prices Index September 1994", CSO Business Monitor MM23, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Airports (Customs Officers)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those United Kingdom airports receiving scheduled flights from abroad which do not have full-time customs staff stationed at the airport.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom airports which receive scheduled flights but do not have full-time customs staff stationed at the airport are as follows:

Blackpool
Cardiff Wales
Dundee
Humberside
Leeds/Bradford
Manston

EEC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the net gain or loss to Britain arising from EEC membership in *(a)* 1972–76, *(b)* 1977–81, *(c)* 1982–86, *(d)* 1987–91 and *(e)* 1992–93 in respect of budget contributions, additional food prices, manufactured trade with the EEC, total trade with the EEC and jobs.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. I have nothing to add to the replies that the Economic Secretary gave to the hon. Member on 17 March, *Official Report*, column *822* and 30 June *Official Report*, column *680* and the reply that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 18 May, *Official Report*, column *470* in answer to very similar questions from the hon. Member.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all those executive agencies regarded by Her Majesty's Government as unsuitable for privatisation.

Sir George Young: Privatisation is one of the options considered before agency status is agreed. The possibility of privatisation is reconsidered in all cases when an agency is reviewed, now normally every five years.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years, when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 28 November 1994

TREASURY

Overseas Debt

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much debt owed to Britain by severely indebted low-income countries has been cancelled since the introduction of the Trinidad terms in 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The amount of official bilateral debt owed to Britain by severely indebted low-income countries which has been cancelled since 1990 is £610 million.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much debt owed to Britain by severely indebted low-income countries since 1990 has been rescheduled.

Mr. Nelson: The amount of official bilateral debt owed to Britain by severely indebted low-income countries which has been rescheduled since 1990 is £1·7 billion.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much debt owed to Britain by developing countries has been rescheduled since 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The amount of official bilateral debt owed to Britain by developing countries which has been rescheduled since 1990 is £3·4 billion.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much debt owed to Britain by developing countries has been cancelled since the introduction of the Trinidad terms in 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The amount of official bilateral debt owed to Britain by developing countries which has been cancelled since 1990 is £712 million.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the countries of sub-Saharan Africa most in debt to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom's biggest sub-Saharan debtors are Nigeria, Zambia, Sudan, Tanzania, Gabon and Congo.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the debt owed to Britain by the severely indebted low-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa has been cancelled since 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The amount of official bilateral debt owed to Britain by severely indebted low-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa which has been cancelled since 1990 is £214 million.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the debt owed to Britain by the severely indebted low-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa has been rescheduled since 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The amount of official bilateral debt owed to Britain by severely indebted low-income countries of sub-Sarahan Africa which has been rescheduled since 1990 is £1·11 billion.

Share Settlements Systems

Mr. Cousin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce legislation to control share settlements systems, with particular reference to control of the exposure of holdings by market makers.

Mr. Nelson: Securities settlements systems are already governed by legislation, notably the Financial Services Act 1986 and the Companies Acts. New, computerised securities settlements systems such as CREST will require changes to the existing law. The Treasury is preparing regulations under section 207 of the Companies Act 1989 to allow such systems to operate. These regulations will not affect existing arrangements regarding control of the exposure of holdings by market makers.

Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those agencies expected to take full pay delegation by 1 April 1995; and if he will identify separately all those agencies that already have delegated responsibility for pay.

Sir George Young: The following civil service organisations are already negotiating the pay and conditions of their own staff:

Agricultural Development and Advisory Service
HM Customs and Excise
Defence Research Agency
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Driving Standards Agency
Employment Service
Fire Service College
Forensic Science Service
Health and Safety Executive
HM Prison Service
Her Majesty's Stationery Office
Inland Revenue
HM Land Registry
Meteorological Office
Ordnance Survey
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
Royal Mint
Scottish Prison Service
Social Security Benefits Agency
Social Security Contributions Agency
Social Security Information Technology Services Agency
Valuation Office Agency
Vehicle Inspectorate

The following are expected to do so from April 1995:

Child Support Agency
Highways Agency
Historic Scotland
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce
Meat Hygiene Service
Paymaster
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)
War Pensions Agency

Inland Revenue, Cumbernauld

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full-time and part-time staff are currently employed at the Inland Revenue office in Cumbernauld.

Sir George Young: The Inland Revenue employs 814 full-time and 260 part-time staff at the accounts office in Cumbernauld.

Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now bring up to date the import-home demand ratio as set out in ratio I in table 15.10 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" as published in 1987.

Mr. Nelson: It is the policy of the Central Statistical Office to publish and make available as much as possible of the data that it collects. Provisional data on import penetration will be included in the CSO's "Monthly Digest of Statistics" early in 1995.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when and in what form the summaries of the import penetration figures on an industry basis from the CSO-Taylor Neilson A6 new business series will be made available to hon. Members.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Copies of "UK Markets" produced by CSO and Taylor Nelson AGB will become available during December and will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett : To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 14 November 1994]:* Conditions of service for the staff of my Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity. Guidance for Ministers is set out in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers".

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the increase in VAT on fuel from April 1995 on the inflation rate.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* An increase of 2.9 per cent. in the retail prices index component index for gas would have the effect of adding around 0.05 percentage points to the percentage change over 12 months in the all items retail prices index.

EU Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the gross domestic product growth assumptions of each EU country on which his estimate of budget contributions was based.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* The growth assumptions are for the Community as a whole and are based on real growth of 2.5 per cent. per annum and inflation of 2.5 per cent. per annum over the period 1995 to 1999.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what EC membership his calculation of budget contributions were based.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* Twelve.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the *(a)* net contributions per capital and *(b)* the gross contributions per capita in each EU country after the raising of the VAT ceiling is in force.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* I presume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the proposed increase in the own resources ceiling.

The table shows each member state's net balance per capita to the 1993 Community budget.

Member States' Net Balances 1993 Community Budget

	Contributions Receipts	*(billion ecu)*	*Net*	*Net balance per capita (ecu)*
Belgium	2·4	2·5	-0·1	-10
Denmark	1·2	1·6	-0·4	-70
Germany	19·1	7·2	+11·8	+150
Greece	1·0	5·1	-4·1	-410
Spain	5·2	8·3	-3·1	-80
France	11·5	10·5	+1·0	+20
Ireland	0·6	2·9	-2·3	-700
Italy	10·3	8·7	+1·5	+30
Luxembourg	0·2	0·4	-0·2	-600
Netherlands	4·0	2·7	+1·3	+90
Portugal	0·9	3·4	-2·5	-240
United Kingdom	7·6	4·5	+3·1	+50
Allocation not applicable or available	—	6·3		
Total	64·0	64·2		

Source:
European Court of Auditors' Report for 1993.)
Notes:
+= net contributor
-= net recipient
"Allocation not applicable or available" refers mainly to development aid and administrative expenditure for the other institutions.

Future estimates would depend on what specific assumptions are made about the pattern of the European Community spending. I gave a broad assessment of likely developments in reply to the hon. Member for Moray

(Mrs. Ewing) on 24 November, *Official Report*, columns *353–54*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what assumptions about the sums agreed for the EU budget for each of the next five years, his assessment of the British net contribution in his letter to hon. Members was based.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* I presume that the hon. Member's intention was to ask on what assumptions my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's assessment was based.

My right hon. and learned Friend's assessment was based on the assumption that the European Community budget will fully utilise the own resources ceilings in each of the years 1995 to 1999. Assuming 2.5 per cent. annual inflation in the Community, 2.5 per cent. annual growth in real Community GNP, and an exchange rate of £1=1.30 ecu, the figures are as follows:

Own resources ceiling (EC12, assuming increases agreed at Edinburgh)

£ billion

1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
55·5	59·1	63·1	67·4	71·4

The own resources ceiling is a limit on the revenue the Community can call up from the member states, not an entitlement to spend or a target for spending. The Community budget is negotiated annually within the framework of the financial perspective. It is therefore more than possible that in practice annual budgets will be smaller than assumed for the purposes of this assessment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what assumptions of the allocations to Britain from the structural funds on which his estimate of the net United Kingdom contributions to the EC budget were based.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* The assumption underlying the latest forecast of the United Kingdom net contributions is that our receipts from the structural funds will average around 8.6 per cent. per year. The United Kingdom's allocation is expected to decline slowly over the period of the forecast reflecting the changes in the allocation of the structural funds agreed at Edinburgh.

TRANSPORT

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Dr. Mawhinney: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. Such costs are covered by the entertainment expenditure for this Department, which is published in the annual report, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Members' Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Dr. Mawhinney: This Department's Ministers intend to send 700 official Christmas cards at an anticipated cost of £668 to buy. Postage will cost approximately £175.00. The information regarding the cost in staff time to sign, address and place the cards in envelopes is not available.

I do not plan to place a sample copy of my official Christmas card in the Members' Library.

Driving Licences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which European countries currently do not have a system of photographs on driving licences;

(2) if he will list those European countries that currently have a system of photographs on driving licences, and indicate which of those countries have a written constitution.

Mr. Norris: All other member states of the European Union have driving licences with photographs. Most member states have some form of written instructions or legislation which could be regarded as a constitution.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the deadline for submissions on the consultation document "Photographs on Driving Licences"; and when the decision was taken to include photographs on driving licences.

Mr. Norris: The closing date for receiving comments as part of the consultation exercise is 30 November. We issued a press notice on 4 November 1991 announcing that photographs would be included on the British driving licence.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the study into the main legal, privacy and administrative issues, referred to on page 1 of his Department's consultation document "Photographs on Driving Licences".

Mr. Norris: The study report is commercial in confidence. But I have arranged for a copy of the management summary to be placed in the Library.

A27

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the figures available in respect of the origins and destinations and types of vehicles using the existing A27 from Polegate to Lewes on dates subsequent to 1 January 1990; what are the figures available in respect of projections made for the years 2000, 2005 and 2010 in respect of the origins, destinations and types of vehicles using (i) the existing A27 and (ii) the proposed improved A27; what feasibility studies are being made in the use of tunnelling in connection with the proposed new A27; and when these are due to be published.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 28 November 1994:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. Watts, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the proposed improvement of the A27 between Lewes and Polegate in East Sussex as the information requested relates to operational matters of the Highways Agency.

East Sussex County Council carried out traffic counts on the A27 and the surrounding road network during 1993 to enable us to compile information on the origins and destinations of vehicles using the A27 in the area. The raw data has been submitted to the Agency but it has not yet been analysed. A considerable amount of work will need to be done to translate the figures into 'readable' facts. I am therefore unable to supply you with the information you requested at this stage. I will arrange for it to be sent to you as soon as possible, but this is unlikely to be before the middle of next year. The data from this survey will be used to inform the detailed design stage.

Similarly, there are no future year projects available in the form requested. However, Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) flows have been predicted using 1990 traffic survey data. The attached table sets out the low growth (LG) and high growth (HG) figures for the A27 with and without the proposed improvement for the years you requested.

A proposal for a tunnel south of Mount Caburn was rejected as uneconomic and not without environmental problems in the preferred route statement issued in July 1993.

We have however, undertaken to look at measures to reduce the impact of the preferred route on the surrounding area during the detailed design stage. This will include considering alternative means of crossing the Glynde Reach at a lower level than the bridge included in the preferred route proposals. I am afraid it is too early to say when this work will be completed.

	24 Hour AADT Forecast Flows						
	1990	*2000*		*2005*		*2010*	
		LG	*HG*	*LG*	*HG*	*LG*	*HG*
A27 Preferred Route							
* Southerham–Beddingham	—	32,100	36,000	34,900	40,600	37,600	45,200
* Beddingham–Polegate Bypass	—	22,000	24,700	23,900	27,800	25,800	31,000
* Existing A27 near Selmeston	—	4,500	5,000	4,900	5,700	5,200	6,300
* Existing A27 near Wilmington	—	4,100	4,600	4,400	5,200	4,800	5,800
Do Minimum							
* Existing A27 Ranscombe Hill	21,250	31,600	35,300	34,300	39,900	37,000	44,500
* Existing A27 near Selmeston	15,100	22,450	25,100	24,400	28,350	26,250	31,600
* Existing A27 near Wilmington	15,100	22,450	25,100	24,400	28,350	26,250	31,600

A40

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the detrunking of the A40 through Cheltenham.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated 28 November 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Railways, Mr. Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the timing of an announcement regarding the detrunking of the A40 through Cheltenham.

As you know it is intended to detrunk the A40 through Cheltenham, and trunk the A436 from Shipton Solers to Air Balloon following the completion of the A417 Brockworth bypass which includes a new junction with the M5.

Earlier this year consultants reported on the improvements needed to enable the A436 to cater for the expected increase in traffic in the longer term. They also identified cost effective minor measures which can be implemented quickly. Discussions are now being held with Gloucestershire County Council on the procedures and agreements required to take forward the statutory trunking and detrunking orders, but I am not yet in a position to be able to say when these orders will be published.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East will receive the letter on air traffic control training in Kent, referred to in his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column 962.

Mr. Norris: I have written to the hon. Member today and have placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average and the median time his Department has taken to pay suppliers in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of bills it took more than six weeks to pay.

Mr. Norris: The average time taken to dispatch a payment document was 18 days, the median being 20 days. A total of 4.8 per cent. took more than six weeks to pay.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects final agreement between all interested parties involved with the west Yorkshire electrification scheme; what is the latest estimated total cost of the scheme; what were the previous estimated total costs; by whom rolling stock is to be supplied and at what cost; when the scheme is expected to be fully operational; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: These are matters for the West Yorkshire passenger transport executive, Railtrack and the train operating unit. However, I understand that discussions are in progress to determine the final scheme cost; that progressive completion and introduction of electric services are planned from spring 1995 onwards and that the PTE is exploring options with the rolling stock companies and other parties for the replacement of the class 308s which will operate the electric local services initially.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. Dorrell: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. Such costs are covered by my Department's entertainment expenditure, which is contained within the running costs expenditure published in its annual report.

The Department of National Heritage and its agencies have spent the following sums on official hospitality in the two years since the Department was set up:

	Department of National Heritage £	*Historic Royal Palaces Agency* £	*Royal Parks Agency* £
1992–93	22,037	17,690	1,032
1993–94	18,278	16,374	8,541

Sports Council

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he intends to appoint management consultants on the restructuring of the Sports Council, on the terms he envisaged in his statement of 8 July, *Official Report*, columns *584–86*.

Mr. Sproat: I am currently considering responses to the consultation on the Government's proposals set out in our 8 July statement. To assist me in this, I have asked the GB Sports Council to provide me with its own view of how its current functions and staffing might be realigned to take account of those proposals. In the light of my analysis, and this further work, I shall be taking final policy decisions and deciding on how these should be implemented.

Radio Authority

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many FM radio frequencies have been issued by the Radio Authority in the Greater London area; and what is the maximum number which may be issued.

Mr. Dorrell: The authority has awarded licences for 11 radio services to use FM frequencies in the Greater London area. The maximum number depends on frequency availability and on the operational characteristics and locations of the transmitters.

The Radio Authority has said that it does not envisage advertising any further London-wide licences in the foreseeable future, but intends to advertise more small-scale services for parts of the Greater London area over the next couple of years.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for ensuring that minutes of meetings of the Radio Authority are published.

Mr. Dorrell: None. Under the Broadcasting Act 1990, it is for the Radio Authority to determine its own procedures.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to ensure that a new radio frequency or frequencies can be allocated to a station or stations playing mainly young rock music.

Mr. Dorrell: None. The Government assign frequencies to the Radio Authority. Decisions on licences are a matter for the Radio Authority. Section 85 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, which describes the licensing functions of the Radio Authority, makes it clear that the authority must do all it can to secure a diversity of independent radio stations. Licence applicants are free to offer a young rock music format.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what report he has received from the Radio Authority as to its reasons for selecting Crystal and Virgin as the allocated stations for FM licences announced in March.

Mr. Dorrell: No report has been received. Licensing decisions are entirely matters for the Radio Authority.

Disabled Access

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with film exhibitors and cinemas proprietors about the provision of access for people with disabilities to cinemas in Britain.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has had informal discussions with the Cinema Exhibitors Association, which represents 95 per cent. of exhibitors on issues relating to access to cinemas for people with disabilities. The association responded to the consultation document on measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people published by the Government earlier this year.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list and date those occasions in the last two years when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Conditions of service for the staff of my Department and its agencies incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Housing (Maintenance Funding)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made as to the knock-on effects of his Department's proposals to introduce a new system for calculating the management and maintenance allowances for local authority housing upon the social security budget.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We are consulting local authorities on the housing revenue account subsidy determinations for 1995–96 and our proposals do not include changing the method of calculating the management and maintenance allowances.

Surveys

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of the surveys of "Public Attitudes to the Environment" and "Public Attitudes to Planning (and Development)", the rent-to-mortgage leaflet follow-up, the Home Improvement Agency client survey and "Wasting Energy Costs the Earth".

Mr. Robert B. Jones: A copy of the survey of public attitudes to the environment has been placed in the Library of the House. A copy of the rent-to-mortgage leaflet follow-up survey report and a full report of the Home Improvement Agency client satisfaction survey will be placed in the Library shortly. A summary of the latter survey's findings is included in the publication "Review of the Home Improvement Agency Grant Programme", a copy of which has been placed in the Library. Research for the report on public attitudes to planning and on the Wasting Energy Costs the Earth campaign has yet to be completed.

Homelessness Legislation

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to reform the homelessness legislation in England and Wales.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction told the House on 18 July, *Official Report*, columns *21-23*, we intend to introduce legislation when parliamentary time permits.

Single Regeneration Budget, Wirral

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what formal or informal conversations, or written correspondence, he or any of his staff have had with any of the Wirral's elected officers or officials on how the single regeneration budget might be spent in the Wirral.

Mr. Curry: Officials in the Government office for Merseyside held six meetings with officers of Wirral metropolitan borough council to discuss potential SRB bids, and wrote to the authority's chief executive in July with preliminary comments on the outline bids under consideration at the time.

Since the final bids were submitted in early September, no meetings or discussions have taken place and no indication has been given of the likely success or otherwise of individual bids.

One letter was sent to Wirral metropolitan borough council about the relationship between SRB bids and the European Union's urban initiative; and one of the bids has been referred to, but not discussed, in meetings and correspondence about the future of the Cammell Laird shipyard site.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost to public funds of the Local Government commission review into local government reorganisation to date; and if he will make a statement regarding its progress.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Local Government Commission for England incurred expenditure of £2·056 million in 1992–93 and £5·146 in 1993–94. We are making available grant in aid of some £8·300 million to the commission for 1994–95.

The commission has published final recommendations for 19 shire counties, of which three have been referred back to the commission for further review. Final reports on the remaining counties, including the three second reviews, are due to be submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of the year.

Ofwat

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what redress is available to a member of the public who is dissatisfied with an investigation carried out by Ofwat;

(2) what powers he has to review investigations carried out by Ofwat.

Mr. Atkins: The Director General of Water Services has a duty to consider any complaint made by a customer or potential customer which is referred to him by a customer service committee because it remains unresolved; he also has a duty to consider complaints from customers that a CSC has failed to perform any of its duties. The Secretary of State does not have powers to review investigations carried out by Ofwat, but the parliamentary ombudsman can investigate complaints of personal injustice resulting from Ofwat's administrative actions.

Canvey Island

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made with respect to the section 106 agreement with Aldersgate, in respect of land on Canvey Island; and when he will commence the promised public consultation prior to agreement being finalised.

Sir Paul Beresford: We will be writing to Aldersgate Developments and other interested parties shortly about the company's draft section 106 documents and the issues which they raise.

Overcrowding

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants are currently estimated to be living in overcrowded accommodation.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest estimate for England is that about 310,000 tenants had fewer bedrooms than the bedroom standard in 1993–94. This figure is from the

1993–94 survey of English housing and is subject to sampling error.

Estate Action

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he will take to maintain estate action funding should the funds available for these projects from the single regeneration budget be reduced.

Mr. Curry: All commitments under the estate action programme which has been subsumed within the single regeneration budget will continue to be honoured.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps the Government will be taking to ensure the completion of the flue gas desulphurisation fitting programmes *(a)* at Drax power station and *(b)* at Radcliffe power station, and the use of FGD at these power stations.

Mr. Atkins: Under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, a condition may be included in the authorisation for a power station, to require its operator to install FGD and to run it whenever that power station is operated, provided that to do so would not be excessively costly and that there is no other preferable technique of preventing or, failing that, minimising and rendering harmless releases of sulphur dioxide, having regard to costs and efficacy.

As I indicated in answer to the hon. Member on 22 November, *Official Report*, columns *66-67*, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is currently in discussion with the generators about their generating operations and improvement programmes for each station.

Housing

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many forms have to be completed by local housing associations applying for grants from the Housing Corporation to build affordable housing to meet local needs; and how many questions are on each form.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Four forms have to be completed by housing associations applying for project approval and grants from the Housing Corporation. A form is completed for each of the following: initial calculation to establish the grant rate for the scheme, application for project approval and grant, application for payment of grant, and the final grant claim. Each form is designed so that check marks can be placed in prepared boxes to ease completion. The first form comprises 14 questions, the second form 16, the third form four, and the fourth form has two questions relating to each house or flat in the scheme.

Electricity

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what part the Government expects Drax power station and Radcliffe power station to play in the market for providing clean electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Under the United Kingdom's national plan implementing the EC large combustion plants directive, each of the two generators in England and Wales is allocated an annual quota of maximum emissions of sulphur dioxides and oxides of nitrogen for the company's generating operations as a whole. Each company has the freedom to decide the distribution of its quotas between its individual power stations, taking account inter alia of market conditions, subject to meeting the conditions in individual site authorisations issued by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

As I indicated in answer to the hon. Member on 22 November, *Official Report*, columns *66–67*, HMIP is currently in discussion with the generators about its generating operations and improvement programmes for each station.

Water Metering

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many disconnections there have been in the London borough of Lewisham in the past 12 months; how many of these disconnections are attributable to water metering; and what is Thames Water Utilities' programme for water metering in Lewisham.

Mr. Atkins: Data on disconnections by local authority district and by charging method are not available centrally. The Director General of Water Services publishes data on disconnections twice a year, by water company area and by domestic and non-domestic customer. Data on disconnections in the six months to 30 September 1994 were published in an Ofwat news release on 15 November, a copy of which is in the Library. I understand that Thames Water Utilities has yet to decide on its preferred future method of charging domestic customers for water and sewerage services but has a policy of metering all commercial customers. Most water companies meter all new and substantially altered domestic properties.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

The Prime Minister: There are five special advisers in No. 10 Downing street.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points ranging from £19,503 to £67,609 or, in some cases, at a rate appropriate to a relevant civil service grade. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister how many official Christmas cards he intends to send out in 1994; and how much these will cost.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *89*.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to provide information via the Internet; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My office is currently studying options to provide information via the Internet.

Mohamed Al-Fayed

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the considerations which led the Cabinet Secretary not to interview Mohamed Al-Fayed in his investigations into allegations of improper behaviour by Government Ministers.

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet Secretary indicated his reasons in his report, which I published on 25 October 1994, *Official Report,* columns *521-22,* and I have nothing further to add.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if the Nolan committee will be interviewing Mohamed Al-Fayed in its examination of standards in public life; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: It is for the Committee on Standards in Public Life to decide whom it wishes to invite to give oral evidence.

Crown Appointments Commission

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister who are the current members of the Crown Appointments Commission.

The Prime Minister: The Crown Appointments Commission is a standing commission of the General Synod of the Church of England. Its membership is set out on page 38 of the current edition of the "Church of England Year Book", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Utility Regulators

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if he will review the powers of the *(a)* gas and *(b)* other utility regulators over boardroom salaries, shareholdings and perks.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* The utility regulators' role is to promote competition and operate price caps in areas of monopoly. Within this framework it is for each company and its shareholders to exercise control of board membership, pay and conditions.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Citizens Charter (Mr. Purnell)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what representations he has received from Mr. David Hernandez Purnell; and what was his response;

(2) if he will make a statement regarding the letter of 13 November to the Treasury Solicitor from a constituent of the hon. Member for Woolwich, a copy of which was forwarded to the citizens charter unit; and what assessment he has made of the conformity of Her Majesty's Government's action in this case with the spirit of the citizens charter.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Mr. Hernandez Purnell has been a frequent correspondent with Government Departments about the purchase of both his and his son's property by the Department of Transport. He has written over 400 letters to the Department of Transport alone. Further correspondence in which Mr. Hernandez Purnell himself has inquired about the role of the citizens charter in his complaint has been answered by officials from the citizens charter unit, and letters from the hon. Member of 3 and 22 September 1993 concerning Mr. Hernandez Purnell were replied to on 30 September 1993 by the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The citizens charter and the citizens charter unit have only an indirect role in Mr. Hernandez Purnell's dispute with the Department of Transport. The role of the citizens charter unit is to work with Departments in developing their services in line with the principles of the citizens charter, and to encourage good practice in doing this. When members of the public write to the citizens charter unit, the unit tries to ensure that a prompt, full and clear reply is sent. Ultimately, however, it is the responsibility of individual public sector organisations, including Government Departments, to ensure that their services are delivered to charter standards. Where—as in Mr. Hernandez Purnell's case—correspondence from a member of the public concerns a dispute about departmental policy which is also the subject of legal proceedings, it is not the role of the citizens charter unit to act as an intermediary.

EDUCATION

College Lecturers

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* further education and *(b)* higher education lecturers retired early on the grounds of ill-health in the last 10 financial years.

Mr. Boswell: The available data do not enable distinction between further or higher education lecturers and other teachers who retire on health grounds within the teachers' superannuation scheme.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time lecturers in colleges of further education there were in each salary grade in each local education authority or otherwise appropriate areas in the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her Department's estimate of the total funds necessary to undertake essential health and safety repair work at colleges of further education.

Mr. Boswell: A professional survey of college buildings when they left local authority control in 1993 estimated the cost of essential health and safety repair work at £136 million.

Nursery Education

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how she plans to finance the expansion of nursery education, targeted through standard spending assessment or specific grant for *(a)* buildings and *(b)* revenue funding; and is she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend is now consulting widely a range of interests in pre-school education with a view to drawing up detailed proposals on how to achieve the target for expansion of pre-school provision set by the Prime Minister. The need for additional funding will be determined as part of the development of these proposals.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

42. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what legal aid will be available for employees wishing to sue their employers if industrial injuries legislation is changed.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Legal aid is available to employees who qualify for help with their legal costs in pursuing a claim for damages against an employer through the courts. I cannot anticipate the outcome of any future legislative changes.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will consider making legal aid available to allow victims of crime or their families to seek appropriate professional advice.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Advice and assistance is already available to those financially eligible under the legal aid green form scheme.

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the latest annual figure paid for legal aid for non-United Kingdom citizens.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information sought is not collected.

Magistrates (Poppies)

46. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice his Department gives magistrates about wearing British Legion poppies in court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None. For myself I have always accepted the British Legion's suggestion that we should wear our poppies with pride and with humble appreciation, too, of those who made great sacrifices for our freedom.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by the Lord Chancellor's Department and Government agencies answerable to this Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. Such costs are covered by the entertainment expenditure for the Lord Chancellor's Department, which is contained in the running costs expenditure published in the annual report, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many official Christmas cards the Lord Chancellor and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much of these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card the Lord Chancellor intends to send this year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is as follows:

	Amount (Estimate)	*Purchase Price (Estimate)*	*Postage Cost (Estimate)*		*Cost in Staff Time*
			UK	*Overseas*	
Lord Chancellor	250	Own Purchase	£38	£33	Not available
Parliamentary Secretary		£12	£6	Not applicable	Not available
	50	£15 with VAT			

I will be placing a sample copy of the Christmas card the Lord Chancellor intends to send—when available—in the Member's Library.

Defamation

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans Her Majesty's Government have to reduce the cost and complexity of defamation proceedings.

Mr. Waller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he intends to bring forward legislation relating to the law of defamation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In December 1992, the Lord Chancellor announced his intention to introduce a number of reforms which we believe will be of great assistance to parties seeking speedy and economic disposals of defamation claims, and the reforms which could be achieved by amending rules of court have already been implemented. Also, we have made considerable progress in developing a precise framework for the further reforms foreshadowed in that statement and on which the Lord Chancellor intends to introduce legislation as soon as he has a suitable opportunity. These reforms include a new defence, recommended by a working group under the chairmanship of Lord Justice Neill, which will avoid the need for a trial if the defendant is prepared to offer amends and pay damages assessed by a judge.

In addition, there will be a new summary procedure, under which every defamation claim will come before the judge at an early stage. He will assess whether the claim is suitable for summary disposal, or whether it should go for trial, with or without a jury. He will have power on summary disposal to award damages up to a fixed ceiling. We believe that the procedure will help the parties to

clarify the real issues much earlier, and encourage sensible settlements, as well as providing a fast track for the disposal of straightforward claims.

Court Proceedings

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he will make available to the public, on request, cassette copies, at cost, of the whole or part of all tape recordings of court proceedings heard in public.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A member of the public who is not a party to an action may only have a transcript of recordings of court proceedings with the prior leave of a district judge in civil cases, and of a chief clerk in criminal cases. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are his responsibilities in relation to following up the crash of Pan Am 103 at Lockerbie.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None.

Barristers and Solicitors

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to encourage the closer working together of barristers and solicitors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Barristers and solicitors are members of the legal profession, which is independent of Government. It would, therefore, not be appropriate for either the Lord Chancellor or me to determine the closeness of their working arrangements. However, we would both wish to support any initiatives on the part of the legal profession which accord with the principles of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990, by making provision for new or better ways of providing legal services while maintaining the proper and efficient administration of justice.

Lawyers (Complaints)

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the time taken to answer complaints about lawyers by the appropriate legal bodies.

Mr. John. M. Taylor: The legal professions function independently of Government. I have no responsibility for monitoring the time taken to answer complaints made to bodies within the professions.

The Lord Chancellor is responsible for the appointment and monitoring of the legal services ombudsman, who investigates complaints about the manner in which complaints about lawyers made to the appropriate legal bodies have been, or are being, dealt with. This will include any complaints relating to time taken in investigation.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Norman Shaw North

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) what has been the cost of work on the three main lifts in the Norman Shaw north building over the last 12 months; who authorised that work; and on how many working days one or more of those lifts have been out of operation during the last year;

(2) what has been the cost of renovating the rear lift in the Norman Shaw north building; who authorised that work; and whether the lift has been working satisfactorily since the work was completed.

Mr. Ray Powell: All three lifts in Norman Shaw north were badly affected by a burst pipe which occurred on 10 October. Two electric motors had to be taken away for rewinding and there was a spate of other minor problems resulting from the flood damage, which altogether cost some £14,000 to repair. The annual maintenance cost for each lift is estimated to be £1,500. The information requested on the number of working days when the lifts did not operate could be compiled only at a disproportionate cost.

The cost of the work to replace the rear lift was £73,000. The work was approved by the Accommodation and Works Committee as part of the rolling programme of lift replacement and refurbishment. The contractor has had to correct several teething problems since the lift was installed, but I believe that these have been overcome and that normal service should now continue. The Director of Parliamentary Works is monitoring the situation carefully.

The combination of the planned lift replacement work on the rear and the unforeseen damage to the three main lifts has resulted in a poor lift service to users of the building over the past few months. Every effort is being made to ensure that a reliable service is provided in the future.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices, and official residences.

Mr. Heseltine: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. The DTI's expenditure on official hospitality since 1990 was published in the answer to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 26 October, column *654*.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department does not commission its own departmental Christmas card. Individual Ministers may choose to send cards. While specific lists of addressees have yet to be drawn up, it is expected that Ministers will send in the region of 500 cards at an expected average cost of 75p each. Cards for recipients within the United Kingdom will be sent second class. It

is not possible to predict accurately the amount of staff time that will be required to process the cards.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department employs three special advisers.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Insolvency Service

Ms Mowlam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what external legal advice he has received on the impact of privatisation of the Insolvency Service on the future disqualification and prosecution of bankrupts;

(2) what advice he has received in respect of the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 in the event of the privatisation of the Insolvency Service;

(3) if he will publish in full the report of the consultants Stoy Hayward into privatisation of the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1251-52*.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the efficacy of investigations begun by the Insolvency Service but completed in the private sector, in the event of privatisation of the service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Stoy Hayward Consulting reported that the contracting out of official receivers administrative functions would enable official receivers to concentrate more on their investigatory role. Under such arrangements investigations begun by contractors would be completed by official receivers.

Post Office

Mr. Cohen : To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total cost, including the cost of using consultants, of the review of possible privatisation in respect of the Post Office; and how much has been paid to each consultant.

Mr. Eggar: The Government announced their intention to privatise Parcelforce on 15 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *1137*, and announced the review of the structure and organisation of the Post Office on 29 July 1992. From those dates to the date of the Government's decision that they would not, for the present, be proceeding with legislation on the Post Office, a total of £1,613,002.28 was spent on consultancy advice. The cost of work undertaken by individual contractors is commercially confidential.

Machine Tool Industry

Mr. William O' Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last discussed the prospects of continuing investment in the machine tool industry with the leaders of that industry; and what concerns the leaders in that industry expressed about ensuring their competitiveness in the world markets.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Ministers and officials in the DTI have had close and continuing contact with the machine tool industry in recent years. The most important influence on investment is a stable economic climate based on low inflation. Inflation is now at its lowest level for 27 years and the output of the United Kingdom machine tool industry is about 15 per cent. higher than a year ago.

We have also discussed with the industry's trade association, the Machine Tool Technologies Association—MTTA—ways to improve the overall competitiveness of the industry. We are presently working with the MTTA and other associations to produce guidance for small manufacturing firms which will enable them to improve the overall quality of investment. This was an initiative referred to in the White Paper "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win", Cm 2563.

Manufacturing

Mr. Sainsbury: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the effect on manufacturing employment of manufacturing businesses contracting out to other firms, classified as service businesses, activities such as transport, catering and cleaning.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Central Statistical Office has estimated that manufacturing employment might have been up to three quarters of a million higher than recorded in 1989 had manufacturers' purchases of non-industrial services as a proportion of total sales remained at 1973 levels—"Changes in the structure of manufacturing industry 1973–1989 as measured by the annual Census of Production", *Economic Trends*, No. 462 April 1992.

Steel

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which EC member states increased steel production between 1988 and 1992; and by how much production and employment fell in the United Kingdom steel industry during this period.

Mr. Eggar: Crude steel production in Italy and Spain increased by 4.5 per cent. and 3 per cent. respectively between 1988 and 1992. In the United Kingdom steel industry production fell by 14.5 per cent. and employment fell by 26 per cent. over the same period.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the numbers employed in the steel industries of EC member states in 1975, 1981, 1987 and 1993 with the percentage change in the numbers employed since 1975.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is in the table.

Employment in the steel industry of EC member states

Country	1975	1981	1987	1993	percentage change 1975–1993
		thousands			
Germany	222.0	187.0	133.3	110.3	–50.3
Italy	96.0	96.0	60.7	49.3	–48.6
France	156.0	97.0	57.6	40.5	–74.0
United Kingdom	185.3	88.0	54.9	39.2	–78.8
Spain	b	b	44.8	27.3	b
Belgium	59.0	45.0	28.6	24.0	–59.3
Netherlands	25.0	21.0	18.5	13.5	–46.0
Luxembourg	21.0	14.0	11.4	7.1	–66.2
Portugal	b	b	5.7	3.1	b
Greece	a	a	4.0	2.9	a
Denmark	3.0	2.0	1.5	1.1	–63.3
Ireland	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.6	–40.0

Source:
Eurostat.
Notes:
a) EC member from 1/1/82.
b) EC member from 1/1/87.
Employment figures are as at end of year.
Steel industry as defined under treaty of Paris, 1951.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he proposes to take to assist the British steel industry in view of the nature of the support by other member states and of their industries; and if he will make a statement on the enforcement of articles 4 and 95 of the treaty.

Mr. Eggar: The best way in which the Government can assist the industry is to work for an international market in which the highly efficient United Kingdom steel industry can trade freely and without unfair competition. The Government will continue to press the Commission to enforce the state aid rules rigorously and to take action against any breaches.

Foreign Investment in Europe

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the British share of *(a)* American investment in Europe in each year since 1964 and *(b)* all non-European investment in Europe over the same time period.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Table 1 sets out the United Kingdom's share of American investment in Europe since 1964. The remaining information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. This is because data are not available on a consistent basis for the entire period requested.

From sources readily available within the Department it would require converting data from national currencies to a common currency for each year and obtaining data from "National Statistical Sources".

Table 1. Annual capital flows for US direct investment abroad

	United Kingdom	Europe	United Kingdom share
	$ millions		per cent.
1964	381	1,796	21.2
1965	559	1,867	29.9
1966	477	2,249	21.2
1967	519	1,858	27.9
1968	686	1,601	42.8
1969	535	2,251	23.8

Table 1. Annual capital flows for US direct investment abroad

	United Kingdom	Europe	United Kingdom share
	$ millians		per cent.
1970	893	3,030	29.5
1971	1,113	3,424	32.5
1972	492	3,030	16.2
1973	1,409	6,577	21.4
1974	1,469	6,432	22.8
1975	1,420	4,584	31.0
1976	1,157	5,492	21.1
1977	1,831	5,289	34.6
1978	2,596	7,820	33.2
1979	4,073	12,259	33.2
1980	4,797	13,011	36.9
1981	1,989	5,278	37.7
1982	754	3,470	21.7
1983	1,385	5,122	27.0
1984	3,052	5,578	54.7
1985	3,147	7,573	41.6
1986	2,259	7,292	31.0
1987	2,559	11,397	22.5
1988	4,170	7,854	53.1
1989	11,825	23,679	49.9
1990	–202	10,194	*
1991	4,665	19,583	23.8
1992	6,068	17,882	33.9
1993	13,886	30,023	46.3

Source:
US Department of Commerce.
Bureau of Economic Analysis.
**Note:*
Direct investment capital flows measure the net funds flowing between US parent companies and their foreign affiliates in a given period; therefore they are negative when funds are flowing back to the United States, on net.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his plans to introduce legislation to implement the chemical weapons convention.

Mr. Heseltine: The United kingdom remains committed to the chemical weapons convention and

legislation to facilitate its ratification will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time and other Government legislative priorities permit.

Electricity

Mr. David Howell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the varying pattern of domestic electricity prices throughout England and Wales; and if he will publish a table giving the information he has received from the electricity distribution companies, as to their plans for price reductions to domestic consumers during the coming year and the part played by additional funds paid in advance before the levying of VAT on electricity, as from April of this year, in enabling electricity authorities to reduce their prices.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Domestic electricity prices are subject to certain price control formulae set by the Director General of Electricity Supply. The price controls are set on a comparable basis for each regional electricity company—REC—but take into account variations such as local conditions and the different customer bases in each region.

The plans for future electricity tariffs are a commercial matter for the public electricity suppliers, although all such suppliers will need to take the price controls into account when setting their tariffs.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Pensions

31. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what provision the Commissioners make for pensions for those in service of the Church of England.

Mr. Alison: The security of existing clergy pensions is not at issue, as the value of the Commissioners' assets comfortably exceeds the accrued pension liabilities for retired clergy and those currently in active service. Separate funding arrangements are in place to pay the pensions of lay employees of the Church of England.

The Commissioners and the pensions board are discussing with dioceses proposals for funding pension liabilities arising from the future service of clergy on a more sustainable basis involving contributions. This will help secure the Commissioners' continuing ability to help the Church in other ways.

Remunerated Clergy

32. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what is the number of remunerated clergy who have *(a)* retired from, *(b)* resigned from and *(c)* joined the payroll of the Church of England in the last 12 months.

Mr. Alison: Since 1 January 1994, 364 stipendiary clergy have retired, 440 have resigned and 465 have joined the Commissioners' payroll.

Lambeth Report

34. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners if all the recommendations contained in the Lambeth report have now been implemented.

Mr. Alison: The implementation of the Lambeth report recommendations was overseen by a steering group of governors appointed by the board of the Commissioners. This will shortly report to the board that all the recommendations either have been implemented or, as in the case of arrangements for the future funding of clergy pensions, are being vigorously pursued.

Assets

35. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what is the current value of the total assets of the Church Commissioners.

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners' assets are revalued once a year. As at 31 December 1993 the total net value of the assets was £2,420 million.

Investments

36. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what percentage of investments are held in companies which are specifically recognised by investment trusts and others buying and selling stocks and shares as ethically and environmentally acceptable.

Mr. Alison: All our company holdings are subject to our ethical criteria, which are reviewed from time to time.

Investments (Profit)

37. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners how much profit the Church Commissioners have made this year from investments.

Mr. Alison: Our estimated income for 1994 is £143 million. The assets are revalued at the end of each year, and therefore it is too early to say what changes in value may have occurred by then.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Sir John Wheeler: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available but I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 25 October 1994, regarding spending on hospitality, *Official Report*, column *543*.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Sir John Wheeler: Ministers representing the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments estimate they will be sending 2,525 Christmas cards at a cost of £2,048 to buy and £498 to post.

The cost in staff time to sign, address and envelope is not available.

A sample copy of the Christmas cards will be placed in the Library when available.

Irish Republic (President's Visit)

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if public funds were involved in the most recent visit of the President of the Irish Republic to Northern Ireland; and which of the bodies inviting her are in receipt of public funds;

(2) when Her Majesty's Government were first informed of the most recent visit of the President of the Irish Republic to Northern Ireland; and when her precise itinerary was disclosed;

(3) if he will list the engagements of the President of the Irish Republic on the occasion of her most recent visit to Northern Ireland, indicating those engagements which were purely private and those which were of a public character;

(4) what was the date of the most recent visit of the President of the Irish Republic to Northern Ireland; and whether it was a public visit or a private visit.

Sir John Wheeler: The President of the Republic of Ireland paid a private working visit to Northern Ireland on 15 and 16 November 1994 where she attended the 1550th anniversary service to mark the establishment of Christianity in Ireland at St. Patrick's Church of Ireland cathedral, Armagh; a conference of European student unions on equality of opportunity in higher education at the Wellington Park hotel, Belfast; visited Hazelwood college, Belfast and a resident at Bethany nursing home, Belfast. All of these visits were in response to private invitations; the church service was also a public act of worship.

Apart from the usual security requirements no public funds were expended on the visit. Hazelwood college is funded by the Department of Education.

Her Majesty's Government were first advised of President Robinson's visit on 25 May 1993 and the final itinerary confirmed on 7 November 1994.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of Newcastle disease were identified in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: Newcastle disease occurred in Northern Ireland in 1991, when six cases were identified.

Quangos

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to Dr. Tony Wright by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 1 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *611*.

In addition to the information in the publications mentioned in that reply the following non-departmental public bodies have ceased to exist since 1986:

1986

Charities Advisory Committee

1987

Advisory Body on Community Work
NI UNESCO Committee
Land Law Working Group
NI Health and Social Services Council

1988

Police Complaints Board—*replaced* by Independent Commission for Police Complaints for NI
Advisory Committee on Teachers Education
Therapeutic Paramedical Advisory Committee
Medical Boards

1989

NI Council for Educational Research
NI Business and Technical Education Council
NI Council for Educational Development
Teachers' Negotiating Machinery Committees—decreased from 4 to 3

1990

Further Education Appeals Board
NI Schools Examination Council
Centre for Learning Resources Management Committee
Committee for Nature Conservation*
Ulster Countryside Commission*
—* combined to become Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

1991

Advisory Board for Postgraduate Awards
Committee for Centre for Education Management
Council for Continuing Education
5 Industrial Training Boards
Manpower Council
NI Training Authority—functions were taken over by the Training and Employment Agency
Youth Committee for NI—became the Youth Council for NI

1992

Road Transport Industry Training Board
Textiles Industry Training Board
Ulster Savings Committee
Accommodation Grants Advisory Committee

1993

NI Electricity Board then NI Electricity Plc—now privatised
Attendance Allowance Board—*replaced* by Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board

1994

9 Wage Councils
NI Schools Examinations and Assessment Council*
NI Curriculum Council*
—* combined to become NI Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment.

Summary data for the years 1979 to 1985 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many quangos his Department was responsible for *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which a number is available.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 25 November 1994]: (a)* My right hon. and learned Friend was responsible for a total of 132 non-departmental bodies in 1979 as listed in the "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies"—Pliatzky Report Cm 7797, January 1980; and

(b) in 1993 he was responsible for 108 non-departmental public bodies as listed in "Public Bodies 1993".

Education Costs

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the annual costs to *(a)* the Department for Education and *(b)* education and library boards in Northern Ireland related to the transfer procedure in each of the last three years for which records are available.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	£ 000		
	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Department of Education	143	156	246
Education and Library Boards[1]	454	485	508

[1] Excludes teacher substitution for the completion of transfer report forms, which cannot be identified separately but includes the cost of appeals regarding placements in grammar and non-grammar secondary schools.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been received alleging the failure of the Hong Kong administration effectively to enforce national wildlife laws and implement the convention on international trade in endangered species, and what has been the response.

Mr. Goodlad: In the past year we have received representations from members of the public responding to non-governmental organisations letter campaigns, and representations from the following NGOs:

Naturewatch—Rhino horn and ivory sales

World Wide Fund for Nature—Sale of rhino, tiger and bear parts

Traffic international—Sale of rhino and tiger products

Environmental Investigation Agency—Sale of bear products and rhino horn.

The EIA met with the Governor of Hong Kong in London to ask for a dedicated wildlife enforcement unit to be created. It wrote to the Governor in October, again requesting the setting up of a specialised unit. We received a similar request in two early-day motions, 22 and 59.

Hong Kong set up an endangered species protection liaison group in November 1993 to co-ordinate and implement actions in enforcing national wildlife laws and implementing CITES. The group has access to the resources and expertise of all enforcement and policy agencies, including under cover capability. Should circumstances change, or if any evidence of wholesale trafficking should come to light, Hong Kong will look again at the idea of whether a specialised unit should be set up, and whether it would do the job better.

The Hong Kong Government are keen to work with NGOs, and is currently liaising with Traffic on a study into Hong Kong's position in the Asian medicine trade. The Hong Kong Government take seriously representations alleging CITES abuses, and follow up evidence that is supplied.

Serbia (Sanctions)

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy regarding financial and practical assistance to Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria in consequence of sanctions against Serbia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The effect of sanctions against former Yugoslavia on neighbouring states is difficult to quantify. Assistance is best directed at helping their economies adapt to their changed circumstances. In our view, the international financial institutions, especially the International Monetary Fund, are best placed to assess the damage caused by sanctions and take account of it in their programmes. Romania and Bulgaria have active programmes with the IMF. We also support other multilateral and bilateral efforts, including those of the United Kingdom's know-how fund, aimed at assisting the change to a market economy.

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the impact upon the Kurdish areas of the current policy of sanctions upon Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We recognise that United Nations sanctions have had a debilitating effect on Iraq. The situation is particularly severe in the Kurdish occupied areas in the north and the southern marshes where the Iraqi regime has also imposed internal economic embargoes. Nevertheless, the Kurdish leadership supports the need to maintain sanctions until Iraq is in compliance with all relevant resolutions. Given the internal embargo, the north is a particular focus for the international aid effort.

Western European Union (Danube Mission)

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many personnel are assigned to the WEU mission on the Danube from each WEU member state, distinguishing between those at Mohacs, Calafat and Ruse.

Mr. Goodlad: The latest available statistics relate to the situation on 1 October. On this date, there were 34 German, seven Dutch, five Luxembourg, five Italian and two British officers in the Mohacs area; 74 Italian, six German, 20 French, 13 Dutch and three Spanish officers in Calafat; and 47 Spanish and 32 German officers in Ruse.

Bulgaria

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the Government's policy to assist Bulgaria with measures to help ensure higher safety standards for Bulgarian nuclear energy installations; and what plans he has to provide Bulgaria with new forms of financial assistance to achieve this.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government support international efforts to improve nuclear safety in Bulgaria, through both the European Union and the nuclear safety account managed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Projects for Kozloduy nuclear power plant total some 30 mecu and 24 mecu respectively. The United Kingdom has also provided some bilateral assistance to Bulgaria in the form of emergency preparedness, studies and training. No new forms of financial assistance in this area are currently being considered.

Entry Clearance Applications

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that copies of the list of posts designated to accept entry clearance applications are placed in the Libraries of the House each time the list is revised.

Mr. Baldry: Yes. Amended lists are presented to the Libraries of both Houses following each revision, which will normally be made twice yearly. I have arranged for the latest lists to be placed in the Libraries today. Members of the public may obtain copies from the migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Government Hospitality Fund

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22

November, *Official Report*, column *109*, if he will list the operational budget of the Government hospitality fund and staff levels for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Goodlad: The operational budget of the Government hospitality fund and staff levels for each of the last 10 years are as follows:

Year	*Budget*	*Staff levels*
1984–85	730,000	26
1985–86	844,000	26
1986–87	945,000	26
1987–88	808,000	26
1988–89	908,000	26
1989–90	1,217,000	26
1990–91	1,099,000	26
1991–92	1,117.000	26
1992–93	1,152,000	26
1993–94	1,337,000	26

The cost of visits in 1993–94 rose as a consequence of visits made by Ministers from the new nations emerging in the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *110*, if he will provide a departmental breakdown of *(a)* hospitality and *(b)* visits costs in each of the last five years.

Mr. Goodlad: The Government hospitality fund provides official hospitality on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, not on behalf of Departments. All invitations for hospitality and visits are issued in the name of Her Majesty's Government.

Arms Sales, Indonesia

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total value of arms sales to Indonesia since 1979 and the amount for each individual year.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

It is not Government policy to reveal details of the value of arms exports to individual countries. Details of the value of exports by geographic region are contained in table 1.11 of United Kingdom defence statistics. A copy of the 1994 edition has been placed in the House Library. In addition, the United Kingdom's annual return to the UN arms register provides information on transfers of equipment within certain broad categories.

Death Penalty

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries of the British Commonwealth still retain the death penalty; and what was the number of people in each country under sentence of death on 16 November.

Mr. Baldry: The information is as follows:

Commonwealth Country	*Numbers*	*Comments*
Antigua	1	
The Bahamas	32	No executions since 1984
Bangladesh	Unavailable	
Barbados	17	
Belize	8	
Botswana	7	No executions since 1987
Britain	—	Applies only to treason and piracy with violation
Brunei	5	
Dominica	4	
Ghana	Unavailable	
Grenada	—	
Guyana	18	
India	86	
Jamaica	128	No executions since 1988
Kenya	568	No executions since 1984
Lesotho	2	
Malawi	—	
Malaysia	Unavailable	
Maldives	Unavailable	
Malta	—	Applies only to high treason by members of armed forces
Mauritius	5	
Nigeria	50	
Pakistan	Unavailable	
Papua New Guinea	—	
St. Christopher and Nevis	2	
St. Lucia	8	
St. Vincent	7	
Sierra Leone	73	
Singapore	60+	
South Africa	335	Moratorim in effect since 1989
Sri Lanaka	—	
Swaziland	5	No executions since 1982
Tanzania	Unavailable	
Tonga	—	No executions since 1982
Trinidad and Tobago	50	
Uganda	193	
Western Samoa	3	
Zambia	101	
Zimbabwe	100	No executions since 1988

Commonwealth Institute

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the formal relationship between the Commonwealth Institute and the Commonwealth Institute in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: The Imperial Institute Act 1925 and the Commonwealth Institute Act 1958, as amended, established and deal with one statutory organisation, the Commonwealth Institute. The Commonwealth Institute, Scotland was constituted by the board of governors of the Commonwealth Institute. It has no separate legal status or personality. The chairman of the Commonwealth Institute, Scotland is a member of the board of governors of the Commonwealth Institute.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the proposals that have been made to him by the Commonwealth Institute for the continuation of the Commonwealth Institute in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: The chairman of the institute, Scotland is in close contact with the board of governors of the Commonwealth Institute on which assessors, appointed by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, represent Government Departments, and is pursuing solutions for the future. He is also exploring the possibilities of maintaining the Scottish Institute's programmes in collaboration with other organisations in Scotland.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the continued funding of the Commonwealth Institute by his Department and the conditions for that funding.

Mr. Baldry: My noble Friend the Baroness Chalker of Wallasey informed the then acting chairman of the Commonwealth Institute on 12 July 1994 that the Government are prepared to make available £1 million for the financial year 1996–97, £800,000 for 1997–98 and £600,000 for 1998—99. The offer is conditional upon the institute submitting by 16 July 1995 a business plan and a building plan for assessment by independent consultants, and for approval by Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who owns the premises used by the Commonwealth Institute in Scotland; and what contribution is made by public funds to the building and the provision of services by the Commonwealth Institute in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: The trustees of the Commonwealth Institute are empowered to hold the assets of the institute. The Commonwealth Institute, Scotland receives a grant in aid of £215,000 per annum.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the continued operation of the work of the Commonwealth Institute in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: On 28 April 1994, the chairman of the Commonwealth Institute, Scotland requested that the Government provide an annual core grant of £116,000 after March 1996. The chairman has submitted a plan to the board of governors of the institute for keeping the body in being after 1996.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions or contacts have taken place between his Department and the Commonwealth Institute in Scotland about its continued existence and funding by his Department.

Mr. Baldry: My noble Friend the Baroness Chalker of Wallasey informed the chairman of the Commonwealth Institute, Scotland on 12 July 1994 that the Government could not meet his request for an annual grant after 1996. However, a grant of £24 million would be made available to the parent body in London for the period 1996 to 1999 to assist the relaunch plan. There would be no objection from Government to the Commonwealth Institute, Scotland requesting the board of the institute in London to make available post-1996 a proportion of its funding.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy options he is currently considering about the future of the Commonwealth Institute in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: None. The chairman of the Commonwealth Institute, Scotland is currently exploring the possibilities of maintaining the Scottish Institute's programmes in collaboration with other organisations in Scotland.

Somalia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Nations Security Council delegation that went to Somalia visited Somaliland; what was the outcome of the visit; what is the current UN attitude to the support of peace development efforts in Somaliland; and what it has done practically to support such efforts.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* The United Nations mission confined its visit to Mogadishu. It concluded that the lack of progress on political reconciliation and the security environment meant that the UN could no longer achieve its objectives and that the UN force should be withdrawn. This view was endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution No. 954. This also makes it clear that the UN is ready to play a role in reconciliation efforts in Somalia after UNOSOM's withdrawal, if the Somalis wish.

Turkey

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that arms supplied to Turkey by the United Kingdom and other NATO states are not being used for the violation or suppression of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Proposed United Kingdom arms sales to Turkey, as to other countries, are considered on a case-by-case basis and are subject to stringent licensing procedures. Before a licence is granted, a wide range of factors are taken into account—including an assessment of the recipient country's human rights record and of the use to which the equipment will be put. We do not grant licences for the sale of equipment which we believe is likely to be used for internal repression.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey regarding bans on British parliamentarians visiting or travelling through that country.

Mr. Goodlad: Turkey has imposed no general ban on British parliamentarians visiting or travelling through that country. We have expressed our concern to the Turkish Government at the ban imposed recently on the noble Lord, the Lord Avebury.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made to the Turkish Government regarding abuse of human rights, destruction of villages and forced displacement of people from south-eastern Turkey during his visit to Istanbul on 14 October.

Mr. Goodlad: During my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visit to Istanbul on 14 October he raised human rights issues with the Turkish Prime Minister. He also discussed the situation in the south-east of Turkey with the Turkish Foreign Minister. The Turkish Government are well aware of the importance we attach to their improving their human rights record.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will urge Dr. Francis Deng, the United Nations rapporteur on internally

displaced persons, to conduct a survey of the position in south-east Turkey; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of resources for the task.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UN human rights investigators draw up their own programmes of visits in the light of their mandates and priorities. It would be inappropriate for any country to attempt to influence the work of such investigators, including Mr. Deng. We are not aware of any immediate plans by Mr. Deng for a visit to Turkey.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if arms being supplied Turkey by the United Kingdom and other NATO member states are of a nature which could be used against Greece.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes, the same would be true of weapons sold to any other NATO member state.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the conformity of arms sales to Turkey by the United Kingdom and other Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe states with the CSCE principles governing conventional arms transfers of November 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Our policy on arms sales to Turkey, as to other countries, is in accordance with the CSCE principles governing conventional arms transfer of November 1993; with the guidelines on conventional arms transfer agreed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council; and with the European Union common criteria for arms exports.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the extent of the European arms embargo against Sudan; what assessment he has made of compliance with them; and what measures are being taken to bring *(a)* South Africa and *(b)* other countries into the embargo.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Union arms embargo agreed on 8 March this year covers arms, munitions and military equipment. As far as we know, it is being fully complied with. The arms embargo covers only European Union member states.

Al Yamamah Contract

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from Sir Colin Southgate, chairman of Thorn/EMI, on commissions paid on the Al Yamamah arms contract with Saudi Arabia, and which other companies he is aware of where commissions were paid in regard to this and other contracts; and to whom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have received no such information.

Human Dimension Review

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish details of any proposals put by Her Majesty's Government to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe's human dimension review meeting in Budapest.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The proposals tabled at the CSCE review conference have not been published because negotiations on them will not be completed before the summit. Some delegations and non-governmental organisations have, however, made available texts of their interventions during the conference. The conclusions of the four working groups, which cover all aspects of the CSCE's work, including the human dimension, will be incorporated into the final document to be approved by Heads of State and Government on 5 and 6 December.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Haverigg Prison

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what grounds catering problems at Haverigg were explained in a "Prison Service News" release as a legacy of its origin as an RAF camp;

(2) what steps have been taken to improve the standard of food and hygiene in Haverigg prison following Judge Tumim's inspection report on 13 July;

(3) what steps he has taken to reduce the level of drug trafficking to Haverigg prison, as reported in Judge Tumim's report on 13 July;

(4) what further drugs offences have occurred at Haverigg prison since July; and what further precautions will be taken to address this problem.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 28 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Haverigg prison.

Haverigg occupies a former Royal Air Force site. The dining rooms criticised in HM Chief Inspector of Prisons report were built by the Royal Air Force approximately 54 years ago. They are particularly difficult to clean, and new cleaning schedules for the kitchen and dining rooms have been drawn up and implemented.

The kitchen is being fully refurbished. A complete refit was begun this summer and is to be completed next month. This has required the provision of a temporary mobile kitchen for food preparation. A new catering manager and catering staff have resulted in higher standards.

Since July there have been 38 adjudications on prisoners charged with unauthorised possession of controlled drugs or articles containing traces of such drugs. Two visitors were arrested for the possession of such drugs. One was cautioned by the police and the other convicted by magistrates.

Drug trafficking is being tackled by increasing searching of visitors, use of security information and searching of the prisoner population, grounds and buildings. Closed circuit television will be introduced in the visits room to deter trafficking there.

We also have a programme of drug education and training for prisoners on reception, which emphasises the dangers of drug abuse and is followed by counselling, group work and introduction to a drug rehabilitation course. This is being developed using psychology staff and local volunteer groups.

Probation Officers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to have reached a conclusion on the report on the examination of the recruitment and qualifying training of probation officers and the number of sponsored places for such training in 1995; and when he will publish the report.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The report is under active consideration and a statement will be made shortly.

Anabolic Steroids

Mr. Pendry : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will include the group of substances known as anabolic agents with particular reference to beta-2-agonists, salbutoamol, clenbuterol, salmeterol and terbutaline, in his proposals to combat the abuse of anabolic steroids;

(2) if he plans to extend his recent proposals to combat the misuse of anabolic steroids to cover growth hormone, human chorionic gonadotrophin, corticotrophin and erythropoeitin.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following the announcement on 2 November by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's decision to impose further controls on anabolic steroids and other similar drugs, he has asked the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to consider and advise on exactly which substances should be brought within the controls of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. I understand that growth hormones and beta-2-agonists will be among the substances considered by the advisory council.

Women Prisoners

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women either had children when they were sentenced to prison or have given birth in prison in the past three years; and if he will list the crimes for which they were sentenced.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Lynne Jones, dated 28 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of women who either have children when they are sentenced to prison or who have given birth in prison in the past three years and the crimes for which they were sentenced.

Information on the numbers of mothers in custody is not routinely collected by the Prison Service. Instead such information has been collected by conducting surveys of female prisoners, concentrating in particular on those who are mothers. Such censuses were carried out in 1982, 1986 and 1989. I enclose the results of the 1989 census, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Home Office Research and Planning Unit has recently commissioned a census of mothers in prison. This was launched earlier this month, following a successful pilot study, and will cover all women in prison, including those on remand. The results are expected in the New Year.

Our records show the number of women temporarily removed to outside hospital for delivery and returning to establishments afterwards. The figures for the past three years are:

1990–91	65
1991–92	56
1992–93	29

There is no record of births having taken place in establishments in recent years.

I regret that the information on the crimes for which the mothers were sentenced is not available.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning progress towards agreement on the European Union's data protection directive; which are the areas where the United Kingdom Government still have major concerns; and which parts of the directive he expects to vote against at the meeting of the Council of Ministers in December.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The United Kingdom has made clear that it disagrees both with the principle of a directive on data protection, and with the specific proposals put forward by the Commission—which are in many respects over-prescriptive, unnecessarily burdensome and very costly, especially in relation to manually held data. The Government will decide, in the light of all the relevant considerations, what stance to adopt when the directive comes up for discussion in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to reverse the United Kingdom's policy towards the derogations entered against the first sentence of paragraph 2.4, the second sentence of paragraph 3.1 and from paragraph 3.3 of Council of Europe recommendation R(85)20; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the *(a)* European Union's proposals for a data protection directive and *(b)* decisions of the data protection tribunal for these derogations;

(2) what plans he has to reverse the United Kingdom's policy towards the derogations entered against principles 6.2 and 6.3 and paragraph 2 of Council of Europe recommendation R(91)10; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the *(a)* European Union's proposals for a data protection directive and *(b)* decisions of the data protection tribunal for these derogations;

(3) what plans he has to reverse the United Kingdom's policy towards the derogations entered against principals 2.2 and 2.4 of Council of Europe recommendation R(87)15; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the *(a)* European Union's proposals for a data protection directive and *(b)* decisions of the data protection tribunal for these derogations;

(4) what plans he has to reverse the United Kingdom's policy towards the derogations entered against the second sub-paragraph of paragraph 1.2, the second sentence of paragraph 3.3 and from paragraph 5 of Council of Europe recommendation R(86)1; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the *(a)* European Union's proposals for a data protection directive and *(b)* decisions of the data protection tribunal for these derogations;

(5) what plans he has to reverse the United Kingdom's policy towards the derogation entered against Council of Europe recommendation R(83)10; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the *(a)* European Union's proposals for a data protection directive and *(b)* decisions of the data protection tribunal for this derogation;

(6) what plans he has to reverse the United Kingdom's policy towards the derogations entered against paragraphs 3.3, 3.4, 5.16 and 7.1 of Council of Europe recommendation R(90)19; and what assessment he has made of the implications of the *(a)* European Union's proposals for a data protection directive and *(b)* decisions of the data protection tribunal for these derogations.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no current plans to amend any of the United Kingdom's derogations in regard to the Council of Europe recommendations mentioned.

It would be premature to consider the implications of the proposed data protection directive for these derogations, until the directive has been adopted. The implications—if any—of the jurisprudence of the data protection tribunal for the derogations remain under consideration.

Terrorists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women convicted of terrorist offences within the United Kingdom are at present serving a prison sentence in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 28 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of men and women at present serving sentences in England and Wales for terrorist offences.

Readily available information on the number of prisoners serving sentences in England and Wales whose offences were related to terrorism is limited to those classified as category A.

On 24 November 1994 there were 45 men and no women.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the system of payments available via the criminal injuries compensation scheme to make better provisions for victims of crime and their families.

Mr. Maclean: The Government reviewed the scheme prior to the introduction earlier this year of the new tariff scheme. The tariff scheme is simpler for claimants to understand, easier to administer and victims will get their money more quickly. It will also enable us to predict and control costs more readily, while at the same time continuing to provide one of the most generous compensation schemes anywhere. The workings of the tariff scheme will be closely monitored and we will make any refinements that prove necessary in the light of experience.

Crime Victims (Court Cases)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend the law to impose a duty on the prosecuting authorities to advise victims of crime and their families about the progress of criminal proceedings in which they were involved including advanced notification of hearing dates, adjournments and grants of bail to the defendant.

Mr. Maclean: The prosecuting authorities are well aware of the importance of keeping victims advised of case progress, and every effort is being made to ensure that this should be done to the fullest extent practicable. I am not persuaded that legislation is required to achieve this.

Special Constables

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances special constables or their dependants are eligible to make claims for criminal injuries compensation if a special constable is killed or injured on duty; how many such compensation claims have been submitted in each of the last three years, to date; how many were *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected; and what was the amount of compensation paid in each case.

Mr. Maclean: Special constables are eligible to apply for compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme in the same way as any other blameless victim of a crime of violence in Great Britain. In cases of death their dependants are similarly eligible to apply. All applications are considered under the same rules.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board does not collate centrally information about claims made by special constables, or other occupational groups.

Common Visa List

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which countries are proposed by the European Commission for inclusion on the common visa list.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The following:

Country	*Country*
Afghanistan	Morocco
Albania	Marshall Islands
Algeria	Mauritius
Angola	Mauritania
Antigua and Barbuda	Micronesia
Armenia	Moldavia
Azerbaidjan	Mongolia
Bahamas	Mozambique
Bahrain	Myanmar
Bangladesh	Namibia
Barbados	Nauru
Belarus	Nepal
Belize	Niger
Benin	Nigeria
Bhutan	Northern Mariana Islands
Botswana	Oman
Bulgaria	Pakistan
Burkina Faso	Papua New Guinea
Burundi	Philippines
Cambodia	Qatar
Cameroon	Romania
Cape Verde	Russia
Central African Republic	Rwanda
Chad	Saint Christopher and Nevis
China	Saint Vincent and Grenadines
Comores	Santa Lucia
Congo	Samoa (Western)
Cuba	Sao Tomé and Principe
Djibouti	Saudi Arabia
Dominica	Senegal
Dominican Republic	Seychelles
Egypt	Sierra Leone
Eritrea	Solomon Islands
Ethiopia	Somalia
Fiji	South Africa
Gabon	Sudan

Country	Country
Gambia	Sri Lanka
Georgia	Surinam
Ghana	Swaziland
Grenada	Syria
Guinea	Taiwan
Guinea Bissau	Tadjikistan
Guinea (Equitorial)	Tanzania
Guyana	Thailand
Haiti	Togo
India	Tonga
Indonesia	Trinidad and Tobago
Iran	Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Palau)
Iraq	Tunisia
Ivory Coast	Turkmenistan
Jordan	Turkey
Kazakhstan	Tuvalu
Kirghizstan	Uganda
Kiribati	Ukraine
Korea (North)	United Arab Emirates
Kuwait	Uzbekistan
Laos	Vanuatu
Lesotho	Vietnam
Lebanon	Yemen
Liberia	Zaire
Libya	Zambia
Madagascar	Zimbabwe
Maldives	
Mali	

Talacre Beach, Clwyd

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now agree the draft byelaw proposed for Talacre beach, Clwyd by Delyn borough council.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Home Office officials wrote to the council on 25 November giving provisional approval to the byelaws.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Politically Sensitive Implications

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General (1) from what sources cases with politically sensitive implications are referred to him;

(2) what procedure he adopts when dealing with cases with politically sensitive implications;

(3) what have been the sources encouraging him to take action against *(a)* anti-road protesters, *(b)* arms to Iraq cases and *(c)* whistleblowers against Government activity; and how he has analysed these requests before making his decision.

The Attorney-General: Cases may be drawn to my attention by a variety of sources but cases of the type described by the hon. Member would most probably be referred to me by a prosecuting authority.

Criminal proceedings in all cases including those described by the hon. Member would be initiated by the relevant prosecuting authority and not by me.

The proper approach to any such case was described to the House on 28 January 1951, *Official Report*, column *683* by the then Attorney-General, who set out the principles which have been consistently followed by successive Attorneys-General of either party. I have supplied a copy of the relevant text to the hon. Member.

Extradition

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General if it is the practice of his Department to indicate to the Irish Attorney-General if extradition requests are urgent or important or both.

The Attorney-General: If there are specific time constraints, for example if the person whose return is sought is liable to be released from custody in the Republic of Ireland, it is the practice to draw attention to them.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General on what date officials in his Department advised the Irish Attorney-General that it was expected that there would be a voluntary return to Northern Ireland by Brendan Smyth and that as a consequence it was not therefore necessary to proceed with the extradition request.

The Attorney-General: Officials of my Department informed the Irish Attorney-General's office on 6 December 1993 that there was a prospect of Brendan Smyth returning voluntarily to Northern Ireland.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Department of Trade and Industry surveys on British-registered fishing vessels have been carried out in Spanish ports.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

Yes. The majority of surveys under the Fishing Vessels (Safety Provisions) Rules 1975 are undertaken in United Kingdom ports but some are carried out elsewhere, including Spain.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. Waldegrave: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. Such costs are included in the Ministry's expenditure on official hospitality, figures for which were given on 25 October, *Official Report*, column *548*.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Waldegrave: Approximately 550 official Christmas cards will be sent by MAFF Ministers in 1994. Three designs have been chosen from the Charity

Christmas Card Council catalogue, at a cost of £252. No estimate is available of the staff and postage costs involved. Samples of the cards have been placed in the Library.

Bovine Immunodeficiency Virus

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether all blood samples from the herd of Linda and Tim Blything of Cheshire were tested for BIV at the Animal Health Institute; and to what extent tests for BIV on the herd were regarded as abnormal.

Mrs. Browning: We do not divulge information on specific cases on the grounds of confidentiality unless the information has already been put into the public domain by the parties concerned. In this instance, we can confirm that blood samples from the herd of Mr. and Mrs. Blything have been examined at the Institute of Animal Health and the results of the serological examinations would suggest that infection by bovine immunodeficiency-like virus—BIV—is widespread in the herd.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department employs one special adviser.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Industry

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with European Commission about alleged illegal national financial support to the pig industry; if EC funding is available to national Governments for schemes to help their pig industry; and what action he proposes taking to assist United Kingdom pig producers.

Mr. Jack: We follow up all evidence of illegal state aids in other member states with the European Commission. Only in the case of France have we established the existence of illegal aid in the pigmeat sector. After a great deal of pressure from us the Commission announced on 27 July that parts of a package of French state aids for pig farmers were illegal. Further proceedings have now begun against French Government guarantees for loans through the Stabiporc scheme. The Commission has sought comments from member states and other interested parties; we will be submitting a robust response and will keep up the pressure on the Commission to ensure that action is taken.

The Government are committed to a successful pig industry and have provided support by releasing feed wheat from intervention stocks, funding research and development in the pig sector, giving financial assistance to collaborative marketing projects and promoting improvements in key production areas through the publication of booklets, ADAS workshops and promotions in the trade press.

Forestry

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many and which local authorities have responded to the consultation paper "Out Forests, the Way Ahead"; and how many and which local authorities have expressed reservations about the proposal to continue with the disposal of woodland and the loss of public access in these woodlands.

Mr. Jack: Thirteen local authorities in England have responded; nine have expressed reservations about the proposals securing public access to woodlands sold by the Forestry Commission as follows:

Cheshire County Council
East Hampshire District Council
Exeter City Council[1]
Forest of Dean District Council[1]
Hampshire County Council
Herefordshire and Worcestershire County Council[1]
Leicestershire County Council[1]
New Forest District Council[1]
Northamptonshire County Council[1]
Shropshire County Council[1]
Staffordshire County Council[1]
Test Valley Borough Council
Winchester City Council[1]

[1]Councils which have expressed reservations

Sheep Annual Premiums

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sheep annual premiums have been made to date; and what is the total value of such payments.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* By 18 November, first and second advance payments had been made on a total of £38,385 claims in England, representing a value of £101,920,444.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* No guidelines are issued specifically about relations with lobbying companies. The conduct of Ministers in this respect is governed by the guidance in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". The departmental staff manual incorporates the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

EMPLOYMENT

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Miss Widdecombe: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. Such costs are covered by the entertainment expenditure for this Department which is published in the annual report, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Training

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people completed their training under (1) the training for work scheme and (2) youth training broken down by gender both regionally and nationally; how many successfully found employment on *(a)* immediate completion of their training, *(b)* up to three months after completion of training and *(c)* up to six months after completion of training; and how many were without work one year after completion, for each year since inception of both schemes.

Mr. Paice: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Vacancies

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current numbers and categories of employment vacancies.

Mr. Oppenheim: In October 1994 there were 194,981 unfilled vacancies at jobcentres, the highest number since June 1990. Further details of these vacancies, including occupational classification, is available from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Youth Training

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the numbers of young people who were registered for youth training, broken down both regionally and nationally and by gender, who are *(a)* currently without offer of a place, *(b)* ineligible for income support or *(c)* receiving special hardship allowance in each year since 1979.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is not available. However, the number of young people covered by the youth training guarantee who have been registered with careers services in England for eight or more weeks is provided in the following table:

Region[1]	*October 1993*[2]	*October 1994*[3]
South East	670	48
London	491	171
Eastern	538	113
South West	208	130
West Midlands	183	65
East Midlands	290	56
Yorkshire and Humberside	146	174
Merseyside	271	27
North West	337	114
North East	198	162
England	3,332	1,060

Notes:
[1] Employment Department training, enterprise and education directorate regions.
[2] 14 October 1993.
[3] 31 October 1994.

All claims for income support from 16 and 17-year-olds are automatically considered under the severe hardship provision unless entitlement under the normal provisions already exist. So far this year, around 86 per cent. of claims under severe hardship have been successful.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the minimum salary for a 16-year-old employed by his Department in London; and how many are so employed.

Miss Widdecombe: The minimum salary for a 16-year-old employed by the Employment Department group in London is £4,995 for non-industrial staff. There is currently one 16-year-old employed by the ED group in London.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Cairo Waste Water Project

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was entailed in *(a)* the contract 18: Cairo waste water project awarded to Biwater International and *(b)* the supervision of contract 18: Cairo waste water project awarded to Taylor Binnie and Partners.

Mr. Baldry: Contract 18 provides the Egyptian General Organisation for Sanitary Drainage with services for:

- preparation of the systems and procedures needed to run the new East Bank pumping stations, including the provision of information to management;
- operating and maintaining the stations in accordance with these systems and procedures;
- training GOSD personnel, who will take over from the contractor and run the stations subsequently; and
- technical support following handover to GOSD.

Taylor Binnie is providing detailed technical supervision and administration. Its supervisory role includes ensuring that the systems and procedures to be developed are compatible with GOSD's wider long-term institutional needs.

Overseas Projects

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what total number of man days were expended in the financial year 1993–94 on projects for *(a)* curriculum reform in-service training by the British Council and CPL, *(b)* Uganda Revenue

Authority: capacity building by Coopers and Lybrand, *(c)* Bangladesh Power Development Board action plan for performance improvement by Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte, *(d)* Qa Disi basin water study by Haiste International Ltd., *(e)* agricultural support services project by Hunting Technical Services and *(f)* mass privatisation adviser by Warburg and Co. Ltd.

Mr. Baldry: Financing arrangements with contractors vary from project to project and it is not always possible to be precise about the number of man days expended under each contract.

(a) Approximately 540 man days.

(b) Four staff were employed full time throughout 1993–94 and they were joined by two others who worked from May 1993 to the end of the financial year.

(c) Approximately 45 man days.

(d) 1,546 man days.

(e) Approximately 1,949 man days.

(f) This is a fixed fee contract against which there are no pre-set manpower inputs.

Privatisation Advisers

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what countries Schroders and Warburg and Co. Ltd. was employed as mass privatisation advisers *(a)* in the financial year 1992–93 and *(b)* since.

Mr. Baldry: J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co. Ltd.—Schroders—was employed to give advice to the Government of Hungary on mass privatisation from February until April 1992. As a member of a consortium led by Ernst and Young Management Consultants, it gave advice on various aspects of mass privatisation to the Czech and Slovak Republics between September 1992 and September 1993.

S. G. Warburg and Co. Ltd. is contracted to give advice to Poland on mass privatisation from 1 November 1992 until 31 December 1994.

Crown Agents

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which country the Crown Agents provided technical co-operation support for an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development rehabilitation loan in the financial year 1992–93.

Mr. Baldry: In 1992–93, the Crown Agents provided technical co-operation and training support to Government procurement agents within the Russian Federation to assist them in the implementation of a World bank rehabilitation loan.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total bill for Overseas Development Administration staff travel in the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. Baldry: The cost of official travel on administering the aid programme by staff of the Overseas Development Administration was £1.4 million in 1993–94. That includes travel by spouses and children of staff serving in overseas locations.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of Overseas Development Administration spending on scheduled airline flights during the financial year 1993–94 consisted of *(a)* economy class, *(b)* business-club class and *(c)* first-class travel.

Mr. Baldry: The proportions are approximately *(a)* 23 per cent. economy class, *(b)* 76 per cent. business-club class and *(c)* 1 per cent. first class.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the project specifications for *(a)* the energy efficiency in buildings project awarded to the Building Research Establishment, *(b)* the energy efficiency training project awarded to March Consultancy and *(c)* the short-term energy requirement study awarded to Lord Marshall of Goring for the financial year 1992–93.

Mr. Baldry: Copies of the terms of reference/scope of work for the three contracts referred to have been placed in the Library of the House.

Multilateral Development Banks

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to join and support the task force on the multilateral development banks, instigated in May to review the activities of the World bank and the regional development banks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: A senior ODA official will be a member of the task force, which is scheduled to start work in December.

World Bank

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to insist that the World bank cancels debts incurred by the Governments of poor countries on loans granted in contravention of the bank's own guidelines.

Mr. Baldry: We will continue to work with other shareholders to ensure that the bank has appropriate systems and procedures in place and abides by its operational guidelines.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to ensure that the World bank adopts policies compatible with the recommendations of the all-party parliamentary group on overseas development on sub-Saharan multilateral debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The recommendations in the all-party parliamentary group's report on Africa's multilateral debt are being given careful consideration.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will encourage Governments borrowing from the World bank and the International Monetary Fund to release loan documents at the end of each cycle of 18 months to two years;

(2) if he will encourage countries borrowing from the International Monetary Fund and the World bank to release policy framework papers setting out macro-economic and structural policy measures and social and environmental information.

Mr. Baldry: The bank and the fund encourage borrowers to make as much information as possible available locally about development priorities and

programmes, including policy framework papers and project-related documentation.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of recent moves to increase transparency and accountability in the operations of the World bank; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We welcomed the presumption in favour of disclosure, on which the bank's board of directors decided in August 1993, and the resulting significant expansion in the range of information about the bank's policies and operations which is now publicly available. The revised disclosure of information policy is scheduled for review after one year of implementation; and we shall consider carefully with other shareholders whether improvements are needed.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement outlining the Government's response to the German proposals to increase accountability of the World bank.

Mr. Baldry: We have not been informed of any German initiative in this area.

Cameroon

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the World bank's review of the Douala infrastructure project in Cameroon.

Mr. Baldry: Bank staff have informed us that, following a recent review by the Government of Cameroon and the bank of the second urban project, approved in 1988, it has been decided to close the loan and cancel the balance of the Douala infrastructure component, implementation of which had been disrupted following civil unrest in 1991. A new project, which will include follow-on work on Douala infrastructure, is under preparation. This will be on concessional IDA terms, whereas the 1988 loan was on International Bank for Reconstruction and Development terms.

Africa

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to implement the recommendations of the all-party group on overseas development in its recent report on Africa's multilateral debt on the introduction of an official channel of communication between the international financial institutions and Parliament.

Mr. Baldry: International financial institutions are intergovernmental bodies owned by their member Governments. Appropriate channels of communication are already in place between the institutions and HMG, who are accountable to Parliament.

Yemen

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to restore overseas aid to the Republic of Yemen, with particular reference to the project to support Sana'a university establishing a postgraduate course in English language studies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The case for restoring aid to the republic of Yemen, including the project to support the Sana'a university English language programme, is currently under review.

Climate Change (Africa)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what plans he has to continue funding for the Overseas Development Administration studies regarding the impact of limiting carbon dioxide emissions in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to continue funding of the Overseas Development Administration studies of the impact of climatic change in Ghana and Kenya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The ODA financed studies were completed in 1992. We have no plans to pursue the issue bilaterally, but the replenished and restructured global environment facility, to which the United Kingdom has committed £89.5 million, is available to assist developing country parties to the climate change convention with their national strategies, plans and programmes.

Uganda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made at the World bank and IMF in reducing Uganda's debt to these bodies; and what is Uganda's current level of debt to those bodies.

Mr. Baldry: *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* Uganda has outstanding debts of about $391 million to the IMF and $1.25 billion to the World bank. Work is under way in both institutions in response to the proposals on multilateral debt outlined by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his answer on 19 October to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), *Official Report,* columns 272–74.

Ukraine

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the question of balance of payments support for the Ukraine with his EU counterparts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last discussed the issue of balance of payments support for Ukraine with his EU counterparts on 4 October. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer discussed Ukraine with his EU colleagues on 7 November. The subject is also expected to be discussed at meetings of EU Foreign and Finance Ministers in the next two weeks.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of claimants of invalidity benefit who are *(a)* terminally ill or *(b)* in receipt of the highest rate care component of disability living allowance.

Mr. Hague: Information in the form requested is not available. We estimate that around 25,000 people of working age become terminally ill each year although not all will qualify for incapacity benefits, some will be in receipt of statutory sick pay and others will not satisfy the contribution conditions. We estimate that up to 10,000 people who are receiving the higher rate care component of disability living allowance may claim incapacity benefits each year.

Company Pension Schemes

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what representations he has received in the last 12 months regarding additional voluntary contributions in relation to company pension schemes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he proposes to take to change the protection to pensions secured by; additional voluntary contributions and if he will make a statement;

(3) what reports or representations he has received regarding the failure of the Bellings and Co. Ltd. retirement benefit plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The proposed changes to the legislation will increase protection for all members of occupational pension schemes by introducing safeguards, including the proposed minimum solvency requirement which should ensure that the value of all accrued rights is protected in the event of a scheme winding up, including the value of additional voluntary contributions. This Department has received a small number of letters about AVCs in the last year and a small number of representations about the Belling pension scheme.

Data Cross-matching

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of his advice, which related to the need for London boroughs to protect claimants from false accusations based on inaccurate data, resulting from his intentions to cross-match council tax and housing benefits personal data with personal data held by his Department.

Mr. Arbuthnot: No written advice has been issued but the Department has held a number of meetings with representatives from the participating London boroughs to discuss the pilot. The cross-matching of data will identify inconsistencies which warrant further consideration. The data sources will be thoroughly checked to confirm any discrepancy prior to any investigation taking place.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he wrote to local authority associations concerning his intentions to cross-match council tax and housing benefits personal data with personal data held by his Department; when copies of this correspondence were sent to the Data Protection Registrar; when he alerted the registrar to the intended data matching exercise in London; and if he will outline the steps which have been taken to improve communications with the registrar's office.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Formal consultations with the local authority associations began on 14 June 1994. Copies of the correspondence were not sent to the data protection registrar. The registrar was informed of the Department's proposals for the pilot exercise at a meeting early in June 1994. We contact the registrar's office whenever necessary.

Benefits

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of administering benefits to the unemployed in cash terms and expressed as a percentage of benefit expenditure in each year since 1979.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table. The proportion of the administrative cost of income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit, social fund loans, and other benefits attributable to the unemployed is not available.

Administrative cost of unemployment benefit

	£ million	*As a percentage of unemployment benefit expenditure*
1979–80	74	11.3
1980–81	120	9.4
1981–82	142	8.3
1982–83	132	8.8
1983–84	132	8.8
1984–85	133	8.4
1985–86	160	10.1
1986–87	179	10.3
1987–88	166	11.3
1988–89	172	15.5
1989–90	176	24.0
1990–91	182	20.9
1991–92	322	20.1
1992–93	269	15.3
1993–94[1]	—	—

[1] Figures for 1993–94 are not yet available.

Information Technology

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of information technology, computing systems and equipment in his Departments and its agencies in each of the last three years, distinguishing between *(a)* capital and equipment, *(b)* in-house provision services and *(c)* contracted services and consultancy.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table. The figures are on a commercial—accruals—basis.

	1993–94 £	*1992–93* £	*1991–92* £
Cost of Capital and equipment (depreciation)	64,640	58,525	58,237
In-house provision[1]	290,330	276,109	267,021
Consultants/Contractors[2]	95,352	110,533	97,158
Total Costs	450,322	445,167	422,416

[1] The 'In-house provision' figure is the balance of Information Technology Services Agency costs once depreciation and consultant/contractor costs are removed.

[2] "Contracted services and consultancy" have been taken to mean consultants/contractors.

Source:

The ITSA Annual Report and Accounts. ITSA, an executive agency of the Department of Social Security, supplies IT services to the DSS and its agencies and to other Government Departments and agencies including the Employment Service, the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, the National Health Service Pensions Agency and the Department of Health. These costs are included in the above figures.

Family Credit

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent modifications he has made to family credit.

Mr. Roger Evans: In October 1994, we introduced new help with child care charges in family credit and in disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit. We estimate that, in the long term, around 150,000 families will benefit from this change, including 50,000 parents taking up work. This new help will provide a further incentive for people to take up and remain in employment.

In April 1994, the special fast-track family credit service was extended to those newly entering self-employment. Most of their claims are now being cleared within five working days. Improvements in the claiming process for all self-employed people have meant a four-day reduction in the average time taken to deal with their claims.

Income Support

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the numbers of owner-occupiers receiving help with mortgage interest payments through income support in 1994–95.

Mr. Roger Evans: The latest available information is that 548,000 income support claimants are receiving help with their mortgage interest payments.

Source: Income support statistics quarterly inquiry February 1994.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to transfer to local authorities responsibility for the funding of income support claimants in care or nursing homes who have preserved entitlements to benefits.

Mr. Roger Evans: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for alterations in industrial injury schemes which will affect the interests of actual or potential sufferers from asbestosis.

Mr. Hague: None, but under the long-term review of social security expenditure each part of the social security programme is being examined to ensure that the objectives are right for the 1990s and beyond.

Child Support

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many absent parents have withdrawn from employment after receiving Child Support Agency assessments since the Child Support Agency began operations.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), on 12 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *569*.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to amend the legislation or regulations applying to the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The Government have been keeping the operation of the Child Support Act under close review for some time. We are now considering carefully the recent report of the Social Security Select Committee and will respond with proposals for change in due course.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the fifth report of the Social Security Select Committee of Session 1993–94 entitled "The Operation of the Child Support Act-Proposals for Change."

Mr. Burt: We are still evaluating the contents of the Select Committee's report, which was published on 26 October and we will respond in due course with proposals for change. No final decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the accounts of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: The Child Support Agency has today published its accounts for 1993–94 and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have claimed disability working allowance since its inception; and if he will break down the figures by age and gender.

Mr. Hague: By 31 October 1994, 51,005 people had claimed disability working allowance. Information on age and gender is not available in the form requested. The breakdown of the number of awards from November 1992 to April 1994, the latest period for which figures are available, is in the table.

Awards of disability working allowance November 1992–April 1994

Age of recipients	*Male*	*Female*	*All*
Under 20	133	91	224
20 to 29	1,121	955	2,076
30 to 39	1,197	768	1,965
40 to 49	1,095	759	1,854
50 to 59	606	351	957
60 plus	139	32	171
All ages	4,291	2,956	7,247

SCOTLAND

Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, and *(c)* the first 10 months of 1994, the number of (i) liver transplants, (ii) heart transplants, (iii) heart and lung transplants and (iv) lung transplants, both single and double, carried out in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. Lung, and heart and lung transplants are not provided in Scotland.

Numbers of Heart and Liver Transplant Operations Performed in Scottish NHS Hospitals 1992–93 and January to October 1994

	1992	*1993*	*January to October 1994*[1]
Liver Transplant	6	30	22
Heart Transplant	21	22	13

[1] Data for 1994 provisional.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Lang: I cannot give the number of official Christmas cards I and my colleagues will send but I will write to the hon. Member when the information is available.

The costs will cost 15p each—excluding VAT—and will be issued by standard second class post. It is not possible to identify the staff time devoted to the dispatch of the cards.

A sample of the card, which depicts the Queen's view in Perthshire, has been placed in the Library.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the Scottish health service management executive to approve Greater Glasgow health board's acute strategy review; and when it will be published.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Greater Glasgow health board expects to conclude its review of acute and maternity services in December this year. Public consultation will follow.

Performance-related Pay

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Scottish Office Department and which Scottish local enterprise companies operate on performance-related pay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: In line with other Government Departments all Scottish Office non-industrial staff, excluding prison officers whose scheme comes into operation on 1 April 1995, are now covered by performance-related pay schemes.

Pay in the local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of the enterprise bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that the grants from revenue currently available to community and voluntary groups in Strathclyde region will continue to be available after reorganisation of local government.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government value highly the work of voluntary organisations in their local communities and wish to ensure a smooth hand-over from the existing to the new authorities. For this reason, the Scottish Office will make a direction under clause 55 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 requiring each existing authority to inform shadow authorities of all funding which is given to voluntary organisations by means of a grant, service agreement or contract. This direction is designed to ensure that the new authorities are aware of the full extent and purpose of the existing authorities' funding of the voluntary sector, and in particular, of the full range of annual discretionary grants. This information will then inform their decision on assistance to community and voluntary bodies.

This direction complements the general provision in the Act for all existing liabilities, obligations and contracts entered into by existing authorities to be transferred to the new councils. This provision will safeguard contracts with voluntary bodies.

The Scottish Office will also issue guidance to the new authorities on the key role of voluntary organisations and the importance of avoiding disruption and delay in grant decision making.

New Town Development Corporations

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many houses for rent are currently held by each new town development corporation; and what percentage this represents of the total number of houses constructed by each development corporation since vesting day.

Mr. Stewart: The last published data are at 31 March 1994 and are set out in the table.

New Town	*Houses for rent as at 31 March 1994*	*Percentage of total stock since vesting*
East Kilbride	9,271	39.5
Glenrothes	5,151	40.9
Cumbernauld	4,686	32
Livingston	6,800	55.4
Irvine	3,609	62.3

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the guidelines issued by his Department to regulate relationships with lobbying companies.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* My Department has no separate guidelines to regulate relationships with lobbying companies. Conditions of service for the staff of my Department incorporate the general principles of conduct that require civil servants not to misuse information which they acquire in the course of their duties; not to make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others; and not to receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party, which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list and date those occasions over the last two years, when Ministers or officials in his Department have met lobbying companies, prior to a decision being made on the subject of the meeting with the lobbying company.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Companies House

14. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the President of the Board of Trade over the future of Companies House.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend has kept me fully informed of his review of Companies House.

Mid Glamorgan Health Authority

15. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairperson of the Mid Glamorgan health authority to discuss the future of the health service.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend met the then chairman of the Mid Glamorgan health authority on 22 March 1994 to discuss proposals for the future of health services in the Merthyr and Cynon valleys.

Unemployment

16. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in the number of unemployed since December 1992.

Mr. Redwood: Seasonally adjusted unemployment in Wales has now fallen by 19,000—14 per cent.—since December 1992. October's fall in the seasonally adjusted rate in Wales was the greatest in the United Kingdom.

25. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of male unemployment in Newport and Gwent at the latest available date.

Mr. Redwood: In October 1994, the number of unemployed males in the borough of Newport and Gwent were 5,154 and 13,741 respectively.

Local Authorities (Conduct)

17. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to improve standards of conduct in local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Such standards of conduct are primarily a matter for local authorities themselves and their auditors, taking account in particular of the national code of local government conduct, Welsh Office circular 23/90, and pecuniary interests of members of local authorities, Welsh Office circular 16/92. Where appropriate the Welsh Office reminds local authorities of their statutory responsibilities.

Manufacturing Industry

18. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the prospects for manufacturing industry in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Prospects for manufacturing industry in Wales are excellent. The latest CBI Wales survey shows that confidence in the Welsh business community is nearly double the United Kingdom average. New orders have increased at their fastest rate since 1988 and at twice the United Kingdom rate. The number of both export and domestic order books above normal levels is the highest since 1988, and the investment intentions of Welsh manufacturers are at their highest level since the survey began.

Health Service Funding

19. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on health service funding in Wales during the current financial year.

Mr. Richards: The initial NHS budget for the current year was £2,076 million. This was £100 million more than last year—an increase of over 5 per cent. A further £8 million has been made available during the year.

Local Government Finance

20. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional resources are to be made available to local authorities in Wales to undertake responsibilities which have been passed over to them from the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Redwood: I have issued £650,000 of additional credit approvals in 1994–95 and I will be providing £1.4 million in 1995–96.

Language Courses

21. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will explain the difference in weighting attaching to courses for the teaching of the Welsh language to adults and the weighting as applied to the teaching of English; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: I understand that the Further Education Funding Council for Wales weights the funding per student of different courses according to the relative costs of provision. Since English as a second language is normally taught in small classes to students from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds the costs per student are higher than those for second language Welsh courses. I also understand, however, that the funding council has decided to increase the weighting for Welsh second language courses next year.

Milk Marketing Scheme

22. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on changes in the milk marketing scheme introduced on 1 November.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The essential features of the new arrangements were set out in the answer by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 16 June, *Official Report*, columns *644–46*. The necessary regulations were duly made and the new marketing arrangements came into effect on 1 November. Dairy Crest has not yet been floated on the stock market and remains in the ownership of the residual Milk Marketing Board.

Severn Bridge

23. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his assessment of the effect on business and the environment of the Severn bridge tolls.

Mr. Redwood: A report by Pieda plc was published in 1992 by the Department of Employment. It concluded, on the basis of a survey of businesses in south Wales and Avon, that the second Severn crossing scheme allowing for the new tolls, would have a positive effect on local trading and commercial activity, and stimulate investment opportunities in south Wales. Copies of the executive summary of the report, entitled "The Economic Impact of

the Second Severn Crossing", are in the Library of the House. No assessment has been made of the effect of the tolls on the environment.

Opt-out Schools

24. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of county councils to discuss opt–out schools.

Mr. Richards: No such meetings have taken place.

Health Authorities

26. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on his proposals to create five new health authorities in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: Since my announcement, there have been five representations, two of which were in support of my decision.

Gross Domestic Product

27. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of gross domestic product per capita in Mid Glamorgan as a percentage of the figure for *(a)* Wales and *(b)* south-east England.

Mr. Redwood: The latest available county data are for 1991, when GDP per head in Mid Glamorgan was estimated at £5,883. This represented 81.5 per cent. of the Welsh average and 59.1 per cent. of that for the south-east of England.

Milk

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the effect of the change in price of milk since the inception of Milk Marque; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Four.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Minister's private offices, his flat in Cardiff and other official residences.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally. I do not have a personal flat in Cardiff. A small area of Cardiff headquarters office is available for Ministers and officials to stay the night, as well as being used for day-time meetings. Nothing will be spent on Christmas in this facility, and there are no official residences elsewhere.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to undertake and publish a training enterprise council employer survey and when.

Mr. Redwood: The fieldwork for a 1994 survey of employers has been completed on behalf of the seven Welsh training and enterprise councils, the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Employment Service and the Welsh Office and a summary of preliminary findings issued in a Welsh Office statistical release on 31 August 1994, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

It is planned to produce a Welsh Office statistical publication summarising the findings of the survey by March 1995.

Gateway to Wales Hotel

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will sanction and fund the erection of reliable and substantial safety barriers between the carriageway and housing estates between the River Dee bridge and the Gateway to Wales hotel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The existing safety barriers on the A494-A550 trunk road at this location are of the type used nationally in similar circumstances and there are no proposals to alter or extend the existing fencing.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cattle were slaughtered as a result of bovine TB in each region in each month since May 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of cattle slaughtered as a result of bovine TB in each month in each county in Wales since May 1994 is as follows:

	Cattle Slaughtered					
County	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*
Clwyd	—	—	1	—	—	—
Gwynedd	—	—	—	—	—	—
Powys	—	—	2	4	—	—
Dyfed	29	25	54	7	12	253
South Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwent	17	7	7	5	9	4

Badgers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many badgers were culled as a result of bovine tuberculosis in each region in each month since May 1994; and how many of these were shown to be suffering from TB.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Eight badgers have been culled in Wales as a result of bovine TB since May 1994. All of these were in Dyfed, four in September and four in October. Three of the eight badgers showed lesions at post mortem consistent with being affected with bovine TB, although laboratory results in all eight badgers are still outstanding.

Job-related Training

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the population is receiving job-related training; and how the figure relates to the standard Great Britain regions and the Great Britain average.

Mr. Redwood: Estimates are given in the following table:

Percentage of the resident population of working age [1] participating in job-related training [2] in the last 4 weeks [3]

Region	*Percentage*
Wales	12.6
Northern	12.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	13.8
East Midlands	12.2
East Anglia	12.3
London	14.1
Rest of South East	14.1
South West	13.3
West Midlands	12.3
North West	13.0
Scotland	12.5
Great Britain	13.2

[1] Working age is defined as men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59.
[2] Education or training connected with the respondent's job, or a job they might be able to do in the future.
[3] Respondents are asked about job-related education and training activity in the four weeks prior to the survey.
Source:
Labour force survey, spring 1994.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Redwood: My Department employs one special adviser. Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Young People

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the number and percentage of 16 to 18-year-olds in Wales who are neither at school, employed or on youth training schemes.

Mr. Redwood: Estimates are given in the following table:

	Number	*Percentage of 16–18 Population*
16–18 year olds not at school, in employment or on YT schemes	29,000	29
Of whom:		
At college	18,000	18
Other	11,000	11

Source:
Labour force survey, spring 1994.

Homelessness

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of registered homeless persons in the Ynys Môn borough council district on 1 September; and what was the equivalent figure for 1 September 1990 and 1 September 1987.

Mr. Richards: Numbers are available for persons and cases accepted as homeless in the Ynys Môn borough council district for the quarter ending 30 September each year and are shown as follows:

	Number of cases accepted as homeless	*Number of persons in households accepted as homeless*
1994	16	25
1990	14	35
1987	1	4

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State of Wales what is the number of claimants currently accommodated in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation and receiving housing benefit in Ynys Môn; and what was the equivalent figure for 1 September 1990 and 1 September 1987.

Mr. Richards: Numbers are available for households in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation in the Ynys Môn borough council district on 30 September each year and are shown as follows:

	Resident in bed and breakfast accommodation
1994	1
1990	2
1987	—

No information is available as to whether individuals are claiming housing benefit or not.

EC Committee of the Regions

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has yet received, from those who have convened the first meeting of the Reporting Back Forum for Wales representatives on the European Committee of the Regions, scheduled to take place of Thursday 24 November, an invitation to be a member or to attend this or subsequent forum meetings; what response he will give; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards the forum.

Mr. Redwood: I did not receive an invitation to the forum meeting convened on 24 November. The forum has been established by the two local authority associations. I have suggested that the associations should consider inviting MEPs and a selection of Welsh MPs from all four parties to join these discussions. I or one of my ministerial colleagues in the Welsh Office would be happy to attend a subsequent meeting.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of Newcastle disease were identified in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There have been no cases of Newcastle disease in Wales since 1985.

Mary Immaculate High School

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a date for the repayment to the education committee of South Glamorgan county council the £70,000 run-off debt left by Mary Immaculate high school when it transferred to grant-maintained status on 31 March.

Mr. Redwood: It has been agreed with South Glamorgan county council that repayment of the budget deficit incurred by Mary Immaculate RC high school while under that local authority is to be effected by adjustments to the authority's revenue support grant over the remainder of the current financial year. The delay in putting this arrangement in place was due to South Glamorgan county council not notifying my Department of the actual size of the deficit until October.

Cardiff Bay Opera House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Cardiff Bay development corporation and the Millennium Fund Commission in relation to the choice of designing architect for the proposed Cardiff Bay opera house.

Mr. Redwood: The choice of architect is not a matter for me but I have spoken to the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation. I urged him to allow the public to have a full opportunity to see the different designs and give their views, and for these to be taken in account by the trustees in coming to their decision on which design to build.

Forests

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and which local authorities have responded to the consultation paper "Our Forests, the Way Ahead"; and how many and which local authorities have expressed reservations about the proposal to continue with the disposal of woodland and the loss of public access in these woodlands.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Four local authorities in Wales have responded: Dyfed county council, Rhymney Valley district council, South Glamorgan county council and Vale of Glamorgan borough council. Each of these local authorities has expressed reservations about the proposals for securing public access to woodlands sold by the Forestry Commission.

Water and Sewerage Charges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Welsh Water/Dwr Cymru cyf with respect to water and sewerage company access to the records of council tax band allocations for the purpose of graduated charging for water and sewerage.

Mr. Redwood: I have recently received correspondence from Dwr Cymru about a number of issues relating to its future charging structure.

Bathing Beaches

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority Wales region concerning the European and United Kingdom statutory regulations for beach cleanliness and bathing water standards in relation to Jackson's bay and Whitmore bay, Barry, Glamorgan.

Mr. Redwood: My officials are in regular contact with the National Rivers Authority, Welsh region, about the EC identified bathing waters on the Welsh coastline, including those at Barry.

Official Cars

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the capital cost and running cost of the chairman's and the chief executive's cars; what marque are these cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* None. The chairman of Cardiff Bay development corporation uses a Jaguar pool car supplied jointly be the corporation and the Land Authority for Wales. The chief executive uses a leased Jaguar car to which he makes a substantial personal contribution in accordance with the scheme approved by my Department.

HEALTH

Community Care

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the total funding of care in the community in 1993–94; and what the projected amount will be for the next five years;

(2) if she will make a statement on the present funding for care in the community.

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is not available in the precise form requested. Total health and personal social services expenditure on services for mentally ill people for 1992–93 was £2.5 billion. These figures only include spending by the voluntary and private sector where purchased by health and social services.

Advertising

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the final cost of each advertising campaign for 1993–94 referred to in her answer to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *623*.

Mr. Sackville: For those 1993–94 campaigns, which included advertising, listed in the earlier reply to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), the advertising costs were:

Campaign	*£000*
AIDS Travelsafe	282
Blood Donor Recruitment	953
Community Care	339
Drug and Solvent Misuse	2,813
Health Service Professions Recruitment	125
Organ Donation	786
TV Fillers	50

Homelessness

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many permanent housing units for mentally ill homeless people have been provided under the Government initiative to supply homes for those needing a higher level of support launched in July 1990.

Mr. Bowis: As part of the Government's homeless mentally ill initiative, the Housing Corporation has approved proposals for 122 bed spaces to provide supported accommodation for mentally ill people. Proposals in respect of a further 40 are being considered. The level of support provided will vary depending on individual clients' needs.

In addition, 330 clients have already been found permanent places in existing accommodation. Many others have been placed in supported residential care for rehabilitation which it is hoped will eventually lead to permanent resettlement at a later date.

Northern Regional Health Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the agreement between Fletcher Joseph Partnership and the Northern regional health authority is still in force; whether such agreements are currently under review by her Department or by other agencies; whether such agreements are deemed ultra vires; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The district auditor has made a confidential report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under section 20(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 concerning the transfer of the former Northern regional health authority's architects department to the Fletcher Joseph Partnership in 1990. After considering fresh legal advice obtained by the RHA, we have accepted the auditor's view that the agreement was ultra vires the authority on one narrow ground. We therefore regard the agreement as being no longer in force.

As a general principle, health authorities have the legal powers to make agreements with external contractors to transfer non-core health authority functions, such as architects services. In drawing up such agreements, health authorities need to take legal advice to ensure they are acting within their powers. The NHS executive has carried out a review of non-core NHS trading agencies and will be producing general guidance for authorities shortly.

Psychiatric Beds

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional psychiatric beds would be needed in inner London to bring the average rate of bed occupancy to 85 per cent.

Mr. Bowis: The number of psychiatric beds is not the only factor influencing bed occupancy rates. The mental health task force's report on services for severely mentally ill people in London, "Priorities for Action", copies of which are available in the Library, found that increased availability of community services and good bed management strategies could reduce the pressure on acute beds. All inner London health authorities have agreed action plans to review their provision of acute psychiatric beds or alternative community-based accommodation and commission any necessary additional provision for 1995–96.

Pharmacists

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure on safes and secure cupboards and containers supplied to pharmacists for NHS use in each of the last three years.

Mr. Malone: Expenditure on these items is a matter for pharmacists and information is not available centrally.

Breast Cancer

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of studies on the incidence of breast cancer in women who have had an abortion; if she will be promoting any research into this correlation; and what advice on this subject she will be issuing to doctors and women.

Mr. Sackville: We have no information on the risks of developing breast cancer in women who have had an abortion. The report of recent Canadian research on this subject will be studied carefully by the Department.

Steroid Users

Mr. Tom Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she will now give to needle exchange schemes and drug user clinics about the advice they give steroid users.

Mr. Bowis: We issued general guidance to health authorities in spring 1994 about the need to promote the health of drug misusers, including non-opiate drug misuse such as steroids. The guidance includes encouraging into treatment and care those not in touch with services and reducing health risks such as the spread of HIV. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Homoeopathy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that national health service purchasing authorities and general practitioner fundholders will use the powers granted to them under the national health service reforms to facilitate homoeopathy where it is considered to be clinically appropriate; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Both district health authorities and general practitioner fundholders purchase services to meet the health care needs of the patients and local populations for whom they are responsible, according to local circumstances and priorities. This includes the purchase of homeopathic services where this is appropriate.

Wheelchair Access

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice she gives to health authorities and NHS trusts on street level access to NHS public buildings for disabled people and wheelchair users; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department issued advice to the national health service in 1989 under the title "Health Building Note 40, Common Activity Spaces, Volume 4, Designing for Disabled People". The scope of this guidance includes the design of ramps and stairways from street level into NHS buildings. Copies of the advice are available in the Library.

General Practitioner Lists

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *68*, when she expects to be able to publish the data for 1993–94 on general practitioner lists.

Mr. Malone: Early next year.

Mental Health Beds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase the number of mental health beds in those areas where there is most need *(a)* during the current financial and *(b)* the next financial year; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: It is for health authorities to determine the range and type of mental health services they purchase based on their assessment of the needs of their population.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her policy on the advertising of tobacco.

Mr. Malone: The Government are committed to ensuring that there are strong and effective controls on the advertising and promotion of tobacco products. We believe that voluntary agreements with the industry provide the best way of controlling tobacco advertising. In May 1994 we announced the main points of a revised voluntary agreement, which will significantly reduce levels of outdoor advertising and enhance the size and impact of health warnings on press and poster advertising. The new agreement will be published shortly.

Herbalists

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to allow the rights granted to herbalists in the Medicines Act 1968; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The rights granted to herbalists under the Medicines Act 1968 will continue.

Chiropractors

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to make treatment by qualified chiropractors available to patients on the national health service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We believe that the professional recognition and regulation of the profession will encourage those purchasers who want to refer their patients for chiropractic treatment to do so. Provision within the national health service is a matter for local decision in the light of priorities and available resources.

Drugs Budget

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of the drugs budget in the national health service, both for hospitals and for general practitioners; what the cost was in 1979; and what has been the change in each year since then.

Mr. Malone: The latest provision for the cost of drugs in the family health services in 1994–95 is £3,217 million. The cost of drugs in the hospital and community health services is met from the total HCHS cash—limited allocation and a separate estimate for 1994–95 is not available. Information relating to earlier years is shown in the table.

	Total NHS spending on drugs £ million (rounded)			
Year	*FHS Drugs*	*Percentage Increase*	*HCHS Drugs*	*Percentage Increase*
1979–80	633	—	156	—
1980–81	766	21.1	185	19.0
1981–82	786	14.4	214	15.5
1982–83	1,009	15.1	245	14.4
1983–84	1,130	12.0	267	8.9
1984–85	1,192	5.4	279	4.6
1985–86	1,275	7.0	297	6.4
1986–87	1,378	8.1	318	7.3
1987–88	1,536	11.5	352	10.6
1988–89	1,744	13.5	380	8.1
1989–90	1,942	11.4	414	8.8
1990–91	2,080	7.1	460	11.3
1991–92	2,317	11.4	591	28.4
1992–93	2,641	14.0	634	7.2
1993–94	2,951	11.7	[1]696	9.9

Note:
[1] Provisional.

Pharmacists

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring her Department undertakes to ensure that national health service prescriptions are properly dispensed by pharmacists.

Mr. Malone: None. Monitoring of the dispensing of national health service prescriptions by pharmacists is undertaken by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society through its professional regulatory machinery.

Herbal Remedies

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to satisfy herself that herbal products which do not require any licence under the terms of the Medicines Act 1968, rather than simply being exempt by sections 12 and 56 of that Act, will remain available under the provisions of the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have looked carefully at all the circumstances in which herbal products are sold and supplied. Those herbal products which require no licence under the Medicines Act will remain available under the new regulations.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her recent announcement that herbal remedies currently exempt from licensing restrictions on their preparation under section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968 will remain exempt under the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations also applies to their exemption under section 56 of that Act from restrictions on the supply of such herbal remedies; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The exemptions and public health safeguards for herbal medicines under section 56 of the Medicines Act 1968 will continue to apply under the new regulations.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what protection will be afforded by the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations for those products which are sold only to herbalists and other practitioners for use in their preparations but not directly to the public; and if she will make a statement.

(2) what assumptions her Department has made of whether products sold directly to herbalists and other practitioners are considered to be placed on the market in the context of European directives; whether or not they therefore fall within the licensing requirements of relevant European directives; what steps she is seeking to guarantee their continued availability; how their continued availability will be protected by the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Herbal products supplied to herbalists and other practitioners for use in their preparations but not directly to the public, which are currently exempt from product licensing requirements under the Medicines Act 1968, will retain their exemption under the proposed new regulations. This will be the case whether or not these products can be regarded as placed on the market.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration she has given to the proposals of the Natural Medicines Society for a simplified registration system for its preparations which would require the demonstration of safety and purity but not necessarily of efficacy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Herbal medicines covered by exemptions from product licensing requirements under section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968 will remain exempt. The need for a simplified registration scheme for such products does not therefore arise.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations her Department has received in total from individuals and from right hon. and hon. Members registering concern about the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations; and how many of these representations welcomed the regulations in question.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has received about 3,500 letters from individuals and over 1,000 letters from right hon. and hon. Members who were concerned about the possible effect of the proposed new regulations on herbal medicines. Our confirmation that herbal medicines currently exempt from product licensing requirements will continue to enjoy this exemption when the new regulations come into force has been generally welcomed.

Mrs. Anne Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether preparation of herbal products in the form of tinctures, extracts, powders and tablets falls outside the definition of industrial processes set by the European directive to be implemented through the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We are satisfied that herbal preparations in the forms described, which are prepared by traditional processes, are not "industrially produced" when supplied in accordance with section 12 of the Medicines Act. They will therefore continue to be exempt from product licensing requirements.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make available in the Library copies of all correspondence which she, her officials, and officials of the Medicines Control Agency have had with the European Commission in connection with the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations and in connection with relevant European directives.

Mr. Sackville: Such correspondence is regarded as confidential by the parties concerned. In my announcement of 11 November, I made clear our view in the position of herbal medicines under the relevant EC directive and the considerations that gave rise to that view.

Aromatherapy

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis she has formed the policy that products used in aromatherapy do not fall within the definition of medicines as established by relevant European directives; what provisions of the proposed new Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations will ensure their continued availability; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Products used in aromatherapy are medicinal products if used, sold or supplied for a medicinal purpose. The position of aromatherapy products currently exempt from product licensing requirements is unaffected by the proposed new regulations.

Casualty Services

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the decision by Cornwall and Isles of Scilly district family health services authority on the future of a casualty service for Falmouth and Penryn.

Mr. Sackville: This is under discussion locally and the hon. Member may wish to contact Dr. Stan Dennison, the chairman of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority, for details.

Visiting Costs Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to introduce a visiting costs scheme to help enable parents to visit their children in hospital.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on 1 November at columns *1081-82*.

DEFENCE

Yugoslavia

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the situation in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Soames: The former Yugoslavia featured prominently in the debate in the House on 17 November, *Official Report*, columns *133–228*, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a further statement to the House on 21 November, *Official Report*, columns *341–48*. We remain very concerned about the upsurge in fighting and are monitoring the situation closely.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices, his London flat in London and official residences.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 26 October, *Official Report*, column *706*, concerning entertainment expenditure by my Department and its agencies.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Freeman: There are no plans for Ministers in this Department to send official Christmas cards this year.

Overseas Service Men (Training)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to encourage countries overseas to send service men for training in the United Kingdom; how much Her Majesty's Government charge for military training; how many personnel were sent to the United Kingdom in the last year; and what is the overall sum earned by the Ministry of Defence in providing such training.

Mr. Soames: My Department continues to encourage training in the United Kingdom by foreign and Commonwealth students as an important element of developing and strengthening relationships and ties with friendly nations. During the last financial year, 4,566 students from 98 different countries took part in training in the United Kingdom. The charges for training will depend on the length of the course, its syllabus and the number taking part; although central records are not maintained of the receipts from this activity, they are estimated to be around £39,500,000.

RAF Leeming

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of works at RAF Leeming in order to accommodate the proposed move there of 100 Squadron from RAF Finningley; and if he will itemise that expenditure.

Mr. Soames: The cost of works is estimated to be £10,000. This is for minor refurbishment of existing accommodation at RAF Leeming.

RAF Bases

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which RAF bases in the United Kingdom have runways of 9,000 ft or over; and what proportion that is of all the RAF bases in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: Of the 72 RAF stations in the United Kingdom, excluding USAF bases, the following 11 have runways of 9,000 ft or over:

RAF Brize Norton
RAF Coningsby
RAF Cottesmore
RAF Finningley
RAF Lossiemouth
RAF Machrihansish
RAF Manston
RAF Marham
RAF St. Mawgan
RAF Waddington
RAF Wittering

RAF Scampton

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost of disabling the fibre optic communications system at RAF Scampton and of providing a new junction point elsewhere.

Mr. Soames: The cost of disabling the fibre optic communications system is not expected to exceed £50,000. The equipment at RAF Scampton is not a junction point and will not therefore need to be relocated.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost of providing safe access from the married quarters at RAF Scampton on to the A15.

Mr. Soames: If it is decided to close RAF Scampton, the existing married quarters will be used to meet the shortfall at RAF Waddington. An estimate of the cost of providing safe access from the married quarters on to the A15 will not be available until more detailed work is carried out on this related, but separate, project.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the renovation of the small arms range at RAF Scampton; and what will be the cost of its decommissioning.

Mr. Soames: Approximately £3,000 was recently spent on minor refurbishment of the small arms range. The decommissioning of the range will consist of the

de-leading and removal of sand which is carried out as a routine maintenance task every 18 months at a cost of £3,500.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sums were spent at RAF Scampton in order to accommodate the Red Arrows in 1984; and under what heading that expenditure was made.

Mr. Soames: Details of this expenditure are no longer available.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost of relocating the Central Flying School from RAF Scampton to other bases.

Mr. Soames: The total estimated cost is £3,000,000.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost of keeping the married quarters open at RAF Scampton, but segregated from the main technical site; and under what headings this expenditure will be itemised.

Mr. Soames: If it is decided to close RAF Scampton, the existing married quarters will be used to meet the shortfall at RAF Waddington. It will not be possible to provide an estimate of the costs requested until more detailed work is carried out on this related, but separate, project. The main cost headings are likely to be access, internal roads, perimeter fencing and provision of facilities.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost of recommissioning RAF Church Fenton and other associated works to prepare for the possible move there from RAF Scampton of the Short Brothers units; and if he will itemise that expenditure.

Mr. Soames: Only minor works services would be required at RAF Church Fenton at an estimated cost of £20,000.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost of providing replacement receipt and dispatch facilities for the operation of the priority flight delivery service at another RAF base if the facilities at RAF Scampton are closed.

Mr. Soames: It is anticipated that the priority freight delivery service task would be subsumed within the existing infrastructure of other RAF bases. Relocation costs have been identified and should not exceed £10,000.

Air Misses

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the joint air miss working group report on the air miss between an RAF Bulldog and a US Air Force F11 over East Lothian on 26 June 1991.

Mr. Soames: A copy of this report is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the joint air miss working group report on the air miss between an RAF Bulldog and an RAF Tornado near Tranent on 11 May 1992.

Mr. Soames: A copy of this report is available in the Library of the House.

Low Flying

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State of Defence if he will list the dates, locations, and nature of the activity notified, for all instances in which helicopter operators have been informed of particularly intense military low-flying activities in accordance with paragraph 2.4 of aeronautical information circular 156/1993, dated 21 October 1993.

Mr. Soames: The aeronautical information circular, AIC, 156/1993 was replaced by AIC 73/1994 dated 30 June following a working group review of the pipeline inspection notification system—PINS.

The requirement of paragraph 2.4 of AIC 156/1993 does not feature in the new AIC since the working group was satisfied that, in practice, all intense military low-flying activity was already notified to helicopter operators under the existing notice to airmen, NOTAM, system and there was no requirement for additional arrangements.

Since 21 October 1993, almost 6,000 NOTAMs have been issued, covering various types of air activity. To identify those which warned specifically of intense military low-flying activity would incur disproportionate cost.

Air Safety

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the actions taken by his Department in response to each of the recommendations of the Air Accidents Investigation Branch's reports on the military-civil collisions on 29 August 1991 and 23 June 1993.

Mr. Soames: As a result of the accident on 29 August 1991, my Department in conjunction with other authorities has implemented the recommendations made by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch, as follows:

(i) Greater publicity of the civil aircraft notification procedure—CANP—and its benefits has been achieved through articles in general aviation safety leaflets and briefings to civil pilots at a number of open evenings.

(ii) Extension of the CNAP system to encompass civil aerial work carried out below 1,000 ft was introduced in August 1993.

(iii) Information has been published showing the directional flow of aircraft in the few areas of high-intensity low-flying operations and RAF stations operating fast jets have been identified.

As far as the accident on 23 June 1993 is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on 7 July, *Official Report,* column *264.* My Department continues to work with the appropriate authorities and organisations in order to maximise flight safety in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many notifications have been made under *(a)* the civil aircraft notification procedure and *(b)* the pipeline inspection notification system in each month from October 1993 onwards; and how many reports have been received in each month of *(a)* breaches of notified areas by military aircraft and *(b)* non-compliance with notifications by civil aircraft.

Mr. Soames: Under the civil aircraft notification procedure only commercial activity attracts temporary avoidance status; details of recreational and other aerial activity are passed as warnings to military aircrew who will take account of them in planning their sorties. The

numbers of notifications, broken down by type of activity, received in each month since October 1993 are as follows:

	Commercial activity	*Recreational and other aerial activity*
1993		
October	50	79
November	10	52
December	5	13
1994		
January	15	31
February	26	63
March	22	40
April	40	65
May	59	117
June	58	106
July	57	134
August	62	90
September	34	81
October	35	95

Since October 1993, there have been six reported breaches of avoidances accorded to commercial activity; three in June 1994, one in September 1994 and two in October 1994.

Under the pipeline inspection notification system a summary of all relevant activity is issued daily from Monday to Friday. Each summary comprises several individual notifications; it would incur disproportionate cost to identify the total number of notifications made.

Notification under PINS attract the same status as recreational and other aerial activity notified under CANP. They constitute a warning of activity, but do not attract avoidance status; they cannot, therefore, be breached.

Participation in CANP or PINS by civil pilots is on a voluntary basis, the question of non-compliance does not therefore arise, nor is there any mechanism for identifying civil activity which could have been but was not notified.

Pipeline Inspection Notification System

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the review of the first six months of operation of the pipeline inspection notification system; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library.

Mr. Soames: The review of the pipeline inspection notification system was carried out by a working group chaired by the National Air Traffic Service on which my Department, the Civil Aviation Authority, the British Helicopter Advisory Board, helicopter operators and companies making use of pipeline inspection services were all represented.

The group's main recommendations were that the system be made more flexible to allow more precise notifications of pipeline inspection activity, and that details of the areas in which military fast jets are permitted to fly below 250 ft be incorporated in the revised AIC.

No formal report was produced. The group's recommendations were, however, incorporated into the revised system which was notified to air users in the aeronautical information circular 73/1994 issued by the Civil Aviation Authority on 30 June 1994.

Red Arrows

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it is proposed to relocate the Red Arrows; and what is the planned expenditure at that base to accommodate them.

Mr. Soames: It is proposed to relocate the Red Arrows to RAF Marham in October 1995 at a total estimated cost of £3 million.

RAF Bases

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which RAF bases are supplied by underground fuel pipelines; and what proportion this is of all RAF bases in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: Of 35 RAF flying stations in the United Kingdom, including three USAF bases, 18 are connected to the military pipeline system which provides aviation fuel. The remainder are supplied by road.

Nuclear Weapons Store

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if details of the nuclear weapons store at USAF Lakenheath are supplied to Her Majesty's Government; and what provision is made for the store to be subject to the consent of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Soames: Inspection and formal approval by the relevant United Kingdom authorities is required before any facility may be used for the storage of nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what responsibility he has for organising emergency plans involving all the local emergency services in relation to the nuclear weapons store at USAF Lakenheath; and how frequently the emergency plan is tested.

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence is the lead Department for the response to any accident involving a nuclear weapon in the United Kingdom. Generic contingency plans exist which take account of the responsibilities of the civil emergency services. Response arrangements, including joint United Kingdom—United States arrangements, are regularly tested; the most recent major exercise took place in April and included full participation by the local authorities and civil emergency services in Suffolk.

RAF Lakenheath

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged, *(c)* convicted and *(d)* acquitted over matters relating to byelaws at RAF Lakenheath in each of the last three years.

Mr. Soames: The figures are as follows:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
(a) Arrested	—	3	—
(b) Charged	—	3	—
(c) Convicted	—	—	—
(d) Acquitted	—	—	—

Nurse Elaine Dugard

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when it was first known that Elaine Dugard, a petty officer registered nurse, had contracted the HIV virus;

(2) between which dates Elaine Dugard worked as a nurse at the royal naval hospital in Plymouth;

(3) between which dates Elaine Dugard worked in the casualty unit at the royal naval hospital in Plymouth.

Mr. Soames: While I can confirm that nurse Dugard worked a the royal naval hospital Plymouth, it is not my Department's practice to give details of an individual's service employment or medical records.

Haymes Garth

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department received the report from KPMG Peat Marwick into spending at Haymes Garth; if he will allow officers named in the report the opportunity to comment on it before its publication; when he expects to publish the report; and what is the estimated cost of conducting the inquiry.

Mr. Soames: KPMG Peat Marwick has not yet submitted its final report on Haymes Garth. Draft extracts have been shown to the individuals who were interviewed in the course of the investigation, and the report is now being finalised in the light of their comments. Once the report has been received we shall want to give its findings careful consideration. The latest estimate of the cost of employing KPMG Peat Marwick to undertake this work is around £100,000.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the amount that will have been spent for the recent refurbishment and redecoration of official service residence Haymes Garth in Gloucestershire; who was the officer responsible for overseeing this budget; what is the present valuation of Haymes Garth; and on how many occasions those responsible for the refurbishment and redecoration travelled overseas to discuss details of the changes proposed.

Mr. Soames: Final reconciliation of the full costs of refurbishment and redecoration of Haymes Garth is in hand. Current indicators are that the total will be slightly lower than the figure given in my predecessor's statement on 4 July, *Official Report*, column *85*, but I shall report the final figure to the House as part of the further statement I have promised. In the light of the on-going study into this particular case it would be inappropriate at this stage to name any individual.

Although informal assessments of the value of Haymes Garth have been made to assist the investigations, there has been no recent full commercial valuation.

The cost of refurbishment and redecoration includes two brief liaison visits to Germany by a contractor.

Accountancy System

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of the contract awarded to SEMA to install and run a commercially based accountancy system.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the Defence Research Agency and I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Chisholm, to answer direct.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Tam Dalyell, dated 28 November 1994:

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to your question concerning the value of the contract awarded to SEMA to install and run a commercially based accountancy system.

DRA's Commercial Accounting System (CAS) was developed to facilitate the creation of the Trading Fund in April 1993. The System is one of the largest integrated accounting systems operating in the United Kingdom. Five software companies received orders of £0.5 million or more. SEMA was one of those companies and its contribution was worth £1.2 million.

The running of the CAS is undertaken in-house by DRA's Financial Accounting Department. It places a number of support contracts for various services. SEMA has a contract to supply a Financial Systems Management service. This was awarded in August 1993 and the payments to December 1994 are expected to be £0.7 million

Research Agency

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the background and qualifications of the new chief executive of the Defence Research Agency.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans to replace the current chief executive of the DRA, John Chisholm. Mr. Chisholm graduated from Cambridge university with a BA in mechanical sciences and is a member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers. He has extensive experience in the service industries, having held senior positions in CAP Scientific and the SEMA group. He has been chief executive of the DRA since July 1991.

Military Equipment

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what items of military equipment of British manufacture are being evaluated by the United States Government under the provisions of the foreign competitive testing programme for 1995; and what items of British manufacture have been bought by the United States Government since that programme was first set up in 1990.

Mr. Freeman: The United States Government have recently announced that six items of military equipment of British manufacture have been authorised for evaluation under the provisions of the United States foreign comparative testing programme for 1995. These are: automatic chemical agent alarm; small projected line charge; acoustic cladding underwater repair system; advanced short range air-to-air missile; mini strike initiator; and minimum operating strip lighting kit. Since 1990, the United States Government have announced the purchase of six items of British manufacture as a result of successful FCT evaluations. These are: chemical agent monitor; improved chemical agent monitor; impressed current cathodic protection; aerial target vector scoring system; versatile exercise mine system; and enhanced electronic warfare scenario generator.

Operational Requirements

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Mr. Mike Wood, currently the United Kingdom marketing executive for Lockheed, and his deputy, Mr. Richard Lumb, were, when employed by his Department, privy to confidential information on the

RAF's future operational requirements including its plans to refurbish or replace the Herclus C-130K aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: All Crown servants, including officers in Her Majesty's armed forces, are bound by regulations governing the acceptance of outside appointments. The rules ensure that when a Crown servant accepts outside employment no cause for suspicion of impropriety exists. I am satisfied that both Mr. Wood and Mr. Lumb abided by these rules.

Hercules Fleet

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the target availability of the Hercules fleet required to enable it to meet its budgeted flying hours requirement.

Mr. Freeman: Aircraft availability dictates the number of aircraft that are available for tasking to meet commitments on any particular day. This is not linked directly to the budgeted annual flying hours requirement as each aircraft does not necessarily fly the same number of hours.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on budgeted flying hours if his Department proceeds with its plan to offer up for sale up to 10 of the older aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: There is no plan to offer for sale any of the Hercules fleet. An advertisement was placed by my Department in September to assess the potential market for RAF Hercules should they become available for sale.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the budgeted flying hours for Hercules C130 fleet in each of the last three years.

Mr. Freeman: Budgeted flying hours are as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Hercules air transport aircraft	33,990	33,990	34,058
Hercules tanker aircraft	2,901	2,901	2,901

There has been an increase in the number of budgeted flying hours for Hercules air transport aircraft this year to accommodate reservist aircrew flying trials.

Biological Weapons (Russia)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Russian counterpart concerning the termination of Russian production facilities for biological weapons.

Mr. Soames: Following a joint statement signed in September 1992 the Governments of Russia, United Kingdom and United States are conducting discussions with the intention of establishing confidence in Russian compliance with the biological and toxic weapons convention.

Royal Dockyards

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to his Department in developing the privatisation plans for the royal dockyards.

Mr. Freeman: During the period between 18 October 1993, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced our policy towards the future management of the dockyards, *Official Report*, 18 October 1993, columns *39-41*, and 31 October 1994, total identifiable expenditure for work associated with developing and implementing plans for the proposed privatisation of the royal dockyards amounts to some £7.2 million. Given that the current dockyard management contracts are due to expire no later than April 1996, my Department would expect to have incurred in any case costs for work related to any future management arrangements for the royal dockyards.

Land Mines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his *(a)* United States, *(b)* Russian and *(c)* Italian counterparts concerning the banning of the export and import of anti-personnel land mines.

Mr. Freeman: The United kingdom is in the forefront of international efforts to establish rules for the responsible use and transfer of anti-personnel land mines. Discussions have been held with a number of states, including the United States, Russia and Italy, in the context of the UN weaponry convention review conference and in respect of other initiatives. Our aim is to establish international arrangements which will command widespread respect and adherence.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 29 November 1994

PRIME MINISTER

State Property Inventories

Mr. Redmond : To ask the Prime Minister if he will give the dates on which state property inventories have been checked since 1980.

The Prime Minister: Departments are responsible for maintaining records of property which they hold for their specialised or operational use. Property Holdings maintains a record for the common user office estate. No central record is kept and the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what evidence he has to support the public statement of Mrs. Stella Rimmington that MI5 had assisted in the tracking down and issue of warrants for the culprits of the Lockerbie crime; and if he will place in the Library the report of the conduct and knowledge of MI5 about terrorist threats against airliners in October to December 1988.

The Prime Minister: The greater part of the Security Service's efforts is directed to countering terrorism.

As I made clear in reply to my hon. Friend, the Member for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt), on 14 July *Official Report*, column *712*, it remains the Government's policy not to provide information on the operations of the security and intelligence agencies. I have, therefore, nothing further to add to what the Director-General has already said.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Zoological Society

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the conduct of the council of the Zoological Society of London in respect of its adherence to its constitution and its performance of its objectives; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Zoological Society of London is an autonomous body operating under a royal charter. Ensuring adherence to the charter is not a matter for the Government.

Government

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister how many members there are of his Administration, including Whips, *(a)* in the House of Commons, *(b)* in the House of Lords, *(c)* in neither and *(d)* in total; and if he will provide comparable figures for November 1989, November 1984 and May 1979.

The Prime Minister: This is a matter of public record. The information requested can be obtained from the Library of the House.

Ministers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the number of Ministers in Her Majesty's Government in each year since 1979.

The Prime Minister: This is a matter of public record. The information requested can be obtained from the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prevention of Terrorism Acts

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the exclusion orders placed upon those people under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts, with particular reference to John Matthews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Government hope that the day is approaching when exclusion orders will no longer be needed but we are not prepared to lower our guard prematurely. There are currently 61 orders in force which I or my predecessors have made and I keep the need for them under review.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to introduce legislation to regulate those who seek to clamp vehicles parked on private land.

Mr. Maclean: Following the consultation process completed last year, the Government are considering what action it would be appropriate to take in respect of wheel clamping on private land. Our aim is to ensure that any measure introduced to prevent or deter irresponsible and heavy-handed wheel clamping on private land does not prevent sensible measures being taken to control genuine parking problems.

We will make an announcement as soon as possible.

National Criminal Intelligence System

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the total costs involved in the integrated national criminal intelligence system project; which computer company provided the equipment; and what consultants were employed.

Mr. Maclean: From the project's initiation in autumn 1989 to its termination in February 1993 total costs involved in the integrated national criminal intelligence system were £1.447 million. No computer equipment was provided as the project did not proceed beyond the design stage. The private sector firms engaged as consultants

were Computer Sciences Co. Ltd. Grafton Database Associates Ltd, Hoskyns', PA Consultants, Software AG and World Quality Systems.

Airports (Immigration officers)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those United Kingdom airports receiving scheduled flights from abroad which do not have permanent, full-time immigration service staff stationed at the airport.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The airports are Belfast (International), Teeside, Humberside, Biggin Hill, Eastleigh (Southampton), Exeter and Kirkwall (Orkney). At six of these locations arrangements exist to provide immigration coverage from the nearest permanently staffed port or office. The exception is Kirkwall where immigration coverage of scheduled flights is provided by customs officers under the provisions of paragraph 1(1) of schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971.

Probation and Community Service Orders

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of unexecuted warrants *(a)* for breach of probation orders and *(b)* for breach of community services orders in each probation service area in England and Wales, and in total in England and Wales in (i) 1991, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1993 and on the latest date for which figures were available.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available centrally.

Camera Surveillance

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance is issued to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* police authorities regarding responsibility to display signs warning of the existence of camera surveillance when it is used to monitor on-street activity in city or town centres;

(2) what guidance is issued to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* police authorities regarding the preservation of privacy for domestic and office premises within CCTV field of vision, where closed circuit television is used to monitor on-street activities in city or town centres.

Mr. Maclean: The Government issued good practice guidelines to local authorities and police authorities on the use of closed circuit television in public places earlier this month. Where cameras are not place prominently the guide recommends that there should be clear signs indicating that a CCTV system is in operation. The guide also recommends the development of local codes of practice for each scheme so that due attention is given to issues of privacy.

Police Authority Membership

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of those submitted by the independent selection process for nomination as independent members of English police authorities were *(a)* women, *(b)* from ethnic minorities, *(c)* from the voluntary sector, *(d)* businessmen, *(e)* educationists and *(f)* lawyers; and what proportion (i) of each group and (ii) in total remained on the list after the Home Office review of the suggested names.

Mr. Maclean: Nominations have been received in respect of 36 of the 37 English police authorities. The Home Secretary has considered 35 of these, and the information is as follows:

	Selection Panels' Lists (Total = 686)		*Home Secretary's Lists (Total = 342)*		
	(a) *Number*	*(b)* *percentage of 686*	*(c)* *Number*	*(d)* *Percentage of 342*	*(e)* *Percentage of (a)*
Women	192	30	73	21.3	38
Ethnic Minorities	52	7.6	23	6.7	44.2
Voluntary Sector	35	5.1	10	2.9	28.6
Businessmen	262	38.1	167	48.8	63.7
Educationalists	114	16.6	30	8.8	26.3
Lawyers	23	3.4	10	2.9	43.5

It is not possible to calculate a total figure, as many of the candidates fall into more than one of the categories listed.

Hunt Saboteurs

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance has been given to the police in relation to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in particular in relation to their treatment of hunt saboteurs.

Mr. Maclean: On Royal Assent, we issued to all police forces a circular and introductory guide on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Copies have been put in the Library of the House. The information provided is explanatory rather than interpretative. The application of the provisions in respect of the offence of aggravated trespass is an operational matter for chief officers.

Adoption

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many babies adopted by British residents in Romania and in India have been *(a)* granted or *(b)* refused admission; and how many appeals against refusal have been (i) rejected and (ii) successful in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Statistics relating to children entering the United Kingdom with a view to adoption are not collected centrally.

Firearms

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost to police in operating the firearms licensing system in respect of each of the categories of firearms fees listed in the table in his answer of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *282*.

Mr. Maclean: The estimated costs[1] for each category for the year 1993–94 are as follows:-

	£
Firearm Certificate Issue	593,000
Shot Gun Certificate Issue	1,303,000
Shot Gun Certificate Renewal	3,460,000
Registered Firearm Dealer Issue of Certificate	20,000
Home Office Club Approval	[2]1,650

[1] Costs vary from year to year according to the number of certificates issued.
[2] No certificates for Home Office club approval fell due for renewal during 1993–94.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the best practice costs detailed in the 1991 guidelines issued to chief police officers for *(a)* the issue and renewal of a firearm certificate, *(b)* the issue and renewal of a shot gun certificate, *(c)* the issue of a certificate to a registered firearm dealer and *(d)* Home Office club approval.

Mr. Maclean: The models of best practice for the administration of the firearms licensing system issued to chief officers of police in 1991 do not include costings.

Costings of best practice are contained in a subsequent study undertaken in 1992 by the independent consultants Ernst and Young. The costings identified, for both uniformed and civilian staff, are as follows:

	Uniformed Procedure	*Civilian Procedure*
Firearm Certificate		
Issue	55.57	36.18
Renewal	12.12	10.23
Shot Gun Certificate		
Issue	44.11	28.92
Renewal	11.18	9.08
Registered Firearms Dealer		
Issue of Certificate	124.52	77.72
Home Office Club		
Approval	92.26	57.64

Young Offenders

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the rates for re-offending for those aged under 21 years within *(a)* two years and *(b)* four years in each year since 1990 for those punished with each of the possible sentences listed in his answer of 20 July, *Official Report*, columns *267–68*, for offences of assault or criminal damage;

(2) what are the rates for re-offending within four years for those aged under 21 years in each year since 1990 for those punished with each of the sentences listed in his answer of 20 July, *Official Report*, columns *267–68*, for the offences of *(a)* burglary of a dwelling-house and *(b)* burglary of buildings;

(3) what are the comparable rates for re-offending within two years for those under 21 years in each year since 1990 for those convicted of (i) theft from shops, (ii) theft of a motor vehicle and (iii) theft from a motor vehicle by a sentence of *(a)* absolute or conditional discharge, *(b)* fine, *(c)* bind over of parent, *(d)* supervision order, *(e)* attendance centre order, *(f)* community service order, *(g)* probation order, *(h)* combination order and (i) detention in a young offender institution;

(4) what are the rates for re-offending within two years for those aged under 21 years in each year since 1990 for those punished with each of the sentences listed in his answer of 20 July, *Official Report*, columns *267–68*, for the offences of *(a)* burglary of a dwelling-house and *(b)* burglary of buildings;

(5) what are the rates for re-offending within four years for those aged under 21 years in each year since 1990 for those punished with each of the sentences listed in his answer of 20 July, *Official Report*, columns *296–68*, for the offences of *(a)* theft from shops, *(b)* theft of a motor vehicle and *(c)* theft from a motor vehicle.

Mr. Maclean: The available information on re-offending is on the rate of reconviction for offenders who commence probation and community service and for sentenced prisoners who are discharged from Prison Service establishments. The latest available information relates to a two-year period following the commencement of an order or the discharge from prison during 1990.

The table gives two-year reconviction rates for those aged under 21 at commencement of their order or aged under 21 when sentenced to a custodial sentence.

These comparisons do not make allowance for the different nature of offenders, with different risks of reconviction, who receive different sentences nor for the fact that for those commencing community penalties there is a greater likelihood of being convicted in the early part of the follow-up period for offences which were committed before the period started. These issues will be addressed in a report in preparation—"Explaining reconviction rates: a critical analysis", a Home Office research study.

Two year reconviction rates[1] for those aged under 21 at commencement of probation and community service orders and for those aged under 21 when sentenced to a custodial sentence by type of original offence[2] based on samples of offenders commencing order or discharged during 1990

England and Wales—percentages and numbers

Disposal	*Theft of a motor vehicle*[3]	*All offenders*	*Assault*[3]	*Criminal damage*[4]	*Burglary in a dwelling*	*Burglary of a building*	*Theft from a motor vehicle*[4]	*Theft from shops*[4]
Probation								
Reconviction rate	81	70	48	64	76	79	73	64
Number in sample[5]	446	3,653	321	475	402	534	492	1,161
Community service								
Reconviction rate	75	67	66	65	67	75	65	73
Number in sample[5]	196	1,603	205	172	147	229	245	310

Two year reconviction rates[1] for those aged under 21 at commencement of probation and community service orders and for those aged under 21 when sentenced to a custodial sentence by type of original offence[2] based on samples of offenders commencing order or discharged during 1990

England and Wales—percentages and numbers

Disposal	Theft of a motor vehicle[3]	All offenders	Assault[3]	Criminal damage[4]	Burglary in a dwelling	Burglary of a building	Theft from a motor vehicle[4]	Theft from shops[4]
Young offender institution								
Reconviction rate	89	72	57	60	77	83	75	81
Number in sample[6]	528	5,932	722	764	825	600	546	970

[1] Reconviction rates are for offences on the 'standard list'. These include all indictable offences and more serious summary offences. A definition of standard list offences is contained in Appendices 4 and 5 of "Criminal statistics England and Wales 1993" (Cm 2680).
[2] The most recent standard list offence recorded in the period up to and including the commencement or discharge date. This may on occasions not be the offence for which the sentence is passed.
[3] This consists of wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm or to resist apprehension, wounding or inflicting grievous bodily harm (inflicting bodily injury with or without a weapon), assault occasioning actual bodily harm, assault with intent to resist apprehension or assault on a person assisting a constable and assault on a constable but does *not* include common assault as all but a few rare subclasses of common assault are not standard list offences.
[4] On account of the relatively low numbers for some of the disposals in the samples for offences of criminal damage, theft from a motor vehicle and theft from shops the quoted figures are based on pooling samples over the period 1987 to 1990.
[5] This consists of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle and stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance.
[6] The number in the samples are given for information. The reconviction rate based on the smallest sample (ie. that for community service and the offence of burglary in a dwelling) could range by chance by about plus or minus 8 percentage points. The rate will be generally more accurately determined as the numbers sampled increase.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of 10 to 16-year-olds found guilty or cautioned for each year since 1981.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Number of 10–16 year olds found guilty or cautioned[1] for all offences 1981–1993

England and Wales

Year	Found guilty	Cautioned[1]	Found guilty and cautioned[1]
1981	118,260	108,237	226,497
1982	110,018	112,684	222,702
1983	100,445	115,437	215,882
1984	93,271	119,848	213,119
1985	82,631	134,567	217,198
1986	62,630	113,496	176,126
1987	53,597	114,401	167,998
1988	46,850	101,375	148,225
1989	40,373	96,627	137,000
1990	37,255	112,081	149,336
1991	32,544	105,662	138,206
1992	29,006	112,867	141,873
1993	29,260	99,870	129,130

[1] Excludes motoring offences.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Howard: My Department employs two special advisers.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Prisoners (Drugs and Alcohol)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities there are for treating those with drug or alcohol problems who are being held in prison in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 29 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on what facilities there are for treating those with drug or alcohol problems who are being held in prison in the United Kingdom.

All prisons within England and Wales provide prisoners with access to education, treatment and counselling services for substance misuse via the prison health care centre, the probation service or outside drug agencies. Some but not all of the facilities are already used by both alcohol and drug misusers.

As part of the new Prison Service drugs strategy, to be launched during January 1995, all prison governors will be required to develop and implement local drug strategies which will form part of their contract with their area manager. The local strategies will include provision for education, treatment and throughcare services for prisoners who misuse, have misused or are at risk of misusing drugs.

The Prison Service will also be launching the first phase of the implementation of a range of treatment programmes throughout Prison Service establishments during 1995. The different programmes will be evaluated.

The Scottish Office and Northern Ireland Office will be able to provide information on the provision of treatment programmes for prisoners with drug or alcohol problems in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of those with drug or alcohol problems currently being held in prison in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 29 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on the number of prisoners with drug or alcohol problems being held in prison in the United Kingdom.

During 1993 the Home Office Addicts Index was notified of 3,764 drug addicts identified by prison medical officers within the United Kingdom. Prisoners addicted to alcohol addiction are not reflected within this figure.

There are currently no central records of the number of alcohol addicted prisoners in England and Wales.

Secure Training Centres

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has received to support the need for the creation of secure training centres; and if he will publish these reports.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office commissioned two pieces of research on persistent young offenders, both of which confirmed the existence of a small number of young people who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime.

The first was a survey of police forces undertaken by the Home Office during 1992. It is contained in annex B to the memorandum of evidence submitted for the sixth report from the Home Affairs Select Committee, Session 1992–93: HC441-II, "Juvenile Offenders".

The second was commissioned from the Policy Studies Institute and is entitled "Persistent Young Offenders". Its findings were published in February 1994.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what bids he has received for the running of the secure training centres.

Mr. Maclean: Twenty-five organisations have indicated an interest in tendering to finance, build or refurbish, operate and maintain secure training centres. We expect to receive firm bids in response to invitations to tender, the first of which will issue within a few weeks.

Criminal Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances the new criminal records system, Phoenix, will hold personal data which relate to individuals who have been acquitted, or who are not prosecuted; and if he will make a statement on how long such data are retained.

Mr. Maclean: Data relating to acquittals and to cases discontinued without a caution will be deleted from the Phoenix system within 42 days of the date of notification, save for certain exceptional cases in which the data will be retained for a longer period. Rules closely defining these exceptional cases are currently being produced by the police service in consultation with the Home Office and the Data Protection Registrar, and I shall make an announcement once they have been finalised.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation which relates criteria for the retention of personal data which describes the analysis of DNA samples, fingerprints and criminal records to the seriousness of the offence; if he will list the current retention criteria; and on what statute the retention criteria is based.

Mr. Maclean: Legislation relating the retention of fingerprints, samples used for DNA profiling, and national criminal records to the seriousness of the criminal offence already exists. Under section 27 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, fingerprints may be retained where the offender has been convicted of a recordable offence, and criminal convictions may be retained in national records where the offender has been convicted of such an offence. Recordable offences are defined in the National Police Records (Recordable Offences) Regulations 1985. Records of convictions for offences which are not recordable may be held in local police collections. Under section 64 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, a sample taken from any person for DNA profiling purposes may be retained if it was taken in the course of an investigation as a result of which a person was convicted of a recordable offence. Samples from persons not convicted of an offence cannot be used in evidence against the person or for any investigation. Their retention is for technical, administrative and legal reasons.

The current practice is that criminal records for recordable convictions are retained by the National Identification Bureau for 20 years, provided that there have been no subsequent convictions; if, however, the conviction involves either homicide or terrorism, the record is retained indefinitely; and if the conviction involves indecency or illicit drugs, or a custodial sentence was imposed, or the record reveals mental illness, the record will be retained until the subject reaches 70 years of age.

Fingerprints are retained until the whole of the associated criminal record is deleted. Rules for the retention of criminal records on the Phoenix application of the police national computer will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and are being developed by the police service in consultation with the Government and Data Protection Registrar. Detailed rules for the retention of samples taken for DNA profiling within the statutory framework set out above are currently being prepared, but the work is at an early stage.

Anabolic Steroids

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department made of the legal status of anabolic steroids in Spain before he made his announcement of 2 November.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, on whose recommendations the Government's proposals are based, made no specific assessment although were aware of the controls on anabolic steroids in the European Union member states and in a number of other countries. We understand that in Spain, as currently in the United Kingdom, anabolic steroids are subject to the law governing medicines and may be supplied lawfully only on prescription.

Automated Facial Recognition

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's research into automated facial recognition from photographs.

Mr. Maclean: The Department's work aims to ensure that the police are able to make maximum use of both images and eye witness reports in the investigation of

crime. The first stage will be the provision of images to accompany the textual information on the Phoenix criminal justice record service.

Operational trials have shown that photographs which have been coded by reference to physical features can be retrieved during the interview of a witness significantly more successfully than uncoded photographs. But manual coding is a very labour intensive process and my Department is therefore investigating automatic coding methods. It is also working with facial identification practitioners to establish standards for the analysis and presentation of facial identification evidence to the courts. These standards may eventually be embodied in a computer system.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the rate of conviction and *(b)* the average sentences for cases heard by (i) Tameside South magistrates court and (ii) Ashton-under-Lyme magistrates court in relation to (i) all crimes of theft, (ii) all juvenile crimes and (iii) crimes of theft committed by juveniles, for each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: The 1989 to 1993 information is given in the table.

Conviction rates and average sentence length (months) given for the offence of theft and handling stolen goods and all offences in the Ashton-Under-Lyne and South Tameside Petty Sessional Divisions by age groups, 1989–1993

	Theft and handling stolen goods			*All offences*[1]		
	10–17	*18+*	*All ages*	*10–17*	*18+*	*All ages*
1989						
Ashton-Under-Lyne PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	71	62	64	78	79	79
Average sentence length (months)	(1.6)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.2)	2.7	2.6
South Tameside PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	(76)	64	66	76	78	78
Average sentence length (months)	(2.3)	(1.7)	(1.8)	(3.3)	2.3	2.5
England and Wales PSDs						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	72	66	67	71	78	77
Average sentence length (months)	3.1	2.6	2.7	3.4	2.9	3.0
1990						
Ashton-Under-Lyne PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	74	61	63	78	76	76
Average sentence length (months)	(4.0)	(1.9)	(2.0)	(3.3)	2.5	2.6
South Tameside PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	(67)	57	58	77	79	78
Average sentence length (months)	(3.2)	(1.9)	(2.1)	(2.4)	2.5	2.5
England and Wales PSDs						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	70	65	66	69	76	76
Average sentence length (months)	3.0	2.5	2.6	3.3	2.8	2.9
1991						
Ashton-Under-Lyne PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	74	65	66	72	78	77
Average sentence length (months)	(2.5)	(1.3)	(1.4)	(3.0)	2.1	2.2
South Tameside PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	(95)	66	70	75	79	79
Average sentence length (months	—	(2.0)	(2.0)	(2.5)	2.9	2.9
England and Wales PSDs						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	66	63	64	65	73	73
Average sentence length (months)	3.0	2.4	2.5	3.3	2.8	2.9
1992						
Ashton-Under-Lyne PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	83	65	68	75	73	73
Average sentence length (months)	(1.8)	(1.9)	(1.8)	(2.3)	2.4	2.4
South Tameside PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	(84)	67	69	67	72	72
Average sentence length (months)	(2.0)	(2.5)	(2.4)	(3.3)	2.9	2.9
England and Wales PSDs						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	62	62	62	60	72	71
Average sentence length (months)	3.2	2.4	2.5	3.4	2.8	2.9

Conviction rates and average sentence length (months) given for the offence of theft and handling stolen goods and all offences in the Ashton-Under-Lyne and South Tameside Petty Sessional Divisions by age groups, 1989–1993

	Theft and handling stolen goods			*All offences*[1]		
	10–17	*18+*	*All ages*	*10–17*	*18+*	*All ages*
1993						
Ashton-Under-Lyne PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	(64)	76	76	(49)	70	70
Average sentence length (months)	(3.0)	(2.3)	(2.3)	(3.0)	2.9	2.9
South Tameside PSD						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	76	67	69	72	68	68
Average sentence length (months)	(2.0)	(3.3)	(3.2)	(3.1)	3.3	3.3
England and Wales PSDs						
Conviction rate (per cent.)	62	63	63	58	70	69
Average sentence length (months)	3.9	3.0	3.1	3.8	3.2	3.2

[1]All offences—Indictable, summary non-motoring and summary motoring.
( ) Percentage based on less than 50 defendants and average sentence length based on less than 50 offenders aged 14–17 sentenced to immediate custody.

Violent Crime

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will commission research to investigate the effect of violent crime on victims and their families, assess the extent to which families suffer post-traumatic stress and identify the support which should be provided to such families.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Research of the kind proposed already exists. I have arranged for a copy of Home Office Research and Planning Unit Paper 80, "The long-term needs of victims: A review of the literature", to be placed in the Library of the House.

Special Constables

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ex-gratia payments were made in each of the last three years to date to special constables or their dependents for being killed or injured on duty; which police authorities recommended ex-gratia payments be made; and what payment was made in each case.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* This information is not readily available and comprehensive figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost. As a policy, all reasonable recommendations are approved. The records available show that three payments were approved in the last year. The largest was for £2,439 to a special constable in Hampshire.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress his officials have made in amending current regulations to enable police authorities to provide non-contributory insurance cover for special constables who are injured or killed in the course of their duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Adequate arrangements exist under regulations to cover any special constable killed or permanently disabled in the course of his or her duties. As far as injury or illness are concerned, the majority of specials are adequately provided for under the regulations and police authorities are free to recommend an ex-gratia payment in any case in which they consider the regulatory cover to be inadequate. But I have asked officials to review the current regulations to identify ways in which they might sensibly be improved. These may include the provision of personal accident insurance cover.

Non-payment of Debts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what indication he has of the number of people imprisoned over the last year for *(a)* non-payment of debt and *(b)* non-payment of court fines; what is the trend over recent years in respect of (i) the numbers in each category and (ii) the length of prison sentences for the people in both categories; what is the average cost of keeping an individual in prison; what are the average debts and fines over which the person was imprisoned; and what proposals he has to end or reduce terms of imprisonment for those involved in relatively small cases of debt or fine.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Provisional information shows that some 23,000 persons were received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for fine default in 1993 and about 17,500 between January and September 1994. A total of 2,020 persons were received for non-payment of debt in 1993 and about 1,330 between January and September 1994. Information for the previous 10 years was published in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales, 1992", tables 6.3 and 7.1 Cm 2581, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Information for 1982–92 on the length of time served by fine defaulters and debtors is also published in "Prison Statistics", tables 6.5 and 7.1. The average net operating cost per prisoner per week is published in the "Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts, April 1992–March 1993", table D, volume 2, Cm 2385, and was £494 at 1992–93 prices.

The Government believe that wherever possible fines should be enforced by the range of other measures available to the courts without recourse to imprisonment. They have no plans at present, however, to remove imprisonment as final sanction for offenders who have failed to respond to other methods of enforcement.

Obscene Publications Branch

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of financial and manpower resources is envisaged for the obscene publications branch —SO1 (4)—for the year 1995 following recent changes within the Metropolitan police; and what has been the

comparable level of such resources allocated for 1994, 1993, 1992 and 1991.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* Staffing levels for the obscene publication branch in 1995–96 are still under consideration. Manpower levels and costs for the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and current 1994–95 levels are as follows:

Police	*Civil staff*
1991–92	
1 Detective Superintendent	1 Higher Executive Officer
1 Detective Inspector	4 Executive Officers
8 Detective Sergeants	6 Administrative Officers
8 Detective Constables	
Total cost: £883,606	
1992–93	
1 Detective Superintendent	1 Higher Executive Officer
1 Detective Inspector	4 Executive Officers
10 Detective Sergeants	4 Administrative Officers
9 Detective Constables	
Total cost: £1,083,628	
1993–94	
1 Detective Superintendent	1 Higher Executive Officer
1 Detective Inspector	3 Executive Officers
7 Detective Sergeants	3 Administrative Officers
8 Detective Constables	
Total cost: £987,040	
1994–95	
1 Detective Chief Inspector	2 Executive Officers
1 Detective Inspector	4 Administrative Officers
7 Detective Sergeants	
6 Detective Constables	
Total cost: Not available	

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Power Stations

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he has made of which method of decommissioning nuclear power stations is most compatible with the principle of sustainable development as defined at the Rio earth summit agreement;

(2) what assessment he has made of whether a method of decommissioning nuclear power stations exists which is compatible with the principle of sustainable development.

Mr. Eggar: The consultation document, "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy: Preliminary Conclusions", published by the Department of the Environment in August, considered a variety of decommissioning strategies. Responses are being considered and a statement will be made in due course.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which body manages the Windscale advanced gas-cooled reactor decommissioning project; and what are his plans for the future management of the project.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Decommissioning of the Windscale advanced gas-cooled reactor—WAGR—is part of the decommissioning and radioactive waste management operations programme which is managed by the DRAWMOPS directorate within the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Government division. The DRAWMOPS directorate has recently awarded a management contract for the next phase of WAGR decommissioning to AEA Technology following a competitive tender exercise. This contract is to manage the decommissioning through to the removal of all main components including the four heat exchangers and reactor internals which is expected to take five and a half years.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the criteria which will be used to determine the method of decommissioning nuclear power stations in future.

Mr. Eggar: Detailed proposals for the decommissioning of nuclear power stations will be the subject of agreement between the operator and the regulatory authorities at the appropriate time.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if Her Majesty's Government will underwrite the costs of decommissioning nuclear power stations if it proves to be prohibitive for private finances.

Mr. Eggar: Schedule 12 to the Electricity Act 1989 provides power to make grants to operators, subject to certain limits, in respect of qualifying expenditure, which may include the costs of decommissioning nuclear power stations.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation to make it a criminal offence to change the electronic identity of a mobile telephone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department, with the Home Office and Oftel, have been discussing with the mobile phone industry what steps can be taken to tackle the problem of mobile phone theft. In particular, the industry is considering improved control of electronic serial numbers and equipment marking schemes. The Federation of Communication Services has proposed the introduction of a new criminal offence of reprogramming a mobile phone. Discussions are continuing with the industry about whether any new offence along these lines would be at all effective in reducing the problem of mobile phone thefts, and whether such an offence could be compatible with protection of the legitimate interests of mobile phone users and others.

Significant offences already exist under the Theft Acts 1968 and 1978 covering the theft and handling of mobile phones and section 42 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 covering the fraudulent use of telecommunications equipment.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of the land area of the United Kingdom can be reached by mobile phones.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Mobile phone services are currently available in an area where over 98 per cent. of the United Kingdom population live, well in excess of the figure of 90 per cent. of the United Kingdom population required by the licences issued to the mobile telecommunications operators under the Telecommunications Act 1984. The Department of Trade and Industry does not hold figures on the percentage of land area of the United kingdom which can be reached by mobile phones.

Exports

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many licences under the Export of Goods (Control) Order were *(a)* applied for and *(b)* issued in 1992 and in 1993, stating in each case how many were for sole use military equipment.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This question could be answered only at disproportionate cost. There will, however, be some details of licences issued and refused during the years in question in the annual report of the Export Control Organisation to be published shortly. A copy of that report will be placed in the Library of the House and I will also arrange for the hon. Member to receive a personal copy.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the outstanding amount on export credits guarantees on arms deals between United Kingdom companies and *(a)* Nigeria, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Malaysia, *(d)* Saudi Arabia, *(e)* Jordan, *(f)* Qatar, *(g)* the United Arab Emirates, *(h)* Oman and *(i)* Turkey.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* ECGD has no business requirement to analyse amounts outstanding in terms of arms or other trade sectors. Consequently the Exports Credits Guarantee Department data on amounts outstanding in these markets are not held on a basis which enables me to provide the information requested.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all the companies represented in the trade mission of November 1994 to Saudi Arabia; and what is his Department's role in respect to this mission.

Mr. Needham: Due to commercial confidentiality I am unable to list the companies involved in the mission organised by British Aerospace. It involved some 50 companies mainly drawn from the engineering and food processing sectors.

My Department's involvement in this mission was in an advisory capacity, due to our involvement in the joint offset committee which aims to encourage companies to set up manufacturing joint ventures in Saudi Arabia to help the kingdom diversify its economy.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the oral answer of the Minister of Defence Procurement on 22 November *Official Report*, column *461*, when Her Majesty's Government intend to ratify the chemical weapons convention.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government intend to ratify the chemical weapons convention as soon as possible. The necessary implementing legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time and other Government legislative priorities permit.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if the chemical weapons convention will be ratified in the current parliamentary Session;

(2) what are the reasons for the delay between the signing of the chemical weapons convention and its ratification.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The Government intend to ratify the chemical weapons convention as soon as possible. The necessary implementing legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time and other Government legislative priorities permit.

Gas and Electricity Companies

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers the Government have to regulate the call-out charges levied by the privatised gas and electricity companies.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Call-out charges levied by electricity companies for work on equipment and wiring belonging to the customer, and British Gas call-out charges in respect of appliance servicing and repair, are subject to competitive pricing by other service providers and are not regulated.

There is generally no call-out charge by British Gas to make safe escapes of gas.

Unemployment

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress is being made in reducing unemployment in south-east England, particularly in the new assisted areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The level of unemployment in the south east, excluding London, has shown a welcome fall from a high point of 9.7 per cent. in January 1993 to its current level of 7.1 per cent. Unemployment within the assisted areas has also fallen as shown in the table.

	January 1991	*January 1992*	*January 1993*	*January 1994*	[2]*October 1994*
			Per cent.		
South East	4.5	7.6	9.7	8.9	7.1
	[1](4.2)	[1](7.3)	[1](9.4)	[1](8.6)	[1](7.3)
Thanet	10.2	13.7	16.4	16.4	13.9
Dover and Deal	5.3	8.5	11.2	11.3	9.4
Folkestone	7.1	9.9	12.3	13.3	11.6
Hastings	7.3	11.0	13.9	13.2	11.3
Isle of Wight	9.5	11.5	14.4	14.5	10.2
Sittingbourne and Sheerness	8.3	12.1	15.3	14.8	12.2

[1] Seasonally adjusted figures.

[2] Latest available figures.

High-technology Enterprises

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to promote further regional distribution of high-technology enterprises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Regional policy seeks to address disparities in employment opportunities and to develop the indigenous potential of the assisted areas, including their ability to attract high technology investment. But investment decisions by high technology and other firms must remain, in general, matters for commercial judgment. The Government do provide advice to companies on technological developments through business link offices.

National Consumer Council

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the level of funding for the National Consumer Council was in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The grant-in-aid paid to the National Consumer Council[1] for each year since 1990–91 was:

1990–91: £1,606,650
1991–92: £1,895,609
1992–93: £2,138,978
1993–94: £2,322,686

Final figures for 1994–95 are not yet available.

Note: Figures include DTI contribution to NCC staff pension fund.

Source: National Consumer Council Annual Reports 1990–91 to 1993–94

[1]Figures do not include grant-in-aid paid to the NCC's Associate Councils (the Scottish and Welsh Consumer Councils) and the Consumers in Europe Group.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the average and the median time his Department has taken to pay suppliers in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of bills it took more than six weeks to pay.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information requested is not available. However, my Department conducts an annual survey of the proportion of its bills paid on time which is defined as within 30 days—or another period if agreed with the supplier—of receipt of both a valid invoice and the goods or services. The result is published in the annual Trade and Industry expenditure plans which is available in the Library of the House.

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what are his reasons for reopening consideration of the proposed takeover of T. Bailey Forman Ltd. following the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report of October 1994;

(2) on how many occasions in the last five years companies have been allowed to make representations for reconsideration of a recommendation following a report on a takeover proposal from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Eggar: It is the role of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to provide advice to Ministers on the proposed transfer of newspaper titles. The final decision as to whether to give consent to such transfers is for Ministers to make.

In publishing the MMC report on the proposed transfer of the newspaper titles of T. Bailey Forman on 31 October I announced that I accepted the MMC adverse findings and that I would refuse consent unless satisfactory conditions could be agreed by 5 December. I invited third party comments on such conditions by 21 November.

The last time that Ministers consulted interested parties about conditions to attach consent to a newspaper transfer was in February 1989 following the MMC report on the proposed acquisition by EMAP plc of shares in TR Beckett Ltd.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions in the past five years unanimous recommendations on takeover proposals from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission have been subsequently overturned.

Mr. Eggar: None.

"Marketing Your Business"

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which consultants were appointed to assist in production of the booklet "Marketing Your Business"; how much was paid to them; what was the remit given to them; and by what process they were appointed.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Business skills seminar workbooks including "Marketing Your Business" were originally written in 1988 by a group of experienced training providers on behalf of the Training Agency. Their remit was to produce a series of workbooks for use and reference by owner managers of new and small businesses. I understand that they were appointed on recommendation of Training Agency area offices.

This book was one of a series of books written by a number of people. It is not possible to identify the separate cost of writing this particular book.

Exports

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will produce a table to show what proportion of United Kingdom exports, including services and invisibles, was exported to the rest of the EC single market in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information is provided in the table.

EC[1] share of United Kingdom current account credits

	Per cent.
1984	37.2
1985	39.1
1986	37.8
1987	38.5
1988	38.5
1989	38.7
1990	41.2
1991	44.0
1992	45.0
1993	43.6

Source:
United Kingdom Balance of Payments, The Pink Book 1994, CSO.

Note:
[1] EC includes Portugal and Spain (which joined in 1986) for all years and the former German Democratic Republic from the second half of 1990.

Business Links

Mr. Mudie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business links are currently in full operation.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* There are now 52 business links fully operational. By the end of the year this will raise to over 60 and by the end of next year I expect there to be 200, covering all parts of England.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* In line with guidance on charging policy produced by the Office of Public Services and Science, which recognised the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, my Department has developed the following scheme of charges for information under the code of practice on access to government information. The Department has always provided much information free of charge. When requests for information under the code can be dealt with simply and quickly the Department makes no charge. Only when a significant diversion of resource is required will a charge be made in line with the amount of work involved in extracting and preparing the information to answer the request.

Charges are based on a two-tier composite hourly rate according to the grade of person performing the work. For SEO and below the rate is £14 per hour, and for grade 7 and above the rate is £34 per hour. There is no charge if the information can be supplied for a forecast amount of less than £100. If the estimated amount is more than £1,000 the charge will be calculated on a grade-by-grade basis of the average pay cost for that grade together with direct costs such as photocopying.

I have asked each of the agency chief executives to write to the hon. Member about their schemes of charges.

Letter from Mike Hoddinott to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

Your recent Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade asked for a statement on charging policy in respect of inquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government. Each agency chief executive has been asked to reply.

The charging policy of Accounts Services Agency follows that for the Department.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

You recently tabled the following Parliamentary Question to which I have been asked to respond direct to you as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

To ask the President of the Board of Trade, if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government.

Companies House is a public registry, and most information on companies is charged for under Companies Act powers, based on the full economic cost of providing it.

Where requests are received involving the Code, our policy is to make a flat charge of £5 to cover administrative cost. If the work involved in satisfying the request is likely to take more than half a day of staff time, our policy is to give a quote for the full cost and obtain agreement to this before undertaking the work.

To date, no requests involving the Code have been received.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade to make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I am replying on behalf of The Insolvency Service.

The Service has developed its charging policy in accordance with guidance produced by the Office of Public Services and Science. To cover the costs of dealing with applications, there is a standard minimum charge of £20 for each access request under the Code. Where dealing with a request would involve considerable expenditure of resources and the estimated costs of supplying the information would exceed £100, an additional charge will be made based on the hourly rates of the grades carrying out the work. For insolvency specialist grades, these hourly rates are set out in the Insolvency Regulations 1994 and begin at £26 an hour for an examiner grade, rising to £49 an hour for an official receiver.

The Service will however advise applicants where the information sought is already provided in the normal course of its activities without charge or is known to be available free of charge elsewhere, so that the applicant will not incur costs unnecessarily through the formal operation of the Code.

The Service also publishes information guides for the public which are available free of charge.

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

Mr. Taylor's answer to your Parliamentary Question on the charging policy of the Department of Trade and Industry and its Agencies in respect of enquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government indicated that Chief Executives of Agencies would write to you.

In the case of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, we are following the Department's charging policy, as described in Mr. Taylor's response. Since the introduction of the Code in April 1994 we have adopted the two tier composite hourly charging regime at the rates determined by DTI as a whole: £14 for a senior scientific officer (equivalent to a senior executive officer) or below; and £34 for Grade 7 and above. As for the Department, there is no charge if the information can be supplied for a forecast amount of less than £100; and if the estimated amount is more than £1000 the charge will be calculated on a grade by grade basis of the average pay cost for that grade (or equivalent) together with any direct costs.

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

I would refer to your question to the President of the Board of Trade in respect of the charging policy for enquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government. As an Executive Agency of the DTI involved in the supply of technology services to the public and private sector our charges are dictated by the market place for our services and the level of the competition which we face. We operate in competition with both the public and private sectors for the majority of our services and therefore all of our charging is market driven.

Letter from Peter Clapham to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

I am writing in response to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding the charging policy of the DTI and its Agencies in respect of inquiries under the Code of Practice to Access to Government Information.

The National Physical Laboratory makes no charge for providing small quantities of information which are readily available. Where a significant amount of effort is involved, the full economic cost of the work is charged.

I hope this provides the information you require.

Letter from Jon Cowdock to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

Charges for information supplied under the Code of Practice on Open Government

I have been asked to reply, in the absence of the Agency's Chief Executive, on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question concerning charges for open government.

The National Weights and Measures Laboratory applies the same charging policy as DTI. Details of that policy are set out in the reply given by Mr Taylor on 22 November.

Letter from P.R.S. Hartnack to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information

You asked the President of the Board of Trade to make a statement on charging policy for inquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I have been asked to reply in relation to the Patent Office.

The Patent Office provides a great deal of information to the public. This includes explanatory literature, which is free; publications for sale at various prices; information supplied in accordance with statutory requirements and on payment of the relevant fee; and consultancy services, for which charges are made on the basis of database access, document supply and hourly rates. None of these activities is affected by the Code of Practice.

In line with guidance on charging policy produced by the Office of Public Services and Science, which recognised the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the Code, the Patent Office has adopted the following scheme of charges. Where an inquirer can be directed to a published document, or free literature is available, there will be no charge. Inquiries requiring further work will be charged according to hourly rates based on the average pay costs of the grades involved, together with any direct costs incurred. However, where the total cost is less than £30, no charge will be made.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 29 November 1994:

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information—Charging Policy

The President of the Board of Trade has asked Chief Executive of DTI Agencies to reply direct to your parliamentary question about our charging policy in respect of enquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I am replying in respect of the Radiocommunications Agency of the DTI.

As a net running cost Agency we are wholly funded by licence fees and other charges paid by our customers. Because of this funding regime we have adopted a slightly different charging policy to that of our parent department. We have set a basic "registration" fee of £15 (this is equivalent to the minimum licence fee we charge and will be linked to that level in future) for all requests for information invoked under the Code, ie outside our existing information flow procedures. This registration fee would cover all cases costing up to £100 to deal with. However, for more detailed cases when estimated costs of providing the information exceed the £100 level, we will use the Departmental composite hourly rates—but the initial £15 fee would be used as a deposit, deductible against any higher charge imposed. For cases estimated to cost over £1,000 we will also follow DTI central policy.

Electricity

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the price of electricity paid by 80MW consumers in each EC member state; and by how much these prices have increased since 1987.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The average price of electricity paid by consumers of 80MW capacity, with an 86 per cent. load factor, in each EC member state for October 1994, and the increase since October 1987, are given in the table.

Country	*Price pence per kWh*	*Percentage increase*
United Kingdom	3.40	[1]37.7
Belgium	3.13	21.3
France	3.20	33.9
Germany	4.58	15.1
Italy	3.24	54.3
Netherlands	3.20	24.5
Spain	4.43	[2]—

[1] For the United Kingdom there is a decrease of about 2 per cent. when the effect of inflation, as measured by the GDP deflator, is excluded.

[2] Data for Spain are not available for October 1987.

Data for Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Luxembourg, are not available.

Source:

Energy Advice.

Retail Sales Statistics

Mr. Sainsbury: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence he has that seasonal adjustment for retail sales statistics gives a more reliable indication of activity than comparisons with a similar period of the previous year.

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply. Both measures are useful. Seasonal adjustment of retail sales statistics, whilst difficult, allows a sensible comparison of activity in the trade across months. Without adjustment, comparisons even with a similar period of the previous year can be distorted by moving holidays such as Easter and comparisons within a year are not possible.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Population Control

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has on the reasons for the prevalence of sterilisation as a method of contraception in the developing world; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 28 November, *Official Report,* column *198.*

World Bank

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will introduce legislation prohibiting the United Kingdom executive director at the World bank from approving projects which do not have demonstrable local consultation and environmental assessment.

Mr. Baldry: The bank's operational guidelines require adequate local consultation and environmental assessment in project design. Where we are not satisfied that these requirements have been fulfilled, we are ready to withhold approval.

Overseas Aid

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries which have received advice and assistance on

privatisation, contracting out and civil service and local government reform as part of the overseas aid programme in each year since 1989 and the cost in each case.

Mr. Baldry: Countries receiving advice and assistance from the aid programme since 1989 on privatisation, contracting out of civil service or local government reform include:-

Albania
Anguilla
Bangladesh
Bulgaria
Cameroon
China
Colombia
Czech Republic
Dependent Territories: Montserrat; and Turks and Caicos Islands
Ecuador
Egypt
Estonia
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Kenya
Kirgistan
Latvia
Mexico
Nepal
Nigeria
Poland
Romania
Russia
Sierra Leone
Slovakia
Slovenia
Uganda
Ukraine
Zambia

Information by year showing the cost in each case is not centrally recorded and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EU Aid

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the European Union overseas aid schemes and European Union overseas aid budget headings under which United Kingdom governmental and non-governmental organisations can apply for European Union overseas aid funds, and the amount of European Union funding given to United Kingdom organisations under each European Union overseas aid scheme and under each European Union overseas aid budget heading in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Baldry: The main EC aid instruments, in all of which United Kingdom governmental and non-governmental organisations can participate, are as follows:

The Lomé Convention for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries;

The Asia and Latin America Programme;

The New Mediterranean Policy;

Phare (for eastern and central Europe);

Tacis (for the former Soviet Union);

The EC Food Aid Programme; and,

The EC Humanitarian Aid Programme.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will write to my hon. Friend once the data requested on funding for United Kingdom organisations have been prepared.

China

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what statistics his Department has received published by the Chinese Government on contraceptive use; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: Statistics about contraceptive use are published in the "Family Planning Statistical Yearbook", produced annually by the Chinese Government. The most recently available yearbook was published in 1993. We will arrange for copies of this to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the International Planned Parenthood Federation has made a report separate from its annual report, to his Department, regarding the work of its affiliate the Chinese Family Planning Association in monitoring human rights abuses in China's population control programme; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: We have a continuing dialogue with the International Planned Parenthood Federation on a range of issues, including China's population policy. Such discussions and any information shared are on the understanding that they remain confidential to the IPPF and Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters were discussed between representatives from his Department and representatives of the Chinese Government at the Cairo population conference.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *198*.

Kenya

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the present projects in Kenya being funded in full or in part by aid from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: Projects supported by United Kingdom aid funds in Kenya with an aid allocation of more than

£500,000, and against which expenditure has already taken place, or will take place in the current financial year, are as follows:

	Aid allocation £ millions
Small Enterprise	
Small Enterprise Awards Scheme	0.5
K-Rep Micro-enterprise Credit	1.0
Barclays Bank Loan Guarantee Scheme	0.7
Policy Implementation and De-regulation	0.6
Health and Children by Choice	
Isiolo Hospital Immediate Support	0.5
Family Planning Services	2.0
Essential Drugs Supply	1.5
Contraceptive Supply	1.5
Education	
Faculty of Information Sciences (Completed 1994)	1.0
Kenyatta University Science Staff Development	1.6
Moi University Library	8.3
Strengthening of Primary Education	3.3
Books for Primary Schools	0.6
Renewable Natural Resources	
Kenya Indigenous Forests Conservation (Completed 1994)	5.0
Kenya Wildlife Service Vehicles	0.8
Kenya Agricultural Research Institute	10.6
Kenya Trypanosomiasis Research Institute	2.4
Efficient Use of Plantation Timber	0.8
Moi Oxford Forestry Link	0.53
Agricultural Information Centre, STEP	0.7
Parastatal Reform	
Kenya Railways Phase II (Completed 1994)	7.3
Kenya Ports Authority (Completed 1994)	11.4
Good Government	
Senior Administrators Overseas Programme (Completed 1994)	1.4
Other	
Molo-Olenguruone and Bomet-Litein roads (Completed 1994)	12.0
Poverty-focused NGO programme	3.0
Bailey Bridging Phase III	2.8

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sri Lanka

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions United Kingdom representatives in Sri Lanka have had with factions, ethnic groups, party and community leaders; what proposal he has to enable the United Kingdom to assist the peace process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I visited Sri Lanka from 15 to 16 November. I met representatives of a wide range of Sri Lankan opinion. Her Majesty's high commission in Colombo also maintains contact with all legitimate political, trade union and human rights groups.

Our standing offer to help facilitate talks, if all parties would find it useful, remains on the table.

Bosnia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment United Nations observers monitoring the border between the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina have made as to whether the flow of supplies across that border has been limited in accordance with United Nations resolutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The latest report of the international conference on the former Yugoslavia—ICFY—mission concludes that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—FRY—Government are continuing to meet their commitment to close the border between the FRY and the areas of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the control of Bosnian Serb forces.

It is essential that the ICFY mission should be equipped to monitor the border closure effectively. Ten United Kingdom observers have been serving with the ICFY mission since it began work in September 1994. In response to an appeal from the ICFY Secretariat for additional help, we have decided to contribute a further ten observers and to provide five four-wheel-drive vehicles. This makes the United Kingdom the second largest contributor.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Bosnian Government in respect of the recent use of Bihac and other demilitarised zones in Bosnia-Herzegovina to launch their military attacks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have urged all parties, including the Bosnian Government, to refrain from fighting in and from the United Nation designated safe areas and weapons exclusion zones.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports have been received by his Department of breaches in the arms embargo in favour of Bosnian-Muslim and Bosnian-Croat forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of reports, both from the media and other sources, of breaches of the United Nations arms embargo. Evidence of such breaches is taken up with the United Nations Sanctions Committee and the country concerned.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures are being considered to encourage the Governments of Serbia, Montenegro and the Federal Yugoslav Government to continue to co-operate with the international community in implementing United Nations and Security Council resolutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Security Council decided in its resolution 943 to suspend the ban on international air links, a ferry crossing to Italy and cultural and sporting contacts in response to a decision by Belgrade to support the contact group plan for Bosnia, to cut off all but humanitarian supplies to the Bosnian Serbs and to co-operate with a mission from the international conference on former Yugoslavia.

Further sanctions relief is envisaged if the contact group plan for Bosnia is implemented. The contact group would also respond positively if Belgrade took other steps towards peace, such as support for a peace plan for Croatia and recognition of the other states of former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Croatian Government regarding the need to comply with United Nations resolutions on the importation of arms into the former Yugoslavia; what actions Her Majesty's Government propose to take in the event of evidence of Croatian non-compliance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Croatian and other Governments have been made aware of our strong views on the need for all member states to comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions. Evidence of non-compliance with United Nations sanctions is taken up with the Government concerned and with the United Nations sanctions committee.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what controls are in place at airports in the Republic of Croatia to ensure that arms shipments, in breach of United Nations resolutions, are not being transported through Croatia to combatants in Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As in other countries of former Yugoslavia and in neighbouring countries, the United Nations have established, under EU/CSCE auspices, a sanctions assistance mission in Croatia, based in Zagreb. This mission has authority to observe and report back its findings to the United Nations sanctions committee.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received reports indicating that the Russian Federation is considering unilaterally abandoning trade sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at the beginning of 1995; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received no reports of this nature. The Russian Government continue to be actively involved in the efforts of the contact group to achieve a peaceful settlement in Bosnia.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs what restrictions are in place on the transport and telecommunications industry with regard to the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since April 1993 transportation owned by or operated from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been subject to impoundment by member states under United Nations Security Council resolution 820. In September this year, some restrictions were suspended for an initial 100 days. Aircraft and civilian flights can operate to and from Belgrade airport, as can the passenger ferry service between Bar in the FRY and Bari in Italy.

Telecommunications are exempt from United Nations sanctions imposition. The only restriction, under UNSCR 820, is that the supply of goods to the FRY, relating to the industry, are subject to UNSC authorisation on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under which United Nations Security Council resolution airlines may engage in commercial activity with the former Yugoslavia; what restrictions remain with regard to their *(a)* marketing, *(b)* technical services and *(c)* financial transactions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: United Nations Security Council resolution 943 permits civilian passenger flights to and from Belgrade airport carrying passengers and personal effects only and cargo authorised by the United Nations Sanctions Committee.

Technical and marketing services may be provided in respect of such flights; no licence from the DTI or authorisation from the United Nations is required.

The United Nations Sanctions Committee is in the process of finalising guidelines relating to financial transactions. Payments will be permitted from funds credited to blocked accounts on or after 5 October 1994 in order to pay the direct expenses incurred by JAT in operating passenger flights in and out of Belgrade airport.

United Nations Resolutions

Mr. Elletson : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the Government of the Russian Federation following the recent decision by the United States Administration on non-participation on the enforcement of United Nations resolutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in regular contact with Russia on the situation in former Yugoslavia, and are aware of Russian views on US policy, but we have held no discussions specifically on this subject.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for a relaxation on the restriction of exports from the republics of Serbia and Montenegro whilst the Governments of the two republics continue to co-operate and assist the implementation of United Nations resolutions concerned with the war in the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Any relaxation on the restriction of exports from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—Serbia and Montenegro—must be agreed by the United Nations Security Council and not just the United Kingdom. It will be considered within the wider context of the sanctions regime as a whole.

We believe that further steps by the FRY authorities to comply with the requirements of the international community should be rewarded with the further relaxation of sanctions.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response the European Union has received from the Government of Sudan to the European Union's criticism of Sudan's treatment of the inhabitants of squatter camps on the outskirts of Khartoum.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Sudanese Government have officially rejected the EU statement released on 31 October and questioned its factual basis. This statement condemned the use of violence by the Sudanese authorities in ejecting residents from a Khartoum squatter camp, during which at least five residents died and 14 were severely injured.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of large-scale troop movements in the Nuba mountains area of Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: With the ending of the rainy season, fighting is beginning to intensify in southern Sudan and the Nuba mountains area.

Departmental Security

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who has been awarded the contract for the supply of security services at his Department's buildings.

Mr. Goodlad: The contract for guarding FCO buildings in London has been awarded to the Security Facilities Executive, an agency of the Department of the Environment.

Dependent Territories

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he proposes to take to ensure that the United Kingdom complies with the recent United Nations declaration that all existing dependent territories be decolonised by the year 2000; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. We respect the wishes and interests of the peoples of the dependent territories in determining their own future, in accordance with the United Nations charter and international law. We give every assistance to those dependent territories which are able to proceed to independence without forcing it on those which are not.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to provide information via the Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the reply on this issue by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) on 6 May 1994 at column 677. The FCO welcomes the recent moves by Her Majesty's Treasury and CCTA in establishing a Government presence on the Internet. Active consideration, in discussion with the CCTA, has and continues to be given to making FCO information available over the Internet.

Serbia

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the embargo on trade with Serbia along the Danube; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On the whole, the operation is effective. Co-operation from the four national Customs services involved—Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary is good. The only persistent difficulty is the control, at certain points on the river, of the cross-bank trade by small boats.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to place in the Library the background papers, including public documents from foreign countries received and collated by the European Union intergovernmental conference unit in the Foreign Office, as and when these papers are received.

Mr. David Davis: We will ensure that Parliament receives copies of the relevant papers submitted to the study group of the 1996 intergovernmental conference by the Community institutions. We will also place in the Library important public documents relating to the IGC, including those from other member states. Ministers will in any case provide Parliament with regular accounts of the preparations for the IGC in the course of normal parliamentary business.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which cabinet Committees, official's committees and consortia with outside interests and how many civil servants are working on preparations and proposals for the 1996 intergovernmental conference arising from the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. David Davis: Ministers and officials in various Governmental Departments have already begun preparations for the 1996 intergovernmental conference. As work proceeds, it will be co-ordinated by the ministerial committee on defence and overseas policy, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and by the ministerial sub-committee on european questions, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The views of outside bodies will be taken into account in these preparations.

Israel

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Israeli Government urging them to release Mordechai Vanunu; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Mr. Vanunu appears to have been treated in accordance with the normal judicial process in Israel. There is no evidence of any illegality in the United Kingdom and we have no formal standing to intervene. We have, however, raised with the Israelis our concerns over humanitarian aspects of this case. The Israelis assured us in 1993 that the conditions under which Mr. Vanunu is detained have improved.

OECD

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to end the United Kingdom's involvement with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and

if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Baldry: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers expect to send 2,078 Christmas cards this year at a purchase price of £679.95. Postage and staff costs are not available. A sample copy of the card that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be sending has been placed in the Library.

EC Membership

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will issue a White Paper setting out in detail the gains and losses to Britain from EEC membership.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer to the replies my right hon. Friend the Economic Secretary gave on 17 March at column *821* and on 30 June at column *680*, the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 18 May at column *470* and the reply given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 25 November, at column *468* in answer to very similar questions from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

Transsexuals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases concerning the rights of British transsexuals are currently being considered by the European Court of Human Rights; what is the estimated cost of defending those cases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are not, at present, any cases involving the rights of any British transsexuals before the European Court of Human Rights. There are, however, three cases before the European Commission of Human Rights.

As two of the cases are in the very early stages and the third, although at a more advanced stage, is not yet concluded, it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the likely total cost which will be incurred by the Government in relation to these cases.

European Directives

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all existing or draft European directives which make reference to the concept of "industrially produced" or similar terms.

Mr. David Davis: Council directive 89/341/EEC of 3 May 1989—amending directives 65/65/EEC, 75/318/EEC and 75/319/EEC—on the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action relating to proprietary medicinal products, and Council directive 85/374/EEC of 25 July 1985 on the approximation of laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states concerning liability for defective products both refer to the term "industrially produced". It is not sufficiently clear what is meant by "similar terms" for this part of the question to be answered.

Rwanda and Burundi

Mrs Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on the situation in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We share the concerns that have been widely expressed about the problems of Rwanda including the difficulties created by the presence of large numbers of refugees in neighbouring countries. We are also aware of the fragility of the situation in Burundi.

We are working closely with our partners in the United Nations and EU and with the OAU in the search for effective solutions to the problems of the region. With United Kingdom support, the EU last week agreed a package of 67 million ecu—about £52 million—of rehabilitation assistance to Rwanda in key sectors, including technical support to the Government of Rwanda to begin the process of reconstruction.

Gibraltar

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar on his country's exclusion from the United Kingdom regulations on mortgage indemnity insurance captives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The question of building societies being allowed to set up captive insurance companies in Gibraltar, to write mortgage indemnity business, was discussed when the Chancellor met the Chief Minister on 17 February.

They have since corresponded on the issue. My right hon. and Learned Friend will consider the matter further when the provisions of the amended Financial Services Commission Ordinance are fully in operation.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Pregnant Service Women

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Attorney-General when he gave advice to the Ministry of Defence with regard to the legality of its policy regarding the dismissal of pregnant service women.

The Attorney-General: By convention, the law officers do not normally disclose whether they have been asked to advise on a particular issue or the substance of any advice that they may have given.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Lord President of the Council how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. Newton: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. The costs are covered by the entertainment expenditure of the Privy Council Office which, for the financial year ended April 1994, was £9,892. I am not responsible for any agencies.

HEALTH

Health Care in London (Leaflet)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is distributing the leaflet "Changing the Focus of Health Care in London".

Mr. Malone: The Department of Health distributed the booklet to national health service organisations and local authorities in inner London for them to make it available to patients and members of the public visiting hospitals, clinics, surgeries, libraries, neighbourhood resource centres and so on.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to allow complaints in the national health service to be monitored by community health councils; and if she will increase the resources of community health councils accordingly.

Mr. Malone: Community health councils already have an important role in supporting individual complainants. In partnership with national health service trusts and/or health authorities they are also able to monitor complaints more generally. The Government do not, therefore, believe that legislation is needed in this area.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will alter the regulations governing community health councils to allow full membership to people over 70 years of age; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The Community Health Council Regulations 1985, as amended, do not contain any restriction on the age of members of community health councils.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will extend the statutory powers of community health councils and district advisory committees to give them the right to enter *(a)* nursing and residential homes and *(b)* general practitioner premises; if she will make it her policy to require home managers and general practitioners to give community health councils information about the services they offer to patients; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: It would not be appropriate to give community health councils power to enter residential care homes, which are already subject to statutory inspection by local authorities. Commissioning health bodies have responsibility for arranging visiting and inspection arrangements for CHCs in the course of negotiating contracts with private nursing homes. CHCs locally have the opportunity to develop constructive working relationships with general practitioners which might include visits to premises.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to ensure that community health councils *(a)* are consulted at the earliest possible stage in the process of establishing a new community care trust home and *(b)* have the right to access to community care trust homes subject to the agreement of residents or their guardians in line with the current statutory rights of access to national health service premises; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: District health authorities have a statutory duty to consult community health councils on any proposals for substantial changes and developments of service. CHCs already have a statutory right to inspect premises controlled by national health service trusts.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to ensure that community health councils have the right to *(a)* meet regularly with (i) trust boards, (ii) health authorities and (iii) local and regional offices of the national health service Executive and *(b)* visit all activities financed or licensed by the national health service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Community health councils already have the right to regular meetings with health authorities. It is for national health service commissioning bodies to include visiting and other rights for CHCs in contracts with those who provide services to the national health service. EL94(4), copies of which are available in the Library, makes clear that individual NHS trusts should agree regular liaison arrangements with CHCs. Subject to parliamentary approval of the Health Authorities Bill, responsibility for establishing and supporting CHCs will pass from regional health authorities to the regional offices of the NHS executive from April 1996. The Government do not consider that legislation is needed to supplement these comprehensive arrangements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase public awareness of community health councils; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive is working with the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales—ACHCEW—on a project for ACHCEW to develop a resource pack for community health councils to use to increase public awareness of their role and activities.

Quarry House, Leeds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the amount of the severance pay being offered to staff currently facing redundancy at Quarry house, Leeds.

Mr. Sackville: The severance payments vary according to factors such as age, salary and length of service and are calculated on an individual basis. The ways in which the sums are calculated are set out in the civil service pension scheme booklet "Early Retirement Benefits", a copy of which is available in the Library. The terms which apply to this scheme are the same as for compulsory departures.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reserve price she has put on Quarry house, Leeds.

Mr. Sackville: None.

London Implementation Zone

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many London households are in the London implementation zone area and how many outside.

Mr. Malone: The 1991 census results show that the number of Greater London households in the London initiative zone area is 1,712,051 and the number outside the London initiative zone is 1,051,115.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend the London implementation zone to the London borough of Redbridge.

Mr. Malone: None.

Respite Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidance to local authorities and health authorities to ensure adequate provision of respite care; if she will ensure that sufficient funding is available to enable health authorities and social services to make adequate provision; if she will monitor the adequacy of the provision; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: It is for health authorities and local authorities to decide locally the specific type and level of services to be provided. The Department continues to monitor the delivery by authorities of the new community care arrangements, including the development of domiciliary, day and respite services to enable more people to live in their own homes and to ensure that authorities make practical support for carers a high priority.

The total funding available to local authorities for personal social services, including the special transitional grant for community care, has increased by 15 per cent. this year on last, and since 1990–91 from £3.6 to £6.4 billion. Of this, £20 million represents additional resources this year specifically for home and respite care services—rising to £30 million in 1995–96.

Dental Fillings

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has conducted or commissioned concerning the effects of amalgam fillings on the human body; what have been the results or conclusions of such research; and what plans she has to commission or conduct such research in the future.

Mr. Malone: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment advised in 1986 that the use of dental amalgam is free from the risk of systemic toxicity and that only a few cases of hypersensitivity occur. The subsequent research findings, and recent evaluations by several authoritative national and international expert committees are consistent with that advice. The Department of Health will continue to assess and evaluate all research in this area.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average number of dental fillings in *(a)* 12-year-old children and *(b)* eight-year-old children in each district health authority in England.

Mr. Malone: The preliminary results of the 1993 children's dental health survey show that the average number of filled teeth in permanent dentition was 0.7 for a 12-year-old and 0.1 for an eight-year-old. Information from this survey is not published at district health authority level. However, the 1992–93 survey by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry of dental caries experience of 12-year-old children provides information on the number of filled teeth for 12-year-old children by district health authority. Copies of the results of the survey will be placed in the Library.

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which HIV and AIDS organisations were refused funding under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 for the current financial year; the amount each organisation requested and the reasons given for refusal;

(2) which HIV and AIDS organisations have successfully applied for funding under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1986 for the current financial year; how much they requested; and how much they received.

Mr. Sackville: Applications for HIV and AIDS voluntary organisations exceeded the section 64 funding available for 1994–95 by over 100 per cent. Our priority was to continue grants to those organisations to whom financial commitments had already been made and renew funding to organisations whose funding was due to end after March 1994. No funding then remained to make any new grants. The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Specialist Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that NHS specialist services provided on a national basis are purchased by one authority for the whole of the United Kingdom; and that regionally based NHS specialist services are purchased by a small number of lead authorities on behalf of all other authorities within a region; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Services which meet the supra-regional services criteria are provided on a national basis and are contracted for by the national health service executive. Guidance has been issued to regions requiring them to ensure that purchasers have appropriate contracting arrangements in place for purchasing other specialised services. Purchasers are encouraged to use a "lead purchasing approach". Copies of the guidance, EL(93)98, are available in the Library.

Kawasaki Disease

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to reduce deaths from Kawasaki disease.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 13 July at column *602*.

Dental Health (Children)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will meet the editor of the *Bolton Evening News* to discuss the benefits to children's dental health of fluoridation of water.

Mr. Malone: We have received no such request, but would consider any proposal on its merits.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys report on the dental health of children will be available.

Mr. Malone: It is hoped that the report will be published shortly.

Macmillan Nurses

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Macmillan hospital nurse posts within the NHS are currently being funded by the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not routinely collected by the Department. Data from the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund show that there are currently 239 national health service hospital nurse posts being funded by the charity. Macmillan nurse posts are usually grant-aided by the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund for the first three years, after which the costs are taken up by the NHS.

Single-sex Hospital Accommodation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that all NHS patients, with the exception of young children and patients in intensive care units, should be offered the choice of accommodation in a single-sex area with segregated toilets and bathroom facilities without delaying their treatment or otherwise reducing its quality; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for local decision, but we do expect all patients to be treated with dignity and respect for their religious and cultural beliefs. A new standard in the revised and expanded patients charter to be issued in the new year will expect patients to be told in advance if they are to be treated in mixed-sex wards. This will allow them to raise any objections with the hospital which will, where possible, take account of their views.

Hip Replacements

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were on waiting lists for hip replacement surgery in each year from 1983 to 1993 in England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of people waiting for treatment in England is collected by specialty and published in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library. Data on the number waiting by individual procedure are not available centrally.

Information relating to Wales and Scotland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has carried out on the effect on the reduction of junior hospital doctors' hours on accessibility to patient services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: A number of research projects have been supported, fully or in part, by central funds. The main studies include:

Description and preliminary evaluation of Department of Health initiatives to reduce junior doctors' hours—Dr. Irene Higginson, health services research unit, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 1992;

The interface between junior doctors and nurses: a research study for the Department of Health—Greenhalgh and Company, September 1994;

Medical support worker policy—Northern general hospital, Sheffield, on-going;

The patient's progress —Department of Health, on-going

Evaluation of processes for creating successful roles for nurse practitioners—Sheffield Centre for Health and Related Research, on-going;

Evaluation project on parasurgical assistants—University of Sheffield, Department of Surgical Sciences, on-going.

Much of the research in this area has concentrated on how best various disciplines can work together to deliver good quality patient care. The evidence suggests that an effective use of skill mix can help maintain continuity of care, improve services to patients, help reduce junior doctors' hours and provide a range of staff with opportunities to develop their skills further.

As well as projects supported directly by central funds, our regional task forces have been able to develop a range of local schemes to examine how best to reduce juniors' hours. They also evaluate the effect on patient care and juniors' hours of the extra senior medical posts, over 800 in all, which we have funded since 1991.

North Staffordshire Patient Transport Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will investigate the competition for the north Staffordshire patient transport service contract; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to do so.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she plans to publish the counselling guide on multiple pregnancies for patients attending infertility treatment centres; and if she will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Sackville: A guide for patients entitled "The Prospect of Triplets and Quads", written by Dr. Frances Price, was published in July 1993. Copies were sent to all assisted conception centres licensed under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

Copies will be placed in the Library.

NHS Management Consultants

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she plans to take to control the level of fees to management consultants paid by NHS trusts.

Mr. Malone: The employment of consultants is a matter for local rather than national decision. To assist health authorities and trusts to achieve best value for money, the Department published comprehensive guidance—EL(94)78—this on the use of consultants, entitled "The Procurement and Management of Consultants within the NHS". This guidance included an indication of the range of fee rates that might be reasonable depending on the skill levels required. Copies of guidance will be placed in the Library.

NHS Executive

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to implement paragraphs 13 to 15 of the national health service executive letter EL (94) 4; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: All elements of executive letter EL(94)4 came into effect on 25 January 1994.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the current *(a)* chairs and *(b)* non-executive directors of each trust board, indicating the gender and occupation of each individual.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 October at column *445*.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total expenditure by NHS trusts on the insurance of buildings and equipment in each of the last four years.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance or instructions have been given to national health service trusts about the timely payment of suppliers' bills; and what evidence she has about the performance of national health service trusts in this regard.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service has been routinely monitored against a payment target of eight weeks from receipt of goods and services. Monitoring in the 1994–95 financial year shows that trusts are generally meeting this target.

New guidance was issued to the national health service in October 1994 on the timely payment of suppliers. The guidance includes the expectation that all trusts will abide by the Confederation of British Industry prompt payment code and with Government accounting regulations. A copy of the guidance, FDL(94)67, is available in the Library.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will abolish all national health service prescription charges during the next financial year; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: No.

GPs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to introduce mandatory training schemes for GP receptionists;

(2) what plans she has to allocate extra money to GPs in order to help fund the practice reception programme.

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will *(a)* increase the resources available to family health service authorities to ensure that more frequent inspections are carried out of general practitioner premises, *(b)* introduce measures to enforce standards and *(c)* ensure that public money spent by general practitioners is used for the maximum benefit of patients; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Under their terms of service, general practitioners are responsible for the provision of adequate practice premises from which to see their patients and it is for family health services authorities to decide the frequency of practice visits needed in the light of local circumstances. Minimum standards are set out in the statement of fees and allowances which are payable for premises and measures already exist to enforce them.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if general practitioners in the South Thames region will remain free to accept or reject secondary care contracts; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Health authority decisions about contracts should be reached in close co-operation with general practitioners. However, GPs remain free to refer their patients in line with their clinical judgment to a service or hospital with which the health authority has no contract.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that general practitioners in the South Thames region will remain able to choose fundholding, locality purchasing or neither; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The recent executive letter "Developing NHS Purchasing and GP Fundholding"—EL(94)79—copies of which are available in the Library, emphasised that health authorities should work with all general practitioners to develop local health and purchasing strategies. The experience of the past four years has shown that patients receive more appropriate services when general practitioners take on direct responsibility for purchasing through fundholding. This remains voluntary.

Children (Employment)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she is taking to enforce the law on the employment of children.

Mr. Bowis: The enforcement of the law protecting children at work is the responsibility of local authorities.

Suicide

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suicides have occurred in each standard region for each year since 1979; and how many of those committing suicide were unemployed.

Mr. Bowis: The number of suicides, including undetermined deaths, in each standard region for the years 1979 to 1992 will be placed in the Library. Information on employment status at the time of death is not generally available.

Gender Therapy

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will name the health authorities which are unwilling to fund referrals to gender identity or dysphoria clinics; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce national criteria and protocols for gender reassignment therapy in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Guidance already exists on medical proficiency and the importance of counselling. The production of protocols is primarily a matter for the medical profession.

Out-patient Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if waiting times for out-patient consultant appointments at Hereford are subject to the same criteria for patients from Powys as for patients from Hereford and Worcester; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if waiting times for out-patient consultant appointments at the Royal Shrewbury hospital are subject to the same criteria for patients from Powys as for patients from Shropshire; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Health authorities and general practitioner fundholders must purchase services for their patients according to the appropriate national and local standards applicable to their residents taking account of available resources.

Dental Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the availability of NHS dental services for adults in rural areas; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone : Family health services authorities in England report that they can help patients in all areas to find national health service dentists.

Northern Health Authority

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement concerning the location of the new headquarters of the Northern health authority, the cost of relocation and the cost of using existing premises.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 22 November at columns *84–85.*

The business case estimated that relocating to Durham would be cheaper than retaining the existing headquarters by around £225,000 a year.

Secure Units

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received concerning the need to amend reporting procedures when patients, whether referred under the Mental Health Acts or voluntary, abscond from a secure unit; if she will describe current reporting procedures; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: None.

The current procedures are given in chapter 21 of the code of practice to the Mental Health Act 1983 and paragraphs 76 to 80 and 288 and 289 of the memorandum to the Mental Health Act 1983, copies of which are available in the Library. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is notified if a patient subject to restrictions under sections 41 or 49 of the Mental Health Act 1983 absents himself without leave.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legal advice she has received or sought to clarify on whether those referred to secure units under the Mental Health Acts have a mandatory or discretionary right to exercise outside such units; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The decisions as to whether a patient is allowed to exercise outside a secure unit, whether within or outside the secure perimeter, is one for the clinical staff responsible for his or her care. In the case of a patient subject to restriction under sections 41 or 49 of the Mental Health Act 1983, any proposal to grant leave outside the perimeter of the unit has to be approved by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Domiciliary Care Agencies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to introduce a system of registration for domiciliary care agencies; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Warwickshire North, (Mr. O'Brien) on 12 April at columns *293–94.*

Blood Donors

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to alter the arrangements whereby donor blood is obtained by voluntary and unpaid donation; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have no such proposals.

Durham Business School

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will institute an inquiry into the lodging of NHS funds with the Durham business school for the purpose of payment for MBA studies; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This is a local matter for Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Greetham, chairman of the authority, for details.

Health Education Authority

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement concerning her policy for the future of the Health Education Authority.

Mr. Malone: We will inform the House once a decision has been made about the Health Education Authority.

Bishop Auckland Hospital

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent to date on the preparation of the business plan and planning for the refurbishment of Bishop Auckland hospital by the Bishop Auckland hospitals trust.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Bishop Auckland hospitals national health service trust. The hon. Member

may wish to contact Mrs. Barbara Gill, chairman of Bishop Auckland hospitals NHS trust, for details.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement concerning her policy in connection with the performance of operations at community hospitals;

(2) if she will make a statement concerning the future of the operation theatre and associated facilities at Newton Abbot community hospital.

Mr. Sackville: It is the responsibility of individual purchasers, in discussion with their hospital providers, to ensure that high standards of quality and safety are maintained for all surgical procedures. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Leverton, chairman of Plymouth and Torbay district health authority, about the future of the operating theatre at Newton Abbot hospital.

Tinnitus

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate she has made of the number of people with tinnitus in England and Wales; and how many tinnitus-only clinics there are;

(2) what guidance she has issued to health authorities regarding special provision for the relief of tinnitus; what assessment she has made of the adequacy of resources available for it; and if she will make a statement;

(3) what plans she has to review the provision of NHS services for people with tinnitus; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It is not known how many people suffer from tinnitus. The numbers of tinnitus-only clinics are not available centrally. However, there are facilities for the treatment of tinnitus at all national health service ear, nose and throat departments.

As with all patient groups, responsibility for the provision of services for people with tinnitus rests with health authorities who have to assess needs and priorities against their resources. We have no plans to review these provisions.

North Durham Hospital Trust

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent to date on the preparation of the business plan, and planning for the new general hospital by the North Durham hospital trust.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for North Durham acute hospital NHS trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. C. P. Douglas, chairman of the trust, for details.

Herbal Remedies

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *86*, what steps she took to obtain counsel's opinion about possible court interpretations of the term "industrially produced", prior to formulating her policy on such matters in relation to the availability of herbal remedies; and if she will make available in the Library a copy of all legal opinions received.

Mr. Sackville: It is not Government's practice to disclose such information.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *86*, how she is able to safeguard the position of herbal remedies in possible future legal cases; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 November at column *86*.

Research

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out into the effect of insulin-like growth factor-1 on human beings.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

The effects of insulin-like growth factor-1, IGF-1, being a naturally occurring substance in humans, have been studied extensively and the Medical Research Council is currently funding a project on the effect of IGF-1 on binding protein in implantation and pregnancy. There are a large number of reports on research into IGF-1 on human beings which have been published in the international scientific literature. The MRC is always willing to consider soundly based proposals in competition with other applications for council's support, and funding decisions are dependent upon a peer review process.

Medicines Legislation

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will now make it her policy to decline to introduce the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, Pharmacovigilance and Related Matters) Regulations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We consulted on the proposed regulations and have made revisions to take account of representations we received. We intend to introduce the regulations shortly.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will revise the guidance given to general practitioners on the diagnosis, treatment and benefit implications of conditions caused by exposure to organophosphorous sheep dips; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Training in diagnosis and treatment is principally a matter for the medical profession rather than the Government. All general practitioners and accident and emergency departments were sent the Department's book "Pesticide Poisoning" when it was published, copies of which are available in the Library, and the chief medical officer wrote to all doctors in England in 1991 and again with the chief executive of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in June 1993 to alert general practitioners to the possibility of exposure to pesticides and certain veterinary medicines including organophosphorus sheep dips and to remind them of the reporting schemes operated by Employment Medical Advisory Service and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's veterinary medicines directive. The chief medical officers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also wrote to doctors in those countries. All doctors therefore should be aware of the possibility of poisoning if over exposure to any of these products occurs and the symptoms to be expected.

This guidance is still valid.

Any benefit implications are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his proposals for local government revenue spending in 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood: I propose to set total standard spending in Wales for 1995–96 at £2,767 million. This figure includes £124.4 million for care in the community. It represents an increase of £72 million, 2.7 per cent. on the comparable level of funding for 1994–95.

I propose to set central Government support for TSS through aggregate external finance at £2,450.8 million.

Within AEF I propose to make available £1,711.1 million in revenue support grant, £520 million in distributable non-domestic rates and £219.7 million in specific and supplementary grants.

My Department has today written to the local authority associations to consult them on my proposals for revenue support grant in 1995–96.

I shall announce provisional standard assessments and provisional capping principles for police authorities in Wales later this week. I shall announce provisional standard spending assessments and provisional capping principles for county and district councils in mid December. I shall announce final details of the settlement early in the new year.

Disabled People

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people suffering a disability in each of the counties of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Information of the incidence of physical and sensory disability is contained in the reports of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys published in 1988–89. These showed that 16.4 per cent. of adults and 3.1 per cent. of children in Wales had such disabilities. This information is not available separately for counties.

The 1991 census asked whether respondents had any long-term illness, health problem or handicap which limited their daily activities or the work they could do, including any problems which were due to old age. The following table contains information from the 1991 census relating to Welsh counties.

Residents with a limiting long-term illness:

	Number	*Percentage of residents*
Clwyd	64,051	15.7
Dyfed	57,244	16.7
Gwent	76,456	17.3
Gwynedd	35,755	15.2
Mid Glamorgan	109,379	20.5
Powys	16,735	14.2
South Glamorgan	56,202	14.3
West Glamorgan	70,173	19.4
Wales	485,995	17.1

Source:
1991 Census—Report for Wales.

Deeside College, Kelsterton

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to visit the Deeside college, Kelsterton.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit Deeside college.

Buckley Disability Action Group

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the offices of Buckley Disability Action Group, Clwyd.

Mr. Richards: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have plans to do so at present.

Holyhead

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's total financial contribution to investment in the port of Holyhead; and what are the implications of such investment for travellers by sea to the Republic of Ireland and for travellers by rail to stations to Crewe and London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Under the European regional development fund, £4.3 million has been made available to Holyhead since 1987 of which £2.5 million related to port development. In addition, since 1991, the area has attracted £300,000 assistance under the strategic development scheme, £1.9 million under the urban programme scheme and investment of £3.1 million by the WDA through the Holyhead joint venture board. The Department has also invested over £9.9 million in regional selective assistance and £525,000 in regional enterprise grant within the Holyhead travel-to-work-area.

Improvements at the port will provide a better standard of service to travellers and the business community, as well as improving the prospects for local employment.

Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which schools he has visited in each of the counties in Wales in 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: In 1994 my right hon. Friend has visited the following schools:

Name of school	*County*
Llanfihangel Rhydithon County Primary School	Powys
St. Davids High School	Clwyd
Eirias High School (Grant Maintained)	Clwyd
Trelai County Primary School	South Glamorgan
Dynevor Comprehensive School	West Glamorgan
Ysgol Bro Lleu	Gwynedd

I have undertaken four visits with two more programmed for December. My right hon. Friend and I are keen to visit as many schools as diary commitments and other pressures allow.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to assist people in Wales who suffer disability, with a view to improving access to buildings, transport and employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on Thursday 24 November 1994.

Public Appointments

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many individuals have responded since July 1993 to Welsh Office advertisements for the register of public appointments; how many of these have been appointed; and if he will list those appointed.

Mr. Redwood: The general advertising campaign in July 1993 inviting people to join the Welsh Office register of candidates elicited over 2,500 inquiries. Approximately 1000 individuals subsequently returned nomination forms. Six of these have been appointed to public bodies in Wales. They are:

Mr. H. K. Evans
Mr. Heddwyn Evans
Mrs. C. A. Hinton
Mr. M. C. G. Pepper
Mr. H. D. B. Williams
Mrs. V. Wilson

Health Authorities and Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of health authorities and trusts as at 30 September.

Mr. Richards: There were nine district health authorities, eight family health services authorities and 24 NHS trusts in Wales as at 30 September 1994.

Rural Transport

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will institute a review of rural transport provision in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: County councils are required to review regularly the level of public transport provision in their areas and if necessary buy in services which are not being provided commercially.

Animal Transport

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement of his policy concerning the effect on the Welsh farming industry of the reluctance of shippers to carry live animals.

Mr. Redwood: I am aware of the concerns in the industry about the ban by ferry companies on the transport of live animals. The situation is being monitored closely, and it is still too early to assess fully the impact of the ban on the farming industry. However, the Government are actively seeking agreement on European Community rules on the welfare of animals in transit, introducing tighter national laws and urgently checking proposals for new transport facilities so that those which are satisfactory can proceed.

Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Line

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet Railtrack and train operators to discuss the carriage of rail freight on the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: A meeting is planned with the director of Transrail to discuss the carriage of rail freight on all lines in Wales. The matter will also be raised at the next meeting with the chairman of Railtrack.

University of Wales

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the Welsh Funding Council is able to, or expected to, take steps to alter the arrangements reached between the university registry and the constituent institutions within the university of Wales following the Rosser report; and if he will make a statement on the funding of those institutions.

Mr. Redwood: The arrangements agreed between the University of Wales and its constituent colleges following the Rosser report, and the University Registry's role within those arrangements, are matters for the university and the colleges to decide. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales' responsibility is to allocate funds for teaching and research and to do so in a way which ensures accountability and value for money.

Abattoirs

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on the provision of abattoirs and meat processing facilities in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: Decisions about the provisions of abattoirs and meat processing facilities in Wales are a matter for the commercial judgment of those involved in the industry.

European state aid regulations put severe restrictions on the granting of financial aid to investments in abattoir facilities. However, financial support can be considered for meat processing under the European processing and marketing grant scheme administered by my Department.

Libraries

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration has been given to the special circumstances in Wales in the preparation of the Aslib report on the development of regional hyper-libraries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The review of the Public Library Service in England and Wales, commissioned by the Department of National Heritage from Aslib, included a case study of the Gwynedd library service. The draft report was published in September and has been circulated for comment to a wide range of library interests.

The Library and Information Service Council (Wales), which has statutory responsibility to advise the Secretary of State on library matters, has considered the draft report in full, including the recommendations relating to regional hyper-libraries, and has submitted comments to Aslib.

Coronary Disease

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to reduce the waiting times between diagnosis and bypass operations for younger coronary disease patients in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Younger coronary disease patients will benefit from the Government's policies to open a new heart treatment centre in south Wales; to reduce the causes of heart disease through health promotion, and to reduce waiting times generally for both outpatient and inpatient hospital diagnosis and treatment.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the firms which have agreed to participate in the arrangements for the modern apprenticeship scheme; how many apprenticeships each has agreed to provide; what funds he is providing to each company via the appropriate training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has contracted with the training and enterprise councils in Wales for the delivery of 550 places on the modern apprenticeships programme in 1994–95. The training and enterprise councils, training providers—including colleges—and a variety of employers are involved in its delivery. Information on the firms involved is not held centrally.

Wales Engineering Centre

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the appointment of a chief executive for the Wales Engineering Centre.

Mr. Redwood: Engineering Centre for Wales appointments are a matter for the chairman and members of the centre.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has decided the details of the transitional arrangements to phase-in the effects of the 1995 revaluation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The revaluation will result in significant local and sectoral changes in rateable values and rates bills. Around 76,000 properties will see increases in their bills, and around 26,000 will see reductions. The Welsh Office's consultation paper, published last month, outlined proposals for transitional arrangements to phase-in the effects of these changes. In the light of responses to that paper and the package of support announced by the Chancellor today, I propose that no business will face a year-on-year increase of more than 10 per cent. after allowing for inflation. For property with a new rateable value of less than £10,000, the maximum real increase will be 7.5 per cent. For small composite properties such as shops with living accommodation, the limit will be 5 per cent.

I estimate that around 62,000 Welsh properties will benefit from relief. I am sure that this will be widely welcomed by the business community.

The Exchequer contribution will cover part of the cost of the scheme. The remainder will be met by limiting real reductions in rates bills, as proposed in the consultation paper. For 1995–96, the limits will be 10 per cent. for properties with a rateable value under £10,000 and 5 per cent. for larger properties.

Other details of the scheme will be as proposed as in the consultation paper. Regulations giving effect to the transitional arrangements will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the Welsh non-domestic rate poundage for 1995.

Mr. Redwood: The 1995 revaluation has increased overall rateable values in Wales by around 18 per cent. I propose to reduce the Welsh poundage from 44.8 to 39.0p reflecting this.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Nurses

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of qualified nursing staff by speciality for each region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moss: The information for 1990–93 has been placed in the Library. The figures before 1990 were not collected on a compatible basis and figures for 1994 are not yet available.

"Making Belfast Work"

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list expenditure by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* district electoral area in Belfast under the "Making Belfast Work" initiative from its inception.

Mr. Moss: Information on expenditure by constituency and district electoral area is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, work is on-going on a database which links project information to different spatial regions.

Details of projects funded under the "Making Belfast Work" initiative from its inception to the end of the 1991–92 financial year are contained in the MBW strategy proposals. A copy of this document was placed in the House of Commons Library in April of this year. I have arranged for details of projects funded by the initiative from 1992–93 to the present also to be placed in the Library.

Roads

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many minor cross-frontier roads have been reopened to date; and how many more have still to be reopened.

Sir John Wheeler: Some 41 of the 104 crossings previously subject to closure orders are open to traffic. Of those, work at 17 crossings has been completed, is in progress on 14 others and was not required at the remaining 10. Some of the remaining 63 crossings are on private land where it will be for the landowner to decide what, if any, work is required.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all of the registered residential homes

and nursing homes in the Armagh and Dungannon unit, and the Newry and Mourne unit of management.

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The information requested is as follows:

ARMAGH AND DUNGANNON UNIT OF MANAGEMENT

Nursing Homes

Armagh, Hamiltonsbawn Road, Armagh
Castledillon, Drumilly, Portadown Road, Armagh
Chestnut Lodge, 47 Carrickaness Road, Benburb
Collegelands, Lislasly Road, Aughanlig, Dungannon
Copperfields, Moore Street, Aughnacloy
Corkhill Lodge, Donaghmore, Dungannon
Dungannon, Killyman Road, Dungannon
Fairlawns, 63 Drumcairn Road, Armagh
Greenpark, Keady Road, Armagh
The Haven, Quarry Lane, Dungannon
Hockley Lodge, 11 Drumilly Road, Armagh
Hockley Mews, 11 Drumilly Road, Armagh
Manor Court, Dungannon Park, Dungannon
The Meadows, Newline, Richhill, Armagh
Nightingale, Old English Road, Dungannon
Rathowen, 118 Portadown Road, Tandragee
The Retreat, 62 Drumilly Road, Armagh
Sanville, 17 Annagher Road, Coalisland
The Valley, 8 Tullybroom Road, Clogher

Residential Homes

Ballymore Retreat, 111 Ballymore Road, Tandragee
39 Ballynahonemore Road, Armagh
The Bawn Cottage, 31A Main Street, Hamiltonsbawn
Benvinda, 49 Maynooth Road, Richhill
Corkhill Lodge, Corkill, Donaghmore, Dungannon
112/113 Fairgreen Park, Keady
Fairlawns, 63 Drumcairn Road, Armagh
Glenview, 9 Cabragh Road, Dungannon
Hebron House, 84/86 Main Street, Markethill
Lisnakee House, 18 Moodage Road, Tandragee
Monique, 28 Moor Road, Coalisland
Roughan House, Newmills, Dungannon
St. Macartan's, 74 Main Street, Clogher
Sunnymead, Deansbridge, 12 Portadown Road, Armagh

NEWRY AND MOURNE HSS TRUST

Nursing Home

Ardmaine, Fullerton Road, Newry
Arnos Vale, 75 Warrenpoint Road, Rostrevor
Avila, Convent Road, Bessbrook, Newry
Cairngrove, Balmoral Avenue, Rathfriland Road, Newry
Cairnhill, Rathfriland Road, Newry
Coolbawn, 23 Queen Street, Warrenpoint
Glencarron, 6 Creamery Road, Crossmaglen
Kilbroney House, 83 Kilbroney Road, Rostrevor
Lisnaaran, 4 Greenpark Road, Rostrevor
Our Mother of Mercy, 1 Home Avenue, Newry
Rathfriland Manor, Rosconner Terrace, Rathfriland
Rockfield, Windmill Road, Newry
St. John of God, Courtney Hill, Newry
St. Joseph's, Prince's Street, Warrenpoint

Residential Homes

Arbour House, 16 Great George's Street South, Warrenpoint
Coach House, Mourne Grange Camphill Village Community, Newry Road, Kilkeel
Glenbeigh House, 18 Victoria Square, Rostrevor
Glencarron, 6 Creamery Road, Crossmaglen
Moneydarragh Lodge, 8 Kilkeel Road, Annalong
Mourne Grange Camphill Village Community, Newry Road, Kilkeel
Our Mother of Mercy, 1 Home Avenue, Newry
Peacehaven, 38 Newry Street, Rathfriland
Sennen House, Rostrevor, Warrenpoint
St. Joseph's, Prince's Street, Warrenpoint
Seafort House, 6 Queen's Street, Warrenpoint

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will explain the meaning and purpose of the Royal Ulster Constabulary's request on 2 December 1993 to the Irish Attorney-General to be told in due course that the warrant had been endorsed in respect of Brendan Smyth.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* By its letter of 2 December to the Commissioner of the Garda Siochana, the RUC inquired whether the warrants in respect of Brendan Smyth had been backed for execution. The RUC was not at that time aware that he might voluntarily return to Northern Ireland.

The Banks Residential Home

Sir James Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what formal proposals he has received about the future of The Banks residential home, Bangor; what is the nature of any such proposals; and what is the timescale for considering them.

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* I have been asked to approve a proposal from the North Down and Ards Community trust that "The Banks" should close. I have recently visited the home and met local interests and I will announce my decision as quickly as possible.

The trust has said that, if the closure is agreed, it will explore the possibility of identifying a buyer for the building who would be willing to build a nursing home and accommodate all existing residents.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to monitor the economic impact of the national lottery.

Mr. Dorrell: The national lottery has already been a great success, with £25 million raised for good causes in the first two weeks, and I expect this to continue. My Department, together with the bodies responsible for distributing lottery proceeds, will naturally be monitoring how those proceeds are spent.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether those national lottery proceeds

administered by the Arts Council can be distributed to film projects.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage where funds from the national lottery destined for distribution to the good causes but not yet paid to applicants are held; what assumptions have been made about rates of interest accruing; and who will receive any such interest.

Mr. Dorrell: Proceeds from the national lottery are held in the national lottery distribution fund pending draw down by the good causes. The investment of the fund is the responsibility of the National Debt Commissioners. Interest gains received by the fund will be at a rate consistent with those normally achieved by risk-free investments. All the interest gained by the investment of the fund will be attributed equitably to the good causes and add to the sum of the proceeds available for distribution.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will give instructions that national lottery tickets should be available at Selkirk, Melrose, Lauder, Earlston and Newton St. Boswells.

(2) if he will give instructions that national lottery tickets should be available at Innerleithen, Walkerburn, West Linton and Broughton.

Mr. Dorrell: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked Peter Davis, the Director-General of the national lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Gentleman, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Millennium Fund Commissioners

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether the millennium fund commissioners can distribute money to private companies or individuals.

Mr. Dorrell: Directions have been issued to the Millennium Commission under section 26 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, concerning matters which the commission should take into account when distributing lottery proceeds. These include the need to ensure that lottery proceeds are distributed to projects which promote the public good and which are not intended primarily for private gain. The Millennium Commission's guidance for applicants, which was issued this week, makes it clear that commercial organisations or those conducted for profit will be eligible if they can demonstrate that their project will promote the public good, and that individuals will not normally be eligible to apply for lottery funds on their own behalf.

Sports and Arts

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the future of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer to the hon. Member to the Budget statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer today.

Tourism

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the completion date of the Touche Ross consultants' report on the English tourist board's crown grading scheme; and on what date he expects to respond to it.

Mr. Dorrell: A review of the Crown accommodation classification and grading scheme was commissioned by the English tourist board from KPMG Peat Marwick. The work is complete and has been sent to me. I intend to write to the chairman of the ETB very soon.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress he has made on developing a comprehensive strategy for tourism; when he will make his Department's new policies public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I am considering the conclusions which are emerging from work that has been taken forward with the English tourist board and the British Tourist Authority, drawing on the views of the industry. I shall make an announcement in due course.

Bowood House (Correspondence)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration was given to purchasing items of correspondence from Bowood house for the national archives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: The national institutions which maintain archives were notified of the recent auction of correspondence from Bowood house. I understand that the National libraries of Scotland and of Wales and the National Maritime museum successfully bid for items they wished to acquire for their archives.

Libraries

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the five local authorities which spend *(a)* most and *(b)* least per head of population on library book provision; for the year 1992–93, together with the sums they spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: The five local authorities in England spending the most per head of population on library book provision in 1992–93 were (*source* CIPFA):

City of London (£129.54), Westminster (£4.34), Lambeth (£3.75), Llanelli (£3.35) and Kingston-Upon-Thames (£3.21).

The five spending least were:

Sheffield (£0.89), Barnsley (£0.87), Hillingdon (£0.78), Wakefield (£0.72) and Brent (£0.34).

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the projected average expenditure for library books per head of population for *(a)* the United Kingdom as a whole, *(b)* the English counties, *(c)* the metropolitan districts and *(d)* the London boroughs for 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: No figures for projected expenditure on library books are yet available for 1995–96.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the spending on library books per head of population, measured by the book index *(a)* in 1981–84 and *(b)* in 1992–93; and what steps he is taking to increase current expenditure.

Mr. Sproat: Spending per head of population, as measured by the book index used in the national book committee report, was:

(a) £1.058 in 1981–84; and

(b) £1.849 in 1992–93

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what response he has made to the 12th annual report of the national book committee, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Sproat: We are currently reviewing the findings of the national book committee report "Public Libraries and their Book Funds".

More generally, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage continues to monitor the provision of public library services in England, including book expenditure, by analysing statistics and by investigating complaints; and the Department is prepared to intervene directly where there is doubt about an authority's ability or willingness to fulfil its statutory obligations under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Museum Staff

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many staff employed in each of the museums funded by his Department are from countries within the European Union; and how many from without.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The information is not collected by my Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list, in tabular form, the staffing levels, full and part-time, of each of the museums funded by his Department.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The details of staffing levels for museums which my Department holds are not broken down into full and part-time employees. Figures collected in the course of 1994 for total staff numbers at the museums directly funded by my Department are as follows:

	Number
Royal Armouries	134
British Museum	1,079
Imperial War Museum	425
National Gallery	430
National Maritime Museum	350
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	560
National Museum of Science and Industry	589
National Portrait Gallery	125
Natural History Museum	825
Tate Gallery	506
Victoria and Albert Museum	850
Wallace Collection	67
Geffrye Museum	24
Horniman Museum	80
Museum of London	307
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	94
Sir John Soane's Museum	20

TREASURY

Classic Cars

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning his policy in connection with road fund licences for classic cars when they are not being kept for use on public roads.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In his Budget speech today, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor gave some further details on the Government's approach to continuous licensing for vehicle excise duty licensing based on possession rather than use of a vehicle.

As the Chancellor made plain, in introducing continuous licensing, the Government will not seek to disadvantage those honest motorists, including classic car owners, who do not pay VED now because their cars are genuinely off the road. A consultation document will be issued shortly setting out details of the proposals.

EU Contributions

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the *(a)* gross contributions, *(b)* receipts and *(c)* net contributions by the United Kingdom to the European Community for each year since 1973; and what are his estimates of those amounts until 2000 assuming current OECD estimates of growth rates and national states tax policies and (i) the adoption and (ii) the non-adoption of the Edinburgh own resources proposals.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's estimates of the United Kingdom's gross contributions, receipts and net contributions to European Community institutions for the financial year 1973–74 to 1993–94, together with the latest forecast of our contributions up to 1997–98, which take account of the Edinburgh own resources proposals, are set out in the following table. The estimates for the years up to 1999–2000 which my hon. Friend requests are also set out at the foot of the table. These long-term estimates are inevitably more speculative as they extend considerably beyond the period covered by OECD estimates. Financial year forecasts of the United Kingdom's net contributions are subject to wide fluctuations for technical reasons such as the timing of payments. Longer term forecasts must be treated with particular caution.

United Kingdom's Gross and Net contribution to the EC Budget (£ million)

Year	*Gross contributions before abatement of refunds*	*Negotiated refunds*	*Abatement*	*Gross contributions after abatement and refunds*	*Public sector receipts*	*Net contribution after abatement refunds and public sector receipts*
1973–74	200	—	—	200	104	96
1974–75	197	—	—	197	232	-35
1975–76	370	—	—	370	354	16
1976–77	544	—	—	544	320	224
1977–78	941	—	—	941	382	559
1978–79	1,323	—	—	1,323	555	768
1979–80	1,665	—	—	1,665	781	884

United Kingdom's Gross and Net contribution to the EC Budget (£ million)

Year	Gross contributions before abatement of refunds	Negotiated refunds	Abatement	Gross contributions after abatement and refunds	Public sector receipts	Net contribution after abatement refunds and public sector receipts
1980–81	1,900	645	—	1,255	1,022	233
1981–82	2,330	959	—	1,371	1,146	225
1982–83	2,820	774	—	2,046	1,308	737
1983–84	3,097	239	—	2,858	1,897	961
1984–85	3,614	589	—	3,025	1,892	1,133
1985–86	3,745	—	823	2,922	1,930	992
1986–87	5,121	—	1,343	3,778	2,557	1,221
1987–88	4,906	—	1,137	3,769	1,958	1,811
1988–89	5,167	—	1,600	3,567	2,400	1,166
1989–90	5,804	—	1,317	4,487	2,035	2,452
1990–91	6,411	—	1,838	4,573	2,388	2,185
1991–92	6,129	—	2,428	3,701	2,757	943
1992–93	6,970	—	1,993	4,977	2,810	2,167
1993–94	8,407	—	2,350	6,057	3,864	2,192
1994–95	8,308	—	1,899	6,409	3,963	2,446
1995–96	9,943	—	2,256	7,687	4,293	3,394
1996–97	9,910	—	2,108	7,802	4,441	3,361
1997–98	10,552	—	2,744	7,808	4,526	3,282
1998–99	11,190	—	[1]3,570	7,620	4,640	2,980
1999–2000	11,830	—	3,170	8,660	4,930	3,730

[1] A substantial increase is anticipated in the United Kingdom's abatement to reflect the final correction of an earlier year.

The Government's estimates of the net cost of the Edinburgh own resources proposals are:

	£ million
1994–95	25
1995–96	75
1996–97	100
1997–98	165
1998–99	230
1999–2000	250

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Nelson: My Department employs two special advisers.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on the special advisers salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

VAT on Building Works

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce or remove VAT on building works to *(a)* listed buildings and *(b)* buildings in conservation areas.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no plans to reduce or remove VAT on building works to listed buildings or buildings in conservation areas.

VAT has been applied at the standard rate to the repair, restoration and maintenance of all buildings since 1973. VAT zero-rating is permitted only for approved alterations to listed buildings.

ERM and Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies he has commissioned on the benefits and losses to Britain arising from *(a)* returning to the exchange rate mechanism and *(b)* monetary union; and if he will issue a White Paper giving his own assessment.

Mr. Nelson: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has not commissioned any specific studies on the issues referred to, although naturally he considers carefully advice rendered on future economic policy. The Government have no plans to issue a White Paper on this subject.

Members and Civil Servants

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is, for an out-of-London hon. Member and for a civil service assistant secretary, each with 20 years' reckonable service *(a)* the normal retirement age, *(b)* salary, *(c)* annual pension and *(d)* the deduction from salary for pension in the last year of employment.

Sir George Young: For a member of Parliament, the pension scheme assumes a normal retirement age of 65, but accrued pension benefits are payable at age 60 to a retired member with 20 years' service. The current parliamentary salary is £31,687. On retirement, taking 30 November 1994 as the last day of service, the pension would be £11,730, with an option to give up part of the pension to provide a lump sum. The maximum lump sum allowed at 60 would be £37,940, leaving a pension of £8,500. The deductions in the last year of employment would be £1,897, or 6 per cent.

For a civil service assistant secretary grade 5, the normal retirement age depends on the policy of the employing Department, but will be between age 60 and 70. The current salary would be between £36,739 and £54,815. Under principal civil service pension scheme, again assuming 30 November 1994 as the last day of service, the pension would be between £9,064.75 and £13,518.34, together with a lump sum of between

£27,194.25 and £40,555.02. The deductions from salary in the last year of employment would be between £543.89 and £811.10. A deduction of 1½ per cent. of pay is made towards the cost of dependant benefits only. The value of pension provision is taken into account in setting rates of pay.

Earnings and Inflation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year since 1978 *(a)* the average earnings and *(b)* the average rate of inflation.

Mr. Nelson: The following table gives the information requested on average earnings:

April of Year	*Average gross weekly earnings of full-time Adult[1] employees[2] Great Britain* £
1978	79.10
1979	89.60
1980	110.20
1981	124.90
1982	136.50
1983	147.40
1984	159.30
1985	171.00
1986	184.70
1987	198.90
1988	218.40
1989	239.70
1990	263.10
1991	284.70
1992	304.60
1993	316.90
1994	325.70

Notes:

[1] For 1978 to 1982, figures are compiled on basis of men aged 21 and over and women aged 18 and over. Since 1983 figures are compiled on the basis of employees on adult rates.

[2] Figures are average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence:

Source:

Department of Employment; New Earnings Surveys.

The information requested at (b) is available in table 8 of the publication "Retail Prices Index September 1994", CSO Business Monitor MM23, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Enhanced Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to recover enhanced payments made to public officials if there is evidence of incompetence.

Mr. Aitken: None. Performance-related pay or bonuses to public officials will usually reflect performance in a preceding period. The recovery of such payments would not normally be appropriate. A decline in performance might be reflected in future payments or in other action.

Civil Service

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many voluntary resignations from the non-industrial home civil service there have been in each of the last 10 years.

Sir George Young: Information on resignations from the non-industrial home civil service is given in table 7 of "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to how many civil servants have left the civil service for jobs in the private sector in each of the last 10 years.

Sir George Young: This information is not available.

EU Budget

Mr. Peter Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his circular letter to hon. Members of 11 November, what was his estimate of the United Kingdom's gross payment to the EC in 1999; what was his estimate of the average annual growth of United Kingdom gross domestic product between 1995–96 and 1999; and what was his estimate of annual average growth of community gross domestic product in the same period.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* The United Kingdom's gross contribution to the European Community after abatement is expected to be £8,660 million by 1999–2000. These long-term estimates are inevitably speculative as they go considerably beyond the period covered by OECD estimates which were used in the table contained in my answer on 23 November to a question from the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), *Official Report*, columns *155-58.*

The average annual growth rate assumptions used in making this forecast are consistent with the assumptions which will be announced in the Budget.

VAT on Fuel

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the increase in VAT on fuel from April 1995 on the inflation rate.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* It is estimated that the increase in VAT on domestic fuel and power in April 1995 will add just over 0.4 per cent. to the retail prices index. Inflation is expected to remain well within the Government's target range 1–4 per cent. through the course of 1995. The imposition of VAT on domestic fuel and power is essential to raise revenue and to encourage energy conservation, contributing to Rio commitments on global warming.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bi-valve Molluscs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how directive 91/492/EEC is implemented in the Netherlands and in France; and what assessment he has made of the nature of the monitoring of that directive and whether it is as rigorous on the continent as it is in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: It is for the European Commission to keep track of such matters and to assess the effectiveness of any supporting procedures, such as monitoring in this case. We ourselves have little information on the progress of implementation of directive 91/492/EEC in other member states. There is not independent check that we can usefully apply.

Bovine Immuno-deficiency Virus

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has considered reports that the former milk marketing board refused to take milk for reasons of BIV from a cow herd which itself was in part subsequently slaughtered for use in meat products; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Infection with bovine immunodeficiency virus—BIV—is neither notifiable nor reportable and the disposal of infected animals is the responsibility of the owner of the animals. Infection with BIV should not preclude any bovine animals, which are not showing signs of disease, going for slaughter for human consumption subject to the normal ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections and other statutory controls on slaughterhouse operations, nor should it preclude the milk from such animals going for human consumption. In March this year, the milk marketing board decided to stop buying milk from a farm where there were cattle with serological evidence of exposure to BIV. The then Minister reviewed this decision, as required by the milkmarketing scheme, and decided not to uphold it on the ground that the board had gone outside its powers in the scheme.

Agricultural Land

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the amount of grade one agricultural land accepted for building development in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: This information is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Cows

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the relationship between ovarian cysts, mastitis in cows and doses of BST administered to cows.

Mrs. Browning: Such issues were covered in the safety assessment carried out by the Veterinary Products Committee and the Medicines Commission, in advising the licensing authority on the two applications received for licences for BST products.

Flooding

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportions of the costs of flooding in the last 12 months for which figures are available can be attributed to increased run-off from land.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only by extensive surveys and flood modelling.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest information on the extent and costs of flooding of roads and property in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: Surveys of flood risk areas are undertaken by the National Rivers Authority at local level and the results made available to local authorities to inform the planning process. In addition, the Association of British Insurance has recently published a report entitled "Identification of Coastal Flood Areas in England and Wales", in collaboration with the National Rivers Authority and the Ministry.

Claims for flood damage to property are handled by insurance companies. The risk of flooding is reduced significantly through expenditure by Government and the responsible local agencies on the maintenance and improvement of flood defences.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has that the change-over from grass or spring cereal crops to winter cereal crops contributes to the run-off from land.

Mr. Jack: Grass is the most effective type of vegetation for reducing the rate at which rainfall runs off from land, and there is evidence that agricultural practices which leave land without grass or crop cover can lead to an increased rate of run off. How spring cereals compare with winter cereals in this respect depends on local circumstances, but winter cereals may provide some limited crop cover—and hence surface water storage—in the winter months when rainfall is generally highest.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many lorries transporting animals through Plymouth harbour on the night of 21 November *(a)* did and *(b)* did not fulfil the requirements of the journey plan.

Mrs. Browning: Nine vehicles arrived for loading on the ferry, of which three were turned back by the Ministry veterinary inspector on the ground that the arrangements made to protect the welfare of the animals during the proposed journey were not satisfactorily recorded on the journey plans presented for his inspection.

Sheep Dip

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the latest available figures for the number of sheep farmers authorised under the certification scheme to purchase organophosphorous dip products in Wales, Scotland and each of his Department's regions in England; and what, in each case, was the total estimated number of sheep farmers.

Mrs. Browning: The certification scheme is run by the National Proficiency Tests Council. There are 90,000 registered sheep farmers in the United Kingdom. The number of farmers who have applied for certification in each NPTC region by 27 October 1994 is set out in the following table. The information is not available by MAFF regions.

By 11 November, a further 647 sheep farmers had applied for certification. A total of 1,761 certificates had also been issued by that date. None of this data is available on a corresponding regional basis.

The decision on whether or not to apply for certification is a matter for the individual sheep farmer, bearing in mind their judgment on the possible need to purchase OP sheep dips for the treatment of sheep in the coming year.

Applications for Sheep Dipping Certificates received by 27 October 1994

Counties	*Numbers registered*
Northumberland	1,036
Durham	
Tyne & Wear	

Applications for Sheep Dipping Certificates received by 27 October 1994

Counties	*Numbers registered*
Cumbria Lancashire Cheshire Merseyside Greater Manchester	
Yorkshire Cleveland	493
Humberside Lincolnshire	170
Derbyshire Leicestershire Northamptonshire Nottinghamshire	339
Shropshire Staffordshire	253
Hereford and Worcestershire Gloucester and North Avon Warwickshire West Midlands	357
Cambridgeshire Norfolk Suffolk	110
Essex Hertforshire London (North of Thames)	50
Bedfordshire Berkshire Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire	139
Kent Sussex East London (South of Thames)	186
Surrey Sussex West	61
Hampshire Isle of Wight	89

Applications for Sheep Dipping Certificates received by 27 October 1994

Counties	*Numbers registered*
Dorset Somerset South Avon Devon Cornwall Wiltshire	489
Clwyd Gwynedd	522
Powys	327
Dyfed	520
Glamorgan Gwent	166
Scotland	1,062
Northern Ireland	235
ATB Landbase	2,277

Badgers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library papers relating to the epidemiological investigation by his department's veterinary staff into the TB herd breakdown on the Highgrove estate in November 1993.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* No. The report of this investigation, as of similar investigations into individual animal disease outbreaks, contains information which is unsuitable for disclosure on commercial confidentiality and other grounds.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of Newcastle disease were identified in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The last confirmed case of Newcastle disease in Great Britain was in 1984.

DEFENCE

Indonesia

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's budget spending planned for the current year on training for the Indonesian military; and what was so spent in 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr Soames: It is not our practice to disclose information of this nature.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence matters were discussed when the Chief and Vice Chief of Defence Staff visited Indonesia last year.

Mr. Soames: The visits by the Chief of the Defence Staff and Vice Chief of the Defence Staff to Indonesia in February 1994 and October 1994 cost my department a total of £11,032.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the arms working party clearance was given in respect of the proposed sale of Scorpion light tanks to Indonesia.

Mr. Freeman: Information relating to arms working party clearances is commercially confidential. A company receiving approval through the AWP process still has an obligation to apply for an export licence from the Department of Trade and Industry before exporting goods. The consideration of the export licence application will, in the normal way, take account of all relevant factors.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment is covered by the memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom and Indonesia; and what is the total value of goods already sold.

Mr. Freeman: Any memorandum of understanding between the Government of the United Kingdom and another Government is confidential between the two Governments. Details of the value of goods sold are confidential between the purchaser and the supplier.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Soames: My Department employs one special adviser. Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Military Training

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries from which foreign students have visited or will visit the United Kingdom for military training in United Kingdom military establishments during 1994.

Mr. Soames: Those countries from which foreign students have visited or will visit the United Kingdom for military training in United Kingdom military establishments during 1994 are as follows;

Country	*Country*	*Country*
Abu Dhabi	Greece	Pakistan
Albania	Grenada	Paraguay
Antigua	Guyana	Philippines
Australia	Hong Kong	Poland
Austria	Hungary	Portugal
Bahrain	India	Qatar
Bahamas	Indonesia	Romania
Bangladesh	Ireland	South Africa
Barbados	Israel	Saudi Arabia
Belgium	Italy	Senegal
Belize	Ivory Coast	Seychelles
Bermuda	Jamaica	Sierra Leone
Botswana	Japan	Singapore
Brazil	Jordan	Slovakia
Brunei	Kenya	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Korea	Spain
Canada	Kuwait	Sri Lanka
Cayman Island	Latvia	Sudan
Chile	Lebanon	Swaziland
St. Christopher Nevis	Lithuania	Sweden
Cyprus	St. Lucia	Switzerland
Czech Republic	Malaysia	Tanzania
Denmark	Maldives	Thailand
Dominican Republic	Malta	Trinidad and Tobago
Dubai	Malawi	Turkey
Ecuador	Mauritius	UAE
Egypt	Montserrat	Uganda
Estonia	Mozambique	Ukraine
Falkland Islands	Namibia	USA
Fiji	Nepal	Venezuela
Finland	Netherlands	St. Vincent
France	Norway	Yemen
Gambia	New Zealand	Zambia
Germany	Oman	Zimbabwe
Ghana		

HMS Brazen

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimated total eventual costs of repairing HMS Brazen following her grounding; where the repairs will be carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The initial repair work to HMS Brazen was carried out in the Chilean port of Talcahuano and further repair work will be undertaken by Devonport Management Limited at Devonport royal dockyard under the existing commercial arrangements for operational repairs. The eventual total cost of the repair work is expected to be some £2.5 million.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conditions as to the use of British defence suppliers for equipment updates and replacement were agreed in the contract for the sale of four type 21 frigates to Pakistan; what information he has on the value of contracts placed for such work *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* elsewhere; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No conditions as to the use of British defence suppliers were stipulated in the contract for the sale of six—not four—ex-RN type 21 frigates to Pakistan. United Kingdom companies competed for all subsequent major Pakistan upgrade or replacement programmes and so far two equipment contracts have been won. It is not our practice to disclose details of values of such contracts which are commercially confidential between the supplier

and the customer Government. Authoritative details of contracts awarded for major upgrades elsewhere are not available.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which helicopters are available for use on the type 23 frigates currently on trials or training programmes.

Mr. Soames: Mark 3 Lynx helicopter are available, for use as necessary to type 23 frigate on trials or testing programmes.

Car Theft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the result of his Department's inquiry into the theft of a car from the home of the Army commander of southern district on 11 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A private car belonging to the General Officer Commanding, southern district, was stolen from the grounds of his official residence on 11 October. The theft was investigated by the Hampshire constabulary as a criminal matter. The vehicle was found on 4 November and returned to its owner.

Correspondence

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North can expect a reply to his letter of 19 September concerning the recall to his unit of one of his constituents who had previously been discharged on medical priority.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State replied to the hon. Member on 22 November.

Northolt Airport

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the report by the Policy Studies Institute on Northolt airport; if it remains his policy to retain Northolt as an exclusively military airport whilst allowing no more than the currently permitted number of civilian or business flights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Consideration of the report issued by the Adam Smith Institute on airport capacity in the London area is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, although RAF activity at Northolt, in particular flying operations, will continue to have primacy over civil use.

Byelaws

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the legal costs of his Department's police and the Crown Prosecution Service relating to byelaws at HMS Forest Moor and Menwith Hill station since 1990; how much in costs has been awarded to people appealing against their convictions; and how many appeals against convictions concerning byelaw offences have been upheld.

Mr. Soames: The costs incurred by the Ministry of Defence police as they relate specifically to HMS Forest Moor and Menwith Hill station are not recorded separately and could only be provided at disproportionate cost; costs to the Crown Prosecution Service are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

Records of costs awarded to individuals appealing against their convictions and of appeals upheld against convictions for byelaws offences are not held centrally.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons he is considering new military land byelaws; and to what extent he regards existing byelaws as being extant and operational.

Mr. Soames: New Military Lands Act byelaws are being drafted to replace those ruled to be defective by the courts; and for establishments where changes to the boundaries necessitate new byelaws. The opportunity is being taken to review many existing sets of byelaws.

Military Lands Act byelaws are extant and operable at all sites to which they apply, except where they have been found defective by the courts.

Molesworth

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who controls the National Security Agency base at Molesworth; and by whom the base commander is employed.

Mr. Soames: RAF Molesworth is situated on Crown freehold land and Her Majesty's Government retain control over the use made of the site and its facilities. These facilities are operated with the agreement of Her Majesty's Government by the United States European Command and the base commander is an officer of the United States Air Force.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the five items received at NSA Molesworth containing polychlorinated biphenyls, referred to in his answer of 25 October 1994, *Official Report,* column *584*; and what is the name of the contractor through which they were disposed of.

Mr. Soames: The five items suspected of containing PCBs were two empty five gallon cans of electrical insulation oil, and three items of electronic scrap and capacitators. The licensed contractor used to dispose of the contaminated items was Biffa Waste Services Ltd.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons convoys transporting nuclear weapons from Faslane to Burghfield by road do not display radiation symbols on vehicles.

Mr. Soames: Regulation 20f of the Radioactive Substances (Carriage by Road) (Great Britain) Regulations 1974, as amended in 1985, exempts vehicles carrying nuclear weapons from the requirement to display radiation symbols.

Royal Dockyards

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total amount spent by his Department on the privatisation of the royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth.

Mr. Freeman: During the period between 18 October 1993, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced our policy

towards the future management of the dockyards—*Official Report*, 18 October 1993, columns *39-41*—and 31 October 1994, total identifiable expenditure for work associated with developing and implementing plans for the proposed privatisation of the royal dockyards amounts to some £7.2 million. Given that the current dockyard management contracts are due to expire no later than April 1996, my Department would expect to have incurred in any case costs for work related to any future management arrangements for the royal dockyards.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total amount paid to consultants by his Department for work concerned with the privatisation of HM royal Devonport dockyard.

Mr. Freeman: Payments made or outstanding to consultants for work related to the proposed privatisation of the royal dockyards between 18 October 1993, when my right hon. and learned Friend announced our policy towards the future management of the dockyards,—*Official Report*, 18 October 1993, columns *39-41*—and 31 October 1994 total some £6.5 million. Costs attributable to Devonport cannot be separately identified.

Tornado

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what proposals he has to replace F3 Tornados assessed as no longer suitable for operational use, subsequent to the 25 fatigue index modification contract carried out at RAF St. Athan by Airwork Ltd;

(2) if he will give the number of F3 Tornado aircraft damaged in the course of the 25 fatigue index modification contract by Airwork Ltd. at RAF St. Athan, which have been assessed as *(a)* capable of flying again and *(b)* suitable only for cannibalisation

Mr. Freeman: It is the intention that all aircraft, damaged by Airwork, will be recovered to a full operational standard and returned to the RAF for normal operational use.

Equipment Programmes

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is now ready to issue further invitations to tender for equipment programmes following his statement on 14 July.

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased to confirm the plans on three major equipment programmes. For the Royal Navy, we are now ready to issue an invitation to tender for the build of a further batch of up to three type 23 frigates. These vessels will form a most valuable contribution to the maintenance of a modern, capable force of 35 destroyers and frigates.

I am also glad to confirm the plans on two weapons programmes of major importance to the RAF. An ITT will be issued for a conventionally-armed stand-off missile to enhance the RAF's capability for precision attack against high-value fixed targets, the importance of which was demonstrated in the Gulf conflict. In addition, we shall at the same time be issuing an ITT for an advanced air-launched anti-armour weapon. This will be a vital element of the offensive support capability to be provided by the Harrier GR7, Tornado and Eurofighter 2000 in the next decade.

Defence Contracts

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was paid by his Department to GEC to bid against VSEL for the contract for the Trafalgar class of submarines.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* We offered contracts to both GEC and VSEL for studies to produce, in advance of bids, innovative and improved construction and integration techniques in order to reduce the ultimate costs to my Department. Both companies have agreed to provide early sight of such proposals but only GEC accepted the offer of a contract to do so. The value of the contract is commercially confidential.

Royal Marines School of Music

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the costs incurred if the proposed relocation of the Royal Marines school of music to Portsmouth takes place in respect of *(a)* hiring new music professors and other civilian staff at Portsmouth, *(b)* expenditure on contract staff and casuals while permanent posts are being filled and *(c)* training new staff.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* Salary costs for 15 professors of music are estimated at £481,000. This figure is the same regardless of the location chosen for the Royal Marines school of music. The salary costs for other directly-employed civilian staff should the Royal Marines school of music move to Portsmouth are estimated at £165,000. This figure compares with that estimated for continued occupation at Deal of £932,000. The cost of recruitment action to take on new staff is expected to be negligible.

Pre-planning and timely recruiting would aim to avoid the use of contract staff and casuals while permanent posts are being filled.

Any training necessary for new staff would be conducted under current internal arrangements at negligible cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many deductions from earnings orders have been served in the last 12 months by each of the Child Support Agency offices.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. John Spellar, dated 29 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of deductions from earnings orders that have been served in the last 12 months by each of the Child Support Agency offices.

During 1993–94, 2,600 deductions from earnings orders (DEOs) were issued. In the first year of the Agency's operations, this information was collected on a national basis only, and cannot be broken down by month or by regional centre.

Between April and September 1994, a further 11,470 DEOs were issued, split between the Agency's regional centres as follows:

	Number
Belfast	2,006
Birkenhead	1,981
Dudley	1,296
Falkirk	2,162
Hastings	2,323
Plymouth	1,702

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Benefits and Contributions Agencies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many beds have been stolen from the nursing and first aid stations on the Newcastle sites of his Department's Benefits Agency and Contributions Agency;

(2) if he will place in the Library a list of all items over £100 in value stolen from the Newcastle sites of *(a)* the Benefits Agency and *(b)* the Contributions Agency;

(3) what was the cost of stolen items from the Newcastle sites of the *(a)* DSS Benefits and *(b)* DSS Contributions Agency in each of the last three financial years;

(4) what computing equipment has been stolen from the Newcastle sites of his Department's Benefits and Contributions Agencies; and whether data on staff or claimants were removed with the computing equipment.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of the Contributions Agency is a matter for Mr. George Bertram, the acting chief executive. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from George Bertram to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 28 November 1994:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS ON SECURITY AT DSS, LONGBENTON

As Acting Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about relevant operational matters. As I have overall control of accommodation and equipment for all Agencies which share the Department's Newcastle site, I have been asked to respond to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Questions about the theft of equipment. Because of the nature of the questions I have combined the responses.

It is over nine years since one bed was reported missing from a sick bay of the nursing facilities on the Newcastle site of the, then, Department of Health and Social Security.

I have attached as an annex to this letter a list of individual items stolen and which were valued at over £100.

For the financial years in question the recorded value of the items reported stolen on the Newcastle site are:-

1991–1992: £15,900

1992–1993: £8,778

1993–1994: £6,850

Separate figures are not kept for the individual agencies on the site. All Information Technology equipment is included in these figures.

The computer equipment stolen has been stand-alone personal computers, printers, and a software package. Data on staff and customers is not stored on this equipment. The annex gives more detail on these losses.

We regularly meet with the Departmental Security Office and our Departmental Information Technology Security Group to address the current levels of security, exchange information and consider whether further improvements can be made. It is clear from this work that the current threat to IT equipment and other items from an increase in theft is the same for all governmental departments and commercial premises.

Our physical security at the Newcastle site, which is 64 acres and employs some 9000 people has been reviewed in the last year. We have made a number of improvements such as the completion of the perimeter fencing of the site and the introduction of modern security equipment but we continue to look for further ways of improvement and are very much aware of this in our plans for the future.

Items over £100 stolen from DSS Longbeaton

Reported	*Item missing*
1991–92	
4 April 1991	VCR
14 June 1991	ICL PC
24 July 1991	TV set
13 September 1991	Mackintosh PC
20 September 1991	Vacuum cleaner
4 October 1991	Fax machine
7 November 1991	£120.00 cash from unlocked drawer
20 January 1992	Two Protocol Analysers
13 March 1992	£180.00 cash from unlocked drawer
17 March 1992	231 desk tidies from store
18 March 1992	Monitor, CPU, Keyboard and Printer
1992–93	
3 May 1992	Microwave from Bellway
11 May 1992	Apricot xen-s keyboard
18 May 1992	Microwave from Bellway
21 May 1992	£140.00 cash
22 July 1992	Multi-meter and rechargeable torch
28 July 1992	60 desk tidies from store
31 July 1992	£100.00 cash from drawer
2 October 1992	Two rolls of carpet
9 October 1992	Two hydroponic plant displays
12 October 1992	Microwave from store
25 November 1992	£152.90 cash from unlocked drawer
8 December 1992	HP Laserjet printer
5 January 1993	VDU Monitor
10 January 1993	One Siemens Nixdorf PC
10 October 1993	Once ICL DRS M55 PC
2 April 1993	Lap top computer
1993–94	
28 April 1993	7 Feature telephones and adapted phone for hard of hearing
18 May 1993	HP Laserjet printer
29 May 1993	Portable TV/Radio from unlocked drawer
8 June 1993	Fujitsu dot matrix printer
28 July 1993	Two 14 inch TVs and two VCRs
9 August 1993	HP Laserjet printer
10 August 1993	HP Laserjet printer
13 September 1993	£100.00 cash from unlocked drawer
23 December 1993	"Apple" style desk top printer
30 December 1993	HP Laserjet printer
22 January 1994	HP Laserjet printer
15 May 1994	Computer monitor. "Thief apprehended"

Quarry House

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his plans to transfer more Benefits Agency staff to Quarry house, Leeds.

Mr. Roger Evans: The deployment of Benefits Agency staff is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 28 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about plans to transfer more Benefits Agency staff to Quarry House, Leeds.

There are presently no plans to transfer more Benefits Agency staff into Quarry House. A number of Benefits Agency staff are located in other buildings in Leeds and should space become available in Quarry House in the future the Agency would consider the possibility of transferring some of these staff into the vacated offices.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Payment of Benefits

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people in England and Wales collected *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit, *(c)* child benefit, *(d)* pension, *(e)* widow's pension, *(f)* invalidity benefit and *(g)* unemployment benefit, from the Post Office each week in each year since 1989–90;

(2) how many people in England and Wales had *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit, *(c)* child benefit, *(d)* pension, *(e)* widow's pension, *(f)* invalidity benefit and *(g)* unemployment benefit paid directly into a bank account in each year since 1989–90.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, dated 28 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the payment of benefit into bank accounts or at the Post Office.

Information is not available in the exact format requested. This is because data is not collated relating to the number of customers being paid on a weekly basis at Post Offices. To obtain this information would be at a disproportionate cost.

That information that is available regarding payments by automated credit transfer is not captured geographically nor weekly and to obtain it for England and Wales would be at a disproportionate cost.

However, I have provided at Appendix A a table showing the number of customers, on an annual basis, from the year 1989–90 who have been paid by automated credit transfer.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Customers paid by automated credit transfer

Benefits	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*Thousands 1993–94*
Income Support[1]	—	—	—	—	44
Family Credit	37	53	76	91	105
Child Benefit	1,297	1,407	1,505	1,595	1,708
Retirement pension and widows pension[2]	1,982	2,160	2,392	2,671	3,232
Invalidity Benefit[3]	—	—	—	12	90
Unemployment Benefit[4]	—	—	—	—	109

Notes:
[1] The option to have Income Support paid by ACT came into effect in w/c 31 October 1993.
[2] No separate figures are available for payments of Retirement Pension and Widows Pension.
[3] The option to have Invalidity Benefit (IVB) paid by ACT came into effect in w/c 31 May 1993. Figures available showing the number of payments by IVB are combined with Sickness Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance Figures.
[4] The option to have Unemployment Benefit paid by ACT came into effect in w/c 20 September 1993. These figures have been obtained from the Employment Service Agency.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish details of the work carried out by his Department's compensation recovery unit since it was established showing the number of cases in which it had reclaimed benefit payments, the total sum recovered for each year of its operation and the total annual operating cost of the unit including all administrative costs, salaries and all other outlays incurred by the unit since its creation.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 28 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for the number of cases in which the Compensation Recovery Unit had reclaimed benefit payments, the total sum recovered and the annual operating costs of the Unit including all administrative costs, salaries and all other outlays since its creation.

The information requested has been provided for each financial year.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Period	Number of cases	Total amount recovered £ million	Operating costs £ million
1 August 1989–31 March 1990	—	—	0.13
1 April 1990–31 March 1991	3,950	3.7	1.7
1 April 1991—31 March 1992	20,781	25.3	1.9
1 April 1992—31 March 1993	30,782	51.3	2.1
1 April 1993–31 March 1994	36,094	81.9	2.7
1 April 1994–31 October 1994	22,224	56.2	1.7

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce legislation to restrict the use of the national insurance number by his Department to benefit-related purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have no such plans at present but the position is being kept under review.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what undertaking he gave to the Data Protection Registrar in respect of restricting the national insurance number to tax and benefit-related purposes; and what revision he has made to the undertaking following the use of that number by a private sector firm in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Data Protection Registrar has been advised it is departmental policy to restrict use of the national insurance number to national insurance, tax and social security benefit-related purposes. I can confirm that a request has been received from a private sector organisation for permission to use the national insurance number and that this is currently under consideration within the terms of the policy.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what criteria he decides to meet or consult organisations of people with learning difficulties.

Mr. Hague: The same criteria are used for organisations of people with learning difficulties as others representing disabled people.

Since I became Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, I have met as many organisations as possible covering a wide range of disabilities, including people with learning difficulties.

National Insurance

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has yet completed his review of national insurance contributions for 1995–96.

Mr. Lilley: I have completed the annual review under section 141 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. For the second year running, the Government will help employers by reducing the three rates of contributions payable for lower-paid employees. These will be cut by 0.6 per cent. for all employees earning less than £205 a week at a cost of £250 million a year. This will encourage the creation of new jobs. It will complement a further measure which the Government propose which will give employers taking on someone who has been out of work for at least two years a full national insurance rebate for up to a year. I am also increasing the help with fuel costs for pensioners, widows and certain disabled people which I introduced last year. Together with the general increases in contributory benefit expenditure which I am maintaining, this will mean a continuing shortfall in the national insurance fund between income and outgoings, but I will maintain the stability of the fund by means of the Treasury grant. The national insurance contribution rebate will be introduced from April 1996. The other changes to NICs will take effect from 6 April 1995.

Employers and Employees

There will be no change to the standard rates of contributions for either employees or employers, which remain at 10 per cent. and 10.2 per cent. respectively.

In line with the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, the lower earnings limit for class 1 contributions is to be raised to £59 a week, which is the nearest whole pound to the basic retirement pension rate for a single person from April 1995. The upper earnings limit is to be raised to £440 a week which is slightly less than 7.5 times the new basic pension rate as provided by the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act. These new earnings limits will replace the current ones of £57 and £430 respectively.

Under the current structure, employees whose earnings reach the lower earnings limit will continue to pay an initial contributions of 2 per cent. of that limit and standard rate contributions of 10 per cent. on that portion of their earnings which exceeds the lower but not the upper earnings limit. For employers the three contribution rates for the lower paid will be reduced by 0.6 per cent. each to 3 per cent., 5 per cent. and 7 per cent. respectively. The thresholds for these rates will also be raised so that from April 1995 they apply to weekly earnings which fall below the ceilings of £105, £150 and £205 respectively, compared with £100, £145 and £200 at present.

Not Contracted Out Employees and their Employers

Neither the employee nor his employer will have to pay any contributions if earnings are less than £59 a week. Those whose earnings do not exceed £430—the former upper earnings limit—will pay 16p a week less in contributions than at present. This is because a further £2 of their weekly earnings will be subject to a deduction of 2 per cent. rather than 10 per cent. For employees with earnings above £430 the maximum possible increase will be 84p a week. Employers will pay between 35p and £6.53 a week less where the employee's earnings are less than £205 a week. There will be no change for employers where earnings are £205 a week or more.

Contracted Out Employees and their Employers

Those with earnings between £59 and £430—the former upper earnings limit—will pay 13p a week less. For those who earn more than £430 the maximum possible increase will be 69p a week. Employers will pay between 29p and £6.57 a week less where the employee's earning are less than £205 a week. There will be little change for employers where earnings are £205 a week or more.

Rebate for Employers taking on the long-term unemployed

Employers who hire someone who has been out of work for two years or more will get a full NIC rebate for that person for a year, starting in April 1996.

Self-Employed People

The flat rate class 2 contribution will be raised by 20p to £5.85 a week.

There will be no increase in the rate of class 4 contributions, currently 7.3 per cent. The annual limits of profits between which class 4 contributions are paid will be raised to £6,640 and £22,880 from £6,490 and £22,360 respectively. Self-employed people who pay only class 2 contributions will pay an extra £10.40 a year in 1995–96.

For people with profits between £6,490 and £22,360—the former upper profits limit—class 4 contributions will be reduced by £10.95 per year assuming an unaltered level of profits. For those self-employed people with profits at or above the new upper profits limit the annual charge for class 4 contributions will be £27.01 higher.

Class 3 (Voluntary) Contributions

The rate of class 3 contributions will be raised by 20p to £5.75 a week.

National Health Service Allocation

The allocation to the national health service, currently 1.05 per cent. from employees and 0.9 per cent. from employers, remains unchanged.

Treasury Grant

In accordance with section 2(2) of the Social Security Act 1993, I propose to maintain the level of the national insurance fund during 1995–96 by means of a grant from the Treasury. I estimate that the grant required will be approximately £5.1 billion.

As usual, I shall be laying a draft order before Parliament together with a report by the Government Actuary describing the effects of my proposals.

Benefit Rates

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out details of the new rates of benefit proposed from April 1995.

Mr. Lilley: As usual, the annual uprating of social security benefits will take place in the first full week of the tax year—in 1995 this will be the week beginning on 10 April.

The increases announced today are fully in line with the Government's commitment to help those in greatest need and includes the second stage of extra help for the effect of VAT on domestic fuel. Expenditure on social security will be £86.5 billion in 1995–96, £90 billion in 1996–97 and £93.5 billion in 1997–98.

I have reviewed social security benefits in accordance with section 150 of the Administration Act 1992. My proposals, which are set out in the schedule, fully reflect the commitment to increase all major benefits in line with inflation. The statutory instruments to implement them will be laid before both Houses for debate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland proposes to introduce similar changes for Northern Ireland.

All national insurance benefits, excluding some transitional amounts, will be uprated at least in line with the annual increase in the retail price index up to September which this year is 2.2 per cent.

Income-related benefits will rise by around 1.9 per cent., slightly more than the Rossi index—RPI less certain housing costs—owing to the extra help for VAT on domestic fuel.

Fifteen million people gained from the extra help for VAT on domestic fuel which was announced last year. They include pensioners receiving retirement pension and those receiving income support, widow's benefit, invalidity benefit—to be replaced by long-term incapacity benefit—or severe disablement allowance. From April 1995, the total extra help will be up to £1 a week for a single person or £1.40 a week for a couple. This extra money is a permanent addition to benefit rates and will be subject to future upratings in the normal way.

Social fund cold weather payments have already increased by £1 this month. From 1 November 1995 they will rise by a further £1.50 to £8.50. This increase is higher than the amount announced last year and will give substantial extra help to income support recipients who are pensioners, disabled people or have young children.

Some key points of the 1995 increases are:

Retirement Pension

Retirement pension will rise by £1.55 to £59.15 per week for a single person and by £2.35 to £94.45 for a couple. In common with certain other benefits, these amounts include the extra help for the effect of VAT on fuel.

Incapacity Benefit

Incapacity benefit replaces sickness benefit and invalidity benefit from 13 April 1995, the initial basic rate of long-term incapacity benefit will be £59.15 per week. This represents a full increase in line with inflation compared with the previous rate of invalidity benefit, as well as including extra help for the effect of VAT on domestic fuel.

Unemployment Benefit

Unemployment benefit for a single person will rise from £45.45 to £46.45 per week.

Child Benefit

Child benefit will be fully uprated in line with prices; this means that the new rates will be £10.40 per week for the first or eldest eligible child and £8.45 for each subsequent child.

War Pensions

War pensions will, again, be uprated fully in line with prices. the 100 per cent. rate of basic war disablement pension will increase from £98.90 to £101.10 per week.

Disability Working Allowance

Disability working allowance will be uprated fully in line with the Rossi index. In addition, the allowance for couples/lone parents will rise from £63.75 to £73.70 per week and the threshold for single people will rise from £43 to £54.80 per week.

A schedule of the main proposed social security benefit rates to April 1995 will be placed in the Library.

Industrial Injury Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of restoring the reduction in industrial injury benefits made since 1979.

Mr. Hague: It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the cost involved.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what level the £35 limit above which occupational pensions are deducted from unemployment benefit could be raised without the cost exceeding the estimated saving from extending such deductions to people aged under 55 years.

Mr. Roger Evans: Estimates of the precise level at which this occurs are not reliable as it is necessary to estimate the number of people who become entitled to contributory benefit because the limit has been raised, and estimating this number with accuracy becomes more difficult the higher the level of limit. However, it is estimated that the £35 per week limit above which occupational pensions are deducted from unemployment benefit could be raised to between £65 and £75.

Notes:

1. Estimates assumed 2.4 million unemployed claimants (GB) and 500,000 unemployment benefit claimants.
2. Estimate assumes that the job seeker's allowance has been introduced and in particular that contributory benefit for the unemployed lasts for six months.
3. Figure estimated using the PSM with 1990–91–92 FES data and 1994 unemployment benefit statistics.

Benefits (Remortgages)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what are the projected savings resulting from the cessation of payments in respect of concomitant interest in respect of remortgages;

(2) how many people claiming income support have sold their property since May 1994 following non-payment by the Department of the concomitant interest payments to cover remortgage payments;

(3) if he will make a statement regarding concomitant interest payments;

(4) how many people claiming income support who have remortgaged their home have not been paid concomitant interest payments by his Department since the rule change of May 1994;

(5) what the projected year–on–year figures are for concomitant interest payments in the years 1995–96 and 1996–97.

Mr. Roger Evans: The effect of the change to the rules on income support help with mortgage interest payments that came into effect on 2 May 1994 was to stop benefit from being increased to meet the interest on loans that people take out while they are receiving income support. Loans that result from the special needs of disabled person, the need to provide separate sleeping accommodation for children of different sexes over the age of 10 years or for essential repairs and improvements are excluded from this restriction. Where remortgages are concerned, income support continues to be able to held with the interest on the parts of a remortgage that were taken out to pay off loans, or parts of loans, that would have been eligible for benefit had they not been paid off. The new rules only apply if the amount of interest that has to be met has increased as a result of the remortgage, and this increase is not covered by one of the exempt categories.

We have no evidence of anyone having sold their property as a result of the rule change. The other information that has been requested is not available.

War Pensioners

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans exist to reform provision with regard to war pensioners.

Mr. Roger Evans: None.

Organophosphorous Sheep Dips

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new advice he has received from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on medical conditions caused by exposure to organophosphorous sheep dips; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: I have received no new advice. The council keeps developments in the field of occupational diseases under review. I understand that the council's research working group is aware of reports on the links between organophosphates and health.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Opportunities

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to create employment opportunities for 16 to 25-year-olds.

Mr. Paice: The Government will continue with the policies that have already reduced unemployment among young people under 25 by over 100,000 in the last year and given the United Kingdom an unemployment rate for this age group among the lowest in Europe.

Employment Initiatives

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives his Department has undertaken to reduce unemployment rates among the over-50 age group.

Miss. Widdecombe: The Government have introduced a number of measures to reduce unemployment among the over-50 age group.

Training (Women)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action his Department is taking to promote training for women returning to the labour market after having children.

Miss. Widdecombe: The Department is promoting training and employment opportunities for women through its new horizons and fair play initiatives. Women who wish to return to work can enter training for work without having to be registered as unemployed for six months.

European Union (Discussions)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last discussed the issue of unemployment with Employment Ministers of other member states of the European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Unemployment has naturally figured prominently in the discussions I have had with my counterparts. I want to make sure that it moves to the top of the Community's agenda.

Regional Expenditure

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's expenditure per head of population in the south-west; and what is his Department's average expenditure per head for all English regions.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to give a comprehensive and accurate comparison of the Department's expenditure between the south-west and other English regions because much of the Department's budget is managed on a national, rather than regional basis and because not all the Department's activities are organised within common regional boundaries.

Stress

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment his Department has made of the effect of stress on employees.

Mr. Oppenheim: In December 1993, the Health and Safety Executive published a major review of the scientific literature on the nature, causes and effects of occupational stress. A copy of the review, which was undertaken on HSE's behalf by Professor Tom Cox of Nottingham university, was placed in the Library.

Coalfield Communities Campaign

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met representatives of the coalfield communities campaign to discuss employment issues.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend has not been asked to meet representatives of the coalfield communities campaign.

Labour Statistics

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many adult males were placed in full-time employment in the month covered by the most recently published statistics on unemployment.

Mr. Oppenheim: Past surveys indicate that the majority of people who leave unemployment go into jobs.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current figures for unemployment *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in other European Union countries and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The United Kingdom unemployment rate is lower than that for all EU countries except Portugal and Luxembourg. Details are provided in the following table:

Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates in EU countries

	Latest Month
Belgium	10.1 (September)
Denmark	9.8 (September)
Germany[1]	—
Greece[2]	—
Spain	21.9 (September)
France	11.3 (September)
Ireland	17.5 (September)
Italy	11.9 (September)
Luxembourg	3.4 (September)
Netherlands	9.9 (August)
Portugal	6.0 (September)
United Kingdom	9.0 (September)
EC Average	10.7 (September)

Notes:
[1] No ILO rate available for unified Germany.
[2] Only 1991 annual average figures available for Greece.
Source:
Statistical Office of the European Community Unemployment Bulletin.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed regionally and nationally for each year since 1979 for less than eight hours per week; and to what extent they are counted by his Department as being in work.

Mr. Oppenheim: This information could be provided from the labour force survey only at a disproportionate cost. Data from 1984 onwards may be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

The definition of employment used by the LFS follows the guidelines of the International Labour Organisation. This counts as "in employment" everyone who did at least one hour of paid work in the reference week.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what were the median and modal age by gender, both regionally and nationally, of those workers with two or more part-time jobs aged *(a)* 21 to 24 years, *(b)* 25 to 34 years, *(c)* 35 to 54 years and *(d)* 55 years and over in each year since 1979;

(2) what were the regional and national numbers of jobless two-adult households who have been without work for *(a)* six months, *(b)* one year and *(c)* two years and over in each year since 1979 to date;

(3) if he will list the numbers of unemployed, both regionally and nationally, for white collar occupations, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: This information could be provided from the labour force survey only at a disproportionate cost. Data from 1984 onwards may be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the United kingdom are in work, as a percentage of the total population of working age; and what are the comparable figures for the other G7 countries.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is given in the following table:

Total employment as a percentage of the population aged 15 to 64 in the G7 nations; 1992[1]

	Per cent.
United Kingdom	68
Germany	66
France	60
Italy[2]	56
USA	71
Canada	64
Japan	74

Source:
OECD, except United Kingdom—Employment Department.
[1] 1992 is the latest year for which comparable data are available.
[2] Aged 14 to 64 years.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of part-time jobs are taken by women with an earning partner.

Mr. Oppenheim: Latest estimates from the spring 1994 labour force survey for Great Britain show that 58 per cent. of the people whose main job was part-time were women with a partner in employment.

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the United Kingdom are in work, as a proportion of the total population of working age; and what are the figures in other major EU countries.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is given in the following table:

Total Employment as a Percentage of the Population aged 15 to 64 in the major EU Countries: 1992[1]

	Per cent.
United Kingdom	68
Germany	66
France	60
Italy[2]	56

Source:
OECD, except United Kingdom—Employment Department.
[1] 1992 is the latest year for which comparable data are available.
[2] Aged 14 to 16 years.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was *(a)* the number of adult male part-time workers in Great Britain in April 1993 and *(b)* the proportion of those workers whose earnings, excluding overtime, fell below (i) £5.88 per hour, (ii) £5.53 per hour, (iii) £4.15 per hour, (iv) £4 per hour, (v) £3.50 per hour, (vi) £3 per hour and (vii) £2.50 per hour;

(2) if he will list the proportions of manual, non-manual and all full-time *(a)* male and *(b)* female employees earning less per week than (i) £221.50, (ii) £208.53, (iii) £156.40, (iv) £150.80, (v) £131.95 and (vi) £94.25 excluding overtime payments (1) by standard economic region, (2) for Great Britain as a whole and (3) for Northern Ireland;

(3) what was *(a)* the number of adult female part-time workers in Great Britain in April 1993 and *(b)* the proportion of those workers whose earnings, excluding overtime, fell below (i) £5.88 per hour, (ii) £5.53 per hour, (iii) £4.15 per hour, (iv) £4 per hour, (v) £3.50 per hour, (vi) £3 per hour and (vii) £2.50 per hour;

(4) if he will list the proportion of (i) full-time employees earning less per week than *(a)* £221.50, *(b)* £208.53, *(c)* £156.40, *(d)* £150.80, *(e)* £131.95, *(f)* £113.10 and *(g)* £94.25 excluding overtime payments and (ii) part-time employees earning less per hour than (1) £5.88 per hour, (2) £5.53 per hour, (3) £4.15 per hour, (4) £4 per hour, (5) £3.50 per hour, (6) £3 per hour and (7) £2.50 excluding overtime payments, indicating (i) and (ii) in relation to (I) Great Britain as a whole, (II) each county in England, (III) each county in Wales, (IV) each London borough and Greater London as a whole and (V) each regional authority and borough in Scotland.

Mr. Oppenheim: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workers are on *(a)* part-time contracts and *(b)* short-term full-time contracts; and, for each category, how many are (i) female and (ii) male; and if he will further break down the figures by standard region.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information is available from the labour force survey on the numbers of part-time and full-time employees who report that they are working under a contract for a fixed period or for a fixed task.

The information for spring 1994 is shown in the following table.

Part-time and full-time employees on fixed-term contracts

	Thousands not seasonally adjusted			
	Part-time		*Full-time*	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
South East	18	78	93	65
-Greater London	[1]—	29	36	30
-rest of SE	11	49	57	36
East Anglia	[1]—	[1]—	11	[1]—
South West	[1]—	15	16	15
West Midlands	[1]—	18	19	13
East Midlands	[1]—	18	14	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	[1]—	14	31	19
North West	[1]—	23	27	22
North	[1]—	12	23	10
Wales	[1]—	[1]—	11	[1]—
Scotland	[1]—	17	34	20
Northern Ireland	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Great Britain	53	211	280	189
United Kingdom	54	214	284	192

[1] Under 10,000 and so not shown

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if children under 15 currently working in factories and businesses are included in his Department's statistics as employed persons.

Mr. Oppenheim: The labour force survey measure of employment only includes persons of age 16 years and over. Employment estimates derived from the employer-based survey make no reference to the age of the employee.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to what he attributes the current changes in unemployment figures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Unemployment has fallen faster in the United Kingdom over the past year than in any other EU country, and has fallen by over 450,000 since recovery in the labour market began. On internationally comparable figures, released last week by the Statistical Office of the European Communities, the unemployment rate in the United Kingdom is nearly two percentage points below the EU average. I attribute this to the pursuit of sound macro-economic policies promoting strong economic growth with low inflation, active measures to help people back to work and the avoidance or removal of unnecessary regulations that obstruct enterprise, competition, and job creation.

Youth Training

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes there have been in the number

of 16 and 17-year-olds on youth training schemes, nationally, regionally and in Nottingham in the last year.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the following table.

Youth training (including Youth Credits) change in in-training from August 1993 to August 1994

	15 August 1993	*14 August 1994*	*Change over period (percentage)*
Greater Nottingham TEC	4,160	3,870	-7
South East	25,000	26,200	+5
London	19,200	18,200	-5
Eastern	20,200	21,900	+8
South West	19,800	18,000	-9
West Midlands	27,100	27,400	+1
East Midlands	23,000	22,600	-2
Yorkshire and Humberside	28,700	27,200	-5
Merseyside	12,400	13,500	+9
North West	35,200	37,500	+7
North East	20,800	18,700	-10
Wales	15,100	14,200	-6
Scotland	33,500	31,900	-5
Great Britain	280,000	277,100	-1

Source:
TEC operating agreement—Annex J Scottish and Welsh Offices.

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people in the United Kingdom have either education or training places; and what the figures were in 1979.

Mr. Portillo: Some 1.1 million 16 and 17-year-olds in the United Kingdom were participating in education and training in spring 1994 compared with 1 million in spring 1984—the earliest year for which information is available. This represents an increase from 54 per cent. to 84 per cent. of the age group as a whole.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Construction Industry training board to discuss youth training on construction sites.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the Construction Industry Training Board chairman recently and discussed youth training and other matters. There are no plans to meet him again in the near future.

Older Workers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives his Department has undertaken to improve the training prospects of older workers.

Miss Widdecombe: Our "Getting On" campaign encourages employers to develop and train their staff regardless of age.

Unemployed older people are eligible for all the Government's employment and training programmes according to normal criteria.

Priority Suppliers Scheme

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest position on the priority suppliers scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government were forced to abolish the priority suppliers scheme because it was incompatible with EC law. The European Commission has confirmed that the PSS was illegal and could not be continued. The Government undertook to discuss the matter with the European Commission and to reintroduce a scheme if that was possible.

In the discussions with the European Commission the Government have sought to establish whether any preferential purchase arrangements for Remploy and other sheltered workshops can be operated within the law.

We have just concluded our talks with the Commission. A new scheme can be introduced but it has to be different from the PSS in two ways. First, to conform with treaty requirements, access to the scheme has to be extended beyond British suppliers to comparable ones in every country of the European Union and the European economic area. "Comparability" will be defined by reference to eligibility criteria which broadly reflect our own criteria for funding supported workshops. Those include requirements that the organisation be a non-profit-distributing body; at least 50 per cent. of its work force must be severely disabled employees engaged in work which makes a genuine contribution to the organisations's business; and employees must be paid the same or closely equivalent wages as non-disabled employees doing the same or similar work. To enable workshops in all member states—which satisfy these criteria—to register their interest, an announcement will be made annually in the EC *Official Journal.*

The second change is that the scheme will have to be confined to contracts below the relevant threshold above which the EC directives—93/36/EEC and 92/50/EEC—and the general agreement on tariffs and trade Government procurement agreement apply. Those thresholds are currently £96,403 for Government supplies contracts and £149,728 for some textiles products purchased by the Ministry of Defence.

The new arrangement, which will be known as the special contracts arrangement, will like its predecessor help eligible supported workshops for severely disabled people to compete for business with United Kingdom Government Departments and their agencies: it will be administered by the Employment Service, which will circulate to Departments and their agencies details of the organisations registered under the scheme, and their products. When awarding contracts covered by this scheme, Departments will be expected to award a contract to an eligible contractor if its tender provides the same value for money as the best rival tender, and provided all other tender requirements are acceptable. Where a tender was unacceptable on price alone there would, as under the previous scheme, be an opportunity to submit a revised tender for part or all of a contract.

Although we believe that the special contracts arrangement will be of some benefit, there remains the more fundamental problem of increasing competitive pressure, particularly in the textiles and clothing trade, from low cost producers beyond the EC. We shall continue to work with Remploy and other supported employers as they adapt to meet the challenges of the changing business environment.

The fact that we needed to end the PSS has never put in question the Government's commitment to make payment to Remploy or similar bodies to compensate them for the extra cost of employing disabled people. That is a principle to which we remain committed. The sum of more than £140 million that the Government make

available for the supported employment programme has never been in doubt.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met representatives of the training and enterprise councils to discuss TEC budgets.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet the TECs representatives to discuss a wide range of topics, including TEC budgets.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress is being made with the arrangements to introduce three-year licences for TECs; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to be able to announce that 12 training and enterprise councils have completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards we set for the award of the new 3-year licence. The licences will be effective from April 1995. The TECs are:

Barnsley/Doncaster
HAWTEC—Hereford and Worcester
Humberside
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
North Derbyshire
North Nottinghamshire
Northumberland
Rotherham
Sheffield
South and East Cheshire
Sunderland City

A number of other TECs are close to completing the process. I expect to make further announcements shortly of TECs to be awarded licences from April 1995.

Our expectation is that the introduction of licensing for all English TECs will take until 1997. Licensing is one part of the contract framework between Government and TECs which is designed to support continuous improvement in their performance, value for money and accountability across all that they do.

To be awarded a licence, a TEC must meet rigorous criteria. These cover the TECs corporate plan and its strategic impact in working with other local bodies, its performance on the main programmes funded by the Government and other areas of its capability as an organisation.

Unemployment

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the reduction in unemployment in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* other major EU countries.

Mr. Oppenheim: The latest internationally comparable statistics from Eurostat show that the fall in the United Kingdom's unemployment rate over the past year has been greater than in any other country in the European Union.

Statistics and Research

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money his Department will spend this year on statistics and research.

Mr. Oppenheim: The running costs and programme expenditure of statistical services division and economics, research and evaluation division in Employment Department headquarters amount to £23.8 million in 1994–95.

Not all this total relates to the collection of information or pure research. A significant proportion of the work of the divisions concerned involved the provision of statistical and economic advice and also evaluation.

Crown Enforcement Notices

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspections have been carried out into Crown premises in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for trends in the number of Crown enforcement notices requiring improvements within the meaning of his answer of 12 July, *Official Report*, column *535*.

Mr, Oppenheim: Information is not available on the number of inspections of Crown premises. There was a significant reduction in the number of Crown enforcement notices in 1986–87 when Crown immunity was removed from the national health service.

Psychological Testing

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what studies his Department has undertaken into the use of psychological testing for employment.

Mr. Oppenheim: In the late 1980s, the Department published the policy document "Assessment Through Psychological Testing". Subsequently, we published the report "Review of Psychometric Tests for Assessment in Vocational Training", which is now maintained by the British Psychological Society.

We have also funded two studies of employers' recruitment practices in relation to young people, which were completed in 1992 and 1993 respectively. These studies "The Selection of Young People by Medium Sized and Large Organisations" and "The Recruitment and Selection of Young People by Small Firms", both included psychological testing among the range of recruitment practices covered.

In addition, we are funding a project in the Tower Hamlets area on psychometric testing and the ethnic minorities. This is currently in progress.

Output-related Funding

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to the reply, 21 Novermber, *Official Report*, column *42*, how many representations he has received, and how many were in favour and how many against output-related funding.

Mr. Paice: It is not possible to quantify the number of representations, which have been made from many quarters over many years. Although some representations have drawn attention to potential difficulties, there has been much support, particularly from training and enterprise councils.

European Court

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the implications for Britain of the judgment of the European

Court in the case of Raymond van der Elst and the French Office des Migrations Internationale.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Employment Department, together with the Home Office, is considering the judgment of the European Court in this case and any implications there may be for the United Kingdom.

Graduates

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list numbers and percentages of unemployed graduates by subject group since 1979 to date, broken down by gender.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The table provides the data requested for alternate years up to 1992 and for 1993. The data have been compiled from annual reports published by the *Universities Statistical Record* on surveys of the first destinations of new graduates. They refer to the position of graduates at the end of the calender year in which they graduated and they exclude graduates from institutions which did not have university status prior to 1992.

Unemployment among new graduates, United Kingdom 1979–80 to 1985–86

		Number and percentages of all graduates, of known destination, in each subject group							
		1979–80		*1981–82*		*1983–84*		*1985–86*	
Male/Female		*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*
Education	Per cent.	3.2	12.6	4.8	12.1	4.6	5.2	4.5	4.6
	Number	15	62	21	105	21	46	10	33
Medicine, Dentistry and Health	Per cent.	0.7	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.6	1.2	0.9	1.1
	Number	23	21	27	23	20	30	26	32
Engineering and Technology	Per cent.	4.8	4.2	8.9	8.8	5.5	5.3	5.1	4.7
	Number	401	20	786	58	496	42	376	32
Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Science	Per cent.	8.3	8.5	12.4	16.1	11.3	12.8	5.1	5.9
	Number	65	36	96	67	88	55	34	29
Science	Per cent.	10.8	7.6	17.3	11.6	11.7	8.9	9.3	6.1
	Number	1,020	343	1,732	588	1,223	483	875	319
Administration, Business and Social Studies	Per cent.	10:2	8.3	14.0	11.6	10.8	8.2	7.0	5.9
	Number	1,005	515	1,384	826	995	601	487	339
Architecture and other Professional and Vocational Subjects	Per cent.	6.8	5.3	4.1	6.9	3.9	5.2	2.6	2.7
	Number	46	15	26	24	25	20	18	6
Language, Literature and Area Studies	Per cent.	15.4	9.2	19.1	13.1	15.1	9.9	11.7	7.2
	Number	414	461	490	727	376	554	227	357
Arts other than languages	Per cent.	13.2	10.1	22.2	14.7	16.3	11.7	11.3	9.0
	Number	361	297	609	481	434	370	288	237
Multi-disciplinary Studies[1]	Per cent.							11.3	8.2
	Number							374	249
Total	Per cent.	8.8	7.8	13.3	11.3	9.5	8.2	7.5	6.1
	Number	3,350	1,770	5,171	2,899	3,678	2,201	2,715	1,633

[1] Only available after 1985.

Unemployment among new graduates, United Kingdom 1987–88 to 1992–93

		Numbers and percentage of all graduates, of known destinations, in each subject group							
		1987–88		*1989–90*		*1991–92*		*1992–93*	
Male/Female		*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*
Education	Per cent.	2.3	2.1	2.7	1.9	5.7	3.8	5.4	4.3
	Number	7	19	7	19	41	36	19	48
Medicine, Dentistry and Health	Per cent.	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.8	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.9
	Number	14	24	20	28	17	58	42	71
Engineering and Technology	Per cent.	3.2	1.6	8.1	5.8	10.6	7.9	10.7	7.3
	Number	242	13	343	27	825	99	897	96
Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Science	Per cent.	4.6	4.5	9.34	5.51	10.1	7.88	9.2	7.3
	Number	31	24	47	30	55	39	51	39

Unemployment among new graduates, United Kingdom 1987–88 to 1992–93

Male/Female		Numbers and percentage of all graduates, of known destinations, in each subject group							
		1987–88		1989–90		1991–92		1992–93	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Science	Per cent.	6.9	4.6	5.2	4.9	14.9	9.6	13.6	8.6
	Number	659	248	643	311	1,593	644	1,502	627
Administration, Business and Social Studies	Per cent.	5.5	4.6	4.8	2.6	10.9	7.8	9.7	6.4
	Number	411	289	475	340	921	589	832	511
Architecture and other Professional and	Per cent.	1.9	2.8	11.2	8.5	14.3	10.2	10.7	4.8
	Number	12	7	36	7	116	31	95	16
Language, Literature and Area Studies Vocational Subjects	Per cent.	9.1	6.0	11.2	8.5	16.1	10.1	15.9	7.9
	Number	173	291	223	383	335	536	357	454
Arts other than languages	Per cent.	10.5	7.3	9.0	8.0	17.5	10.8	15.7	9.4
	Number	287	205	295	230	536	355	521	338
Multi-disciplinary Studies	Per cent.	8.1	6.9	10.4	7.9	14.5	10.9	14.4	8.4
	Number	289	226	621	303	611	464	623	386
Total	Per cent.	5.7	4.8	7.1	5.6	12.3	8.5	11.6	7.1
	Number	2,125	1,346	2,710	1,678	5,050	2,851	4,939	2,586

Maternity Leave

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the definition of other contractual benefits besides salary for a woman on 14 weeks maternity leave under regulations in force since 16 October; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* A woman absent from work on statutory maternity leave is entitled to the benefit of the terms and conditions of employment which would have been applicable to her if she had not been absent, with the exception of remuneration. This is under section 33 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 as inserted by section 23 of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current level of debt for each local authority in Greater Manchester, the current figure for each year since 1987–88 and the totals for the whole Greater Manchester metropolitan area.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is as follows:

Outstanding debt at end of year

	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	[1]1992–93	£ million 1993–94
Bolton	245	241	234	215	216	146	152
Bury	108	110	118	117	115	82	80
Manchester	1,138	1,096	1,129	1,275	1,382	1,326	1,277
Oldham	279	287	292	274	274	242	242
Rochdale	216	228	—	248	278	212	204
Salford	420	428	437	450	467	403	376
Stockport	151	160	163	165	156	116	104
Tameside	224	217	219	248	262	186	183
Trafford	99	118	118	113	109	81	82
Wigan	303	303	317	276	278	250	237
Total	3,183	3,188	—	3,381	3,538	3,045	2,937

Note:

In addition, debt inherited from the former Greater Manchester county council amounts to £260 million.

[1] The debt of most housing authorities was reduced in 1992–93 as the result of the commutation of certain loan charge grants in October 1992.

Sources:

1987–88 to 1989–90—Outstanding loan debt, capital outturn returns.

1990–91 to 1993–94—Total external debt, borrowing and lending surveys and PWLB.

Under-occupation

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the extent of under-occupation in *(a)* the rented and *(b)* owner-occupied sectors.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the extent of under-occupation in the *(a)* rented and *(b)* owner-occupied sectors.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest estimates for England are as follows:

Households with more bedrooms than the bedroom standard 1993-94

Thousands

Tenure	*Number of bedrooms more than bedroom standard*		
	One	*Two*	*Three or more*
Tenants	2,120	810	70
Owner-occupiers	5,450	4,300	980

These figures are from the 1993–94 survey of English housing and are subject to sampling error.

Homelessness Data

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has done into the accuracy of homelessness data used by his Department in the standard spending assessment formula.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department is currently undertaking research on the impact of the 1991 homelessness code of guidance. One of the areas covered by this research is the consistency of authorities' statistical returns.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities about the accuracy and appropriateness of using homelessness figures as an indicator within the standard spending assessment formula.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Since the 1994–95 settlement, the following local authorities have made representations on the use of homelessness data:

Coventry city council
Dudley metropolitan borough council
London borough of Newham
London borough of Hounslow
London borough of Islington
Avon county council
Barrow borough council

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of appeals outstanding against the 1988 uniform business rate valuation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: At the end of September, there were around 235,000 1990 non-domestic rating appeals outstanding with valuation tribunals in England, the vast majority of which were made after the initial appeal period to reflect changes in material circumstances.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to deregulate the radioactive nuclear waste industry and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Proposed changes to the regulatory responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were contained in paragraph 194 of the Department's consultation paper "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy: Preliminary Conclusions", published in August. Copies were placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 39 dump sites identified as suitable for placing low-level radioactive nuclear waste.

Mr. Atkins: A recent press release by Greenpeace listed 37 landfill sites which are, or have in the past, received low-level radioactive waste for disposal by controlled burial. Ten of these sites are in Scotland and the information relating to Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution currently monitors and publicly reports upon the remaining 27 sites in England and Wales. A number of these sites are now closed or do not now receive radioactive waste for disposal. The sites which are specified in the authorisations issued under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, and which currently receive such waste are listed

Milton Landfill, Cambridge
Cowpen Bewley Tip, Cleveland
Waste Ponds, Walney Island, Cumbria
Hilts Quarry, Derbyshire
Magnesium Elktron site, Greater Manchester
Cilgwyn Quarry, Gwynedd
Braziers Landfill, Hertfordshire
SCM Chemicals site, Humberside
Clifton Marsh, Lancashire
Sefton Meadows Tip, Merseyside
Beighton Tip, South Yorkshire
Beddingham Quarry, Sussex

Four of these 12 sites receive low-level radioactive waste from premises licensed under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965, and which are local to the site of burial. The remaining sites receive waste generated by activities which are not a part of the nuclear industry, most commonly hospitals and universities.

Authority to make controlled burials is granted only after a comprehensive assessment of waste producer's application and of the site it proposes. There are no outstanding applications for authorisation to make controlled burials of waste generated at nuclear sites, or for additional producers of waste to make consignments to sites currently used by others.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration has been given to *(a)* dry storage at the site of production and *(b)* other alternative methods of dumping of radioactive nuclear waste.

Mr. Atkins: A consultation document containing the preliminary conclusions of the Government's review of radioactive waste management policy was published in August and copies placed in the Library of the House. The responses are now being considered and a statement of future policy will be made in due course.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what responses his Department has received to the consultation document "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy: Preliminary Conclusions", published on 5 August 1994.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has received more than 250 responses to the consultation document. A list of these has been placed in the Library of the House and copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Library. In addition, we have received over 5,000 letters from members of the public following campaigns by Greenpeace. All the points raised are receiving careful consideration.

Anti-social Tenants

Mr. Thurnham : To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to encourage local authorities to make use of injunctions and civil actions to deal with anti-social tenants in council housing.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government encourage local authorities to develop a variety of strategies and practices to deal with anti-social behaviour, which include the use of injunctions and other appropriate remedies.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers local authorities have to evict anti-social tenants.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities have powers under the Housing Act 1985 to evict anti-social tenants. Breaking tenancy agreements and causing a nuisance to neighbours are among the grounds for taking repossession action.

Fly Posting

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce legislation to allow the organisers of events advertised through fly posting to be prosecuted.

Sir Paul Beresford: It is an immediate offence, under section 224 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and regulation 27 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992, to display an advertisement without the prior consent of the owner of the land, or premises, on which it is displayed. The maximum penalty on summary conviction of this offence is £1,000 with a daily penalty of £100 for a continuing offence. Paragraphs 51 and 52 of the annex to Department of the Environment circular 5/92 advise local planning authorities on effective prosecution procedures for fly posting.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the current levels of elephant products stockpiled by range states and affected by CITES regulations.

Sir Paul Beresford: The most recent information is contained in a paper by Tom Milliken of TRAFFIC East/South Africa, prepared for the meeting organised by the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Community and held in Kasane, Botswana from 19 to 23 September 1994. He estimates that the total volume of raw ivory held in the African range states is of the order of 500 tonnes. There is no quantified information on stockpiles of other elephant products, although South Africa does hold a stockpile of elephant hides. Copies of the report of the Kasane meeting and the background paper mentioned are in the Library.

London Government

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who governs London; and what is their authority to do so.

Sir Paul Beresford: The provision of public services in Greater London and its government is carried out by central Government Departments, centrally appointed bodies, the 32 London boroughs and the corporation of the City of London, and London-wide local government bodies. The authority for these bodies' responsibilities is conferred by legislation.

Directorships

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *70*, what rules apply to prevent possible conflicts of interest in cases where serving officials in his Department have held directorships in companies as part of the staff development programme involving contact between Whitehall and business.

Mr. Robert B Jones: Officials are not nominated for non-executive directorships of companies whose sector of business is the concern of their management or policy responsibilities in the Department. If they are posted to new official duties which create such a conflict of interest, they resign the directorship. In common with all members of staff, officials holding non-executive directorships are required to observe the Department's rules of conduct governing the use of official information and experience, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts; in particular, they should as directors declare an interest and withdraw from discussion of any dealings between the company concerned and the Department, and within the Department they should declare an interest and withdraw from any involvement in official business involving that company. In order to avoid personal financial interest officials do not receive fees for their directorships; in cases where fees are payable, they are surrendered to the Exchequer.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *70*, what considerations underlay the decision not to keep records of the public limited companies to which he refers.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The corporate status of the host organisation has not been relevant to the staff development objectives of non-executive directorships, which have been held in a variety of organisations, some not being companies. However, in all cases the same rules governing the avoidance of conflicts of interest have applied.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he gives to local authority unitary development plans when he arbitrates on planning permission appeals in respect of the turning down by local authorities of applications to develop open-cast mining sites; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: If the development plan is relevant, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must determine the appeal in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is a statutory duty under section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the operation of which is explained in planning policy guidance note 1, "General Policy and Principles", a copy of which is held in the Library.

Rented Homes

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total output of rented homes by housing associations and local authorities in the current year; what was the figure for 1978–79; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing. Local authorities primary housing tasks are now the efficient management of their own stock of housing and enabling other organisations to provide new housing. In England during 1978–79 local authorities completed 76,500 dwellings and new towns completed a further 8,000 new dwellings; during 1993–94 local authorities completed 1,400 new dwellings and by 1994–95 we expect this may have fallen to less than 1,000.

Housing associations provide additional rented homes through new build and through rehabilitation. In England during 1978–79 they provided some 33,600 new rented homes in this way. We currently forecast that in 1994–95 housing associations will provide 41,800 new rented homes through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme. We also estimate that local authority supported housing association activity will provide in the region of 10,000 new homes in 1994–95.

In addition, the cash incentive scheme for local authority tenants; the tenants incentive scheme, for housing association tenants; and the 60 per cent of do-it-yourself shared ownership help social sector tenants to become owner-occupiers and so free up existing properties for re-letting to new tenants. These schemes were not in existence in 1978–79. We currently estimate that in 1994–95 some 13,000 new housing association and local authority lettings will be provided in this way.

Orimulsion

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the burning of orimulsion in power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: We have received no representations about the burning of orimulsion in power stations this calendar year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is his estimate of the non-domestic rate poundage for next year;

(2) if he has decided the details of the transitional arrangements to phase in the effects of the 1995 revaluation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The 1995 revaluation will not lead to any significant change in overall rateable value in England. We therefore propose to set the poundage for England next year at 43.2p, in line with the increase in the retail prices index in the year to September 1994.

However, the revaluation will result in significant local and sectoral shifts in rateable values. My Department's consultation paper, published last month, outlined proposals for transitional arrangements to phase in the effects of these shifts on rate bills. In the light of responses to that paper, and the generous package of support announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor today, I now propose that no business will face year on year increases of more than 10 per cent., after allowing for inflation. For property with a new rateable value of less than £10,000—£15,000 in London—the maximum real increase will be 7.5 per cent., while for many small shops combined with living accommodation, the corresponding limit will be 5 per cent.

We estimate that nearly 1 million smaller properties and 250,000 million larger properties in England will benefit from relief. One third of beneficiaries will be shops. A further 170,000 properties will see reductions in their bills as a result of the revaluation. I am sure this will be widely welcomed by the business community.

The Exchequer contribution will cover part of the cost of the scheme. The remaining element will be met by limiting real reductions in rates bills, as proposed in the consultation paper. For 1995–96, the limits will be 10 per cent. for small properties and 5 per cent. for large ones.

Other details of the scheme will be as proposed in the consultation paper. Regulations giving effect to these changes will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals for the appropriate level of aggregate local authority spending in 1995–96, and the level of central support for that spending.

Mr. Gummer: I propose that total standard spending for 1995–96 should be £43.51 billion for England. This represents an increase of £930 million—2.2 per cent.—compared with this year's figure, including the amount for transitional community care special grant and provision for local government reorganisation transitional costs. Excluding community care and reorganisation, this still represents a cash increase of 0.8 per cent.

I propose that the level of aggregate external finance distributed to local authorities in 1995–96 should be £34.67 billion. This represents an increase of £430 million—1.2 per cent.—compared with this year's figure, including community care. Net of community care, this represents a cash decrease of 0.4 per cent.

I also propose that the national non-domestic rate poundage for 1995–96 in England should rise to 43.2p, reflecting this year's revaluation and the annual increase in the retail prices index to September. This will ensure that the benefit of the government's success in tackling inflation will once again be passed on in full to businesses.

I propose to set the distributable amount of non-domestic rates at £11.35 billion. I propose that the total of revenue support grant should be £18.32 billion. Special and specific grants within AEF will amount to £5 billion.

I shall announce shortly my proposals for the distribution of Government grants, including my proposals for changes in the standard spending assessment methodology. At the same time, I shall announce my capping intentions. I shall also set out my proposals for the third year of the scheme of transitional assistance to those households which faced particularly significant increases in their local tax bills following the introduction of the council tax.

It is essential that local and central Government continue to play their part in restraining expenditure. Our overriding priority is to reduce the public sector deficit. My proposals for total standard spending, aggregate external finance and the non-domestic rate poundage represent a balanced approach to the funding of local authority services in 1995–96. I look to local authorities to take the same responsible attitude in determining their spending priorities and setting their budgets in 1995–96. However, in the context of a tough settlement, I am confident that with efficient housekeeping and efficient collection of the council tax, these proposals will allow local authorities to maintain their current levels of spending and carry out their functions.

Consultants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what employment consultants were engaged between 1 January 1990 and 30 April 1992 by his Department or organisations responsible to it; for what posts; and when these posts were filled.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This information is not available centrally for non-departmental posts, and could not be assembled without disproportionate cost. Within the Department, the consultants used, posts to be filled and dates are as follows:

Douglas Llambias Associates
Chief Executive, The Buying Agency; filled 31 October 1991;

Goddard Kay Rogers Associates Ltd.
Chief Economist, Department of the Environment; filled 3 February 1992;

MSL International
Chief Executive, the Planning Inspectorate; filled 1 January 1992;

NB Selection Ltd.
Chief Executive, Royal Parks agency; filled 16 March 1992. Responsibility for this agency subsequently transferred to the Department of National Heritage.

Saxton Bampflyde International plc
Director, Property Holdings; filled 10 December 1990. Director and Chief Inspector, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of pollution; filled 1 May 1991. Chief Executive, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre; filled 16 March 1992.

County Hall

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the contractual price agreed between the London residuary body and the Shirayama Corporation for the scale of the riverside building in the country hall complex; and how much of the sale price has now been received by the London residuary body.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The terms of the sale—including the sale price—of the riverside building of county hall were a matter of commercial confidentiality between the London residuary body and the purchaser. Some £50 million of the purchase price was distributed by the LRB to the London boroughs in proportion to the total populations of each borough in accordance with the London Government Reorganisation (Capital Money)(Greater London) (Amendment) Order 1993.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the remaining parts of the County hall complex to be sold; what is the estimated value of the unsold parts; and how much has been spent by the London residuary body in marketing the site.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The London residuary body has announced that the sale of the remainder of the county hall site is to be completed on 29 March 1995 and that the agreed purchase price is £17.5 million. The cost of marketing the site is a matter for the LRB.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what have been the maintenance costs of county hall over the past two years; and how much relates to the riverside building.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This is a matter for the London residuary body.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to which property or properties the £10 million deferred capital receipt appearing in the London residuary body accounts for 1993–94 relates; and when he expects the receipt to be available for distribution to the London boroughs.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This is a matter for the London residuary body.

TRANSPORT

Railways

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the current value of domestic and other properties acquired by the British Railways Board in pursuance of the building of a high-speed railway line between London and Dolland's Moor, broken down by *(a)* present market valuations, *(b)* cost of purchase and *(c)* present written down value in the books of (i) the British Railways Board, (ii) European Passenger Services Ltd. and (iii) any other public sector body;

(2) how many properties were acquired by the British Railways Board in each borough or district along the route of the proposed high-speed railway line between London and Dolland's Moor; what was the cost of these acquisitions; how many properties have been subsequently disposed of and at what value; and what was the cost of the properties so disposed of.

Mr. Watts: All properties acquired in advance of need for the present channel tunnel rail link have been purchased by Union Railways, an agency company wholly owned by the British Railways Board. The present

market value and present book value is £13.9 million. Total purchase cost, including home loss and disturbance payments, where appropriate, was £38.8 million. The cost and number of these purchases by local authority area is:

Local authority	*Cost (£ million)*	*Number*
Shepway	6.1	42
Ashford	16.7	111
Maidstone	9.6	54
Tonbridge and Malling	0.3	2
Camden	6.1	2

None of these properties has been sold.

Disabled Drivers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if orange badges for disabled drivers issued by one local authority are accepted by others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Orange badges are valid throughout England, Scotland and Wales, except in the City of London, the city of Westminster, the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea and a part of the London borough of Camden. Badges are also accepted under a similar parking scheme operating in Northern Ireland. In addition, access to certain town centres may be prohibited or limited to vehicles with special permits in addition to the orange badge.

Commercial Vehicles (Testing)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his Department has given to the introduction of a legal requirement that the large goods vehicle test be carried out on a fully laden vehicle.

Mr. Norris: We have considered the possibility of requiring large goods vehicles to be tested fully laden, most recently in the context of the initiative to facilitate a significant expansion of the arrangements for on-site testing by Vehicle Inspectorate staff at operators' own premises. We have concluded that this would impose an unnecessary cost burden on the road haulage industry.

Rail Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by British Rail network those passenger train services that have not met their punctuality targets during the last 12 months.

Mr. Watts: Of British Rail's 52 route groups, the following have not met their punctuality targets over the 12-month period ending 11 November:

South east routes
- LTS Rail
- Northampton Lines
- North London Lines
- Kent Link
- South London Lines
- Sussex Coast
- Great Northern

InterCity routes
- Gatwick Express
- Cross Country
- East Coast
- Midland Mainline
- West Coast

Regional routes
- Merseyrail City Line
- West Yorkshire Short
- Lancashire Local
- Manchester Local
- North Wales Branches
- ScotRail East
- ScotRail Central
- Avon
- Central Inter Urban
- Mid Wales & Marches
- Transpennine

Red Routes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the purposes of red routes.

Mr. Norris: The aims of the red routes are set out in chapter 5 of "Traffic Management and Parking Guidance", local authority circular 5/92. A copy of the circular is in the Library.

Buses (Disabled Access)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the outcome of his negotiations with the European Commission for a directive to ensure that future generations of new buses will be more accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: We have pressed for a number of changes to the proposed draft directive in the interests of safety, accessibility and the needs of bus and coach manufacturers and operators. We are currently awaiting revised proposals. Our aim, which we shall be taking forward in future discussions on the directive, is to ensure that low-floor buses are introduced where technically feasible.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Marland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the increase in the number of heavy goods vehicles using the *(a)* A48, *(b)* A40, *(c)* B4136 and *(d)* B4215/4221 heading towards the Severn bridge since one-way tolls on the Severn bridge have been imposed.

Mr. Watts: In April and May this year, Gloucestershire county council carried out a traffic survey for the Highways Agency which indicated that 575 more heavy goods vehicles than would be expected, allowing for traffic growth, were travelling westbound on roads through Gloucestershire per 24-hour day. The increases by individual roads were: *(a)* A48, 200 HGVs; *(b)* A40/A4136, 200 HGVs; and, *(c)* B4215/B4221, 175 HGVs. The eastbound HGV flows on these roads were slightly less than would have been expected.

Not all the extra vehicles could be positively identified as avoiding the Severn bridge because of the one-way tolls.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the bids made by each local authority in England for transport supplementary grant for 1995–96 broken down into *(a)* major highway schemes—eligible for TSG, *(b)* structural maintenance on carriageways, *(c)* structural maintenance on bridges, *(d)* major public transport projects, *(e)* minor works-highways and public transport, *(f)* minor works-local safety schemes and *(g)* parking.

Mr. Norris: The figures are shown in the following table:

Bids for 1995–96 included in transport policies and programme submissions—all figures are in £ thousands

Authority	*Major road schemes (TSG eligible)*	*Major road schemes (not TSG eligible)*	*Structural maintenance on carriageway*	*Structural maintenance on bridges*	*Major public transport projects*	*Minor works (other than local safety schemes)*	*Minor works (local safety schemes*	*Parking*	*Total*
City of London	—	—	—	1,022	—	2,794	—	290	4,106
Barking	1,630	—	696	134	—	1,243	600	175	4,478
Barnet	665	—	500	300	—	5,806	815	—	8,086
Bexley	10,362	—	1,310	1,100	—	1,796	700	550	15,818
Brent	400	—	1,165	663	—	12,493	3,601	—	18,322
Bromley	246	850	620	370	—	1,416	320	51	3,873
Camden	—	—	4,358	2,981	—	1,783	635	—	9,757
Croydon	5,039	—	2,340	920	—	4,243	1,760	500	14,802
Ealing	550	—	145	126	—	6,738	600	300	8,459
Enfield	846	—	2,775	3,735	—	2,582	855	—	10,793
Greenwich	3,900	—	717	1,053	—	2,625	660	120	9,075
Hackney	30	—	844	2,662	—	4,751	455	—	8,742
Hammersmith	—	—	560	1,380	—	6,746	600	600	9,886
Haringey	1,365	—	620	884	700	3,072	370	210	7,221
Harrow	6,622	—	419	1,245	—	2,772	220	—	11,278
Havering	—	—	115	850	—	1,402	550	589	3,506
Hillingdon	3,289	—	598	2,456	—	8,158	2,968	—	17,469
Hounslow	1,652	—	1,831	1,593	—	6,666	1,355	784	13,881
Islington	—	—	1,330	1,693	—	5,534	1,414	20	9,991
Kensington	743	—	271	175	—	1,165	640	—	2,994
Kingston	9,562	—	1,110	4,375	—	2,788	746	1,195	19,776
Lambeth	—	—	1,043	1,330	—	1,744	766	—	4,883
Lewisham	3,428	—	424	255	—	1,865	1,194	—	7,166
Merton	10	—	175	150	—	2,192	870	320	3,717
MNewham	3,031	—	405	4,361	—	4,782	2,361	1,915	16,855
Redbridge	—	—	786	1,200	—	5,578	305	183	8,052
Richomd	—	—	217	460	—	4,938	830	—	6,445
Southwark	4,634	—	2,002	1,155	—	1,590	400	—	9,781
Sutton	811	—	170	853	—	4,864	760	—	7,458
Tower Hamlets	—	—	2,160	1,094	—	7,481	578	1,204	12.517
Waltham Forest	742	—	320	178	—	2,294	845	190	4,569
Wandsworth	—	—	1,000	995	—	7,278	2,400	860	12,533
Westminster	1,093	4,912	128	5,565	—	2,772	1,825	790	17,085
Bolton	1,614	—	1,114	4,613	—	3,462	348	98	11,213
Bury	—	—	1,026	1,250	—	3,038	315	378	6,007
Manchester	11,907	725	3,049	3,339	—	10,054	1,550	—	30,624
Oldham	3,000	—	1,006	3,062	—	6,129	660	100	13,957
Rochdale	—	—	1,000	3,000	—	1,000	274	—	5,274
Salford	10,971	300	1,927	1,585	—	8,435	1,621	—	24,839
Stockport	592	—	3,228	3,294	100	6,080	541	300	14,135
Tameside	2,125	—	1,500	931	—	3,744	350	15	8,800
Trafford	18,972	—	428508	1,387	—	3,298	377	100	24,562
Wigan	1,798	—	850	1,390	—	7,861	350	150	12,399
Knowsley	16,260	—	1,178	405	—	3,792	541	470	22,645
Liverpool	3,200	—	2,200	1,200	—	5,440	1,200	250	13,490
St. Helens	3,574	—	200	300	—	930	150	15	5,169
Sefton	3,103	—	524	1,305	—	2,627	395	651	8,605
Wirral	2,180	—	400	2,145	—	2,748	400	—	7,873
Barnsley	7,676	—	1,373	1,399	—	2,022	464	—	12,934
Doncaster	17,950	—	1,334	2,625	—	2,021	800	780	25,510
Rotherham	595	—	736	2,740	—	1,945	350	—	6,366
Sheffield	14,677	—	4,350	6,024	600	11,180	750	70	37,651
Gateshead	908	—	520	660	—	4,220	500	250	7,058
Newcastle	10,859	—	2,152	2,835	—	1,856	700	—	18,402
North Tyneside	450	—	1,490	660	—	1,322	300	—	4,222

Bids for 1995–96 included in transport policies and programme submissions—all figures are in £ thousands

Authority	Major road schemes (TSG eligible)	Major road schemes (not TSG eligible)	Structural maintenance on carriageway	Structural maintenance on bridges	Major public transport projects	Minor works (other than local safety schemes)	Minor works (local safety schemes	Parking	Total
South Tyneside	66	—	370	1,130	—	1,090	360	700	3,716
Sunderland	2,525	—	2,828	1,537	—	2,412	1,250	170	10,722
Birmingham	30,602	1,332	4,565	3,590	—	7,632	1,585	952	50,258
Coventry	12,829	—	602	857	—	1,220	533	—	16,041
Dudley	13,288	0	1,608	1,282	0	2,327	690	600	19,795
Sandwell	5,758	0	3,135	5,286	0	2,082	738	70	17,069
Solihull	1,720	0	1,150	469	0	646	909	1,250	6,144
Walsall	3,342	0	1,280	3,209	0	7,819	850	124	16,624
Wolverhampton	11,524	0	3,306	4,000	0	4,512	820	220	24,382
Bradford	1,133	0	3,523	4,161	0	6,561	1,100	0	16,478
Calderdale	436	0	3,690	2,318	0	2,372	417	0	9,233
Kirklees	30	54	5,365	2,283	0	6,163	596	100	14,591
Leeds	18,655	942	4,000	2,336	2,750	12,400	1,825	785	43,693
Wakefield	9,490	0	1,628	1,641	0	3,861	1,230	0	17,850
Avon	9,493	0	3,505	3,170	5,020	7,735	1,261	0	30,184
Bedfordshire	8,895	0	1,476	2,624	500	3,602	751	0	17,848
Berkshire	9,844	0	2,202	1,900	0	3,267	1,746	52	19,011
Buckinghamshire	6,633	75	2,900	1,800	0	2,290	1,014	1,060	15,772
Cambridgeshire	4,020	0	3,901	4,958	0	5,010	3,030	49	20,968
Cheshire	20,816	783	15,841	5,381	0	4,537	900	55	48,313
Cleveland	10,540	0	3,148	601	0	2,599	786	0	17,674
Cornwall	7,535	0	3,439	5,228	0	4,823	830	1,220	23,075
Cumbria	5,930	0	3,000	3,000	0	6,430	600	693	19,653
Derbyshire	6,191	0	2,369	2,650	9,788	5,745	1,386	549	28,678
Devon	7,648	292	6,052	5,342	300	8,054	1,328	576	29,592
Dorset	2,300	0	1,800	3,170	0	4,524	806	0	12,600
Durham	7,735	2,855	2,095	2,450	0	5,966	500	0	21,601
East Sussex	10,244	0	4,924	3,194	4,000	2,908	791	100	26,161
Essex	9,689	2,899	5,900	4,244	0	12,130	3,620	0	38,482
Gloucestershire	6,633	0	2,548	1,686	0	4,046	937	80	15,930
Hampshire	17,353	2,000	12,241	3,471	0	7,351	2,379	2,300	47,095
Hereford and Worcestershire	6,424	0	5,406	1,851	0	5,316	797	402	20,196
Hertfordshire	9,120	0	3,500	4,450	0	5,704	2,500	0	25,274
Humberside	6,038	720	5,998	2,912	0	3,653	1,000	120	20,441
Isle of Wight	2,390	0	810	320	0	3,919	270	0	7,709
Kent	143,034	1,800	15,745	5,987	0	13,216	6,376	0	186,158
Lancashire	15,862	0	11,035	16,043	1,940	9,030	2,650	3,550	60,110
Leicestershire	4,829	0	4,414	3,080	6,091	8,581	2,005	0	29,000
Lincolnshire	2,420	0	2,808	3,150	0	4,823	650	117	13,968
Norfolk	11,553	11	5,522	6,300	0	6,303	5,315	685	35,689
Northamptonshire	6,398	410	4,686	2,350	0	1,680	1,100	250	16,874
Northumberland	10,110	0	5,000	6,370	0	1,190	765	445	23,880
North Yorkshire	10,529	0	7,241	7,210	0	5,687	910	1,142	32,719
Nottinghamshire	7,634	112	5,720	3,120	6,136	13,120	1,144	1,664	38,650
Oxfordshire	1,228	4,045	3,756	2,792	0	1,253	2,148	708	15,930
Shropshire	6,062	0	4,257	2,568	0	9,474	540	0	22,90
Somerset	10,051	0	2,568	4,853	0	3,351	867	0	21,690
Staffordshire	16,606	0	8,000	2,400	0	7,084	910	0	35,000
Suffolk	3,815	2,200	7,141	5,200	0	14,470	1,450	945	35,221
Surrey	30,735	0	8,213	9,453	0	10,867	9,150	30	68,448
Warwickshire	180	0	3,825	2,850	0	2,960	1,505	74	11,394
West Sussex	4,294	4,414	2,110	737	0	3,336	2,936	2,025	19,852
Wiltshire	3,702	0	2,320	450	0	2,796	763	0	10,031
Greater Manchester PTE	0	0	0	0	44,183	8,523	0	0	52,706
Merseyside PTE	0	0	0	0	11,548	25,725	0	0	37,273
South Yorkshire PTE	0	0	0	0	72,020	5,815	0	0	77,835
Tyne and Wear PTE	0	0	0	0	1,765	2,840	0	0	4,605
West Midlands PTE	0	0	0	0	24,572	10,559	0	0	35,131
West Yorkshire PTE	0	0	0	0	400	290	0	0	690
Total	768,972	31,731	297,205	276,876	192,413	570,798	127,252	38,470	2,303,717

Marine Pollution

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he expects the Government to publish their detailed response to the report of Lord Donaldson's inquiry into the prevention of marine pollution from merchant shipping.

Mr. Norris: Work is well advanced in taking forward the report's recommendations and in preparing a response. We believe that it makes sense to delay publication to take account of current developments in the European Community and in the International Maritime Organisation. As a consequence, we now hope to publish the response in the new year.

Railways (Finance)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what external finance limit has been set for the railway industry for 1994–95; and what estimate he has made of Government grant support for 1994–95.

Mr. Watts: The external finance limit for the railway industry as a whole has now been set at £1,496 million. This represents an increase of £259 million on previous plans. The increase is met either from reallocations within existing Department of Transport programmes or from the reserve and does not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The British Rail and Railtrack EFLs have been set, respectively, at contributions of £272 million and £333 million and European Passenger Services EFL at a requirement of £177 million. Grant support, comprising franchising director and metropolitan railway grant, is estimated to be £1,924 million. Any further adjustments will be notified to Parliament.

A2

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *19*, what arrangements he proposes for consulting the public on the proposed A2 Lydden-Dover improvement scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: I am pleased to announce that public consultation on this scheme will start at the end of this week with the local distribution of brochures describing the proposed improvement. Public exhibitions will be held on 9 and 10 December at Dover district council offices to give the public the opportunity of discussing the proposals with representatives of the Highways Agency and their consultants.

Those wishing to comment on the proposals are invited to write to the Highways Agency before the end of the consultation period on 3 February.

Transport Council

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the result of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 21 and 22 November.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Transport Council met in Brussels on 21 and 22 November. It agreed a resolution on ferry safety, calling for a number of detailed initiatives at International Maritime Organisation and Community level.

A common position was reached on a directive giving the force of European Community law to the Paris memorandum of understanding on port state control, which lays down rules for state inspection of foreign ships. At my request, the council agreed to call on the Commission to work with the countries of the Paris MOU group to monitor the standard of shipping in EC ports and to report back to the council within a year with proposals for tougher measures as necessary.

A draft directive on mandatory reporting by ships—EUROREP—was discussed. Much of the text was agreed by the council, but the key issues of concern to the United Kingdom—finalising reporting lines, adoption of EUROREP by the IMO and the directive's date of entry into force—were referred back to the committee of permanent representatives for further discussion.

The Commission outlined a proposal to consider granting individual exemptions from competition rules to groups of shipping companies that offer multimodal rates, provided they improve the efficiency of their land-side operations. Some member states supported the proposal. I, supported by a number of other delegations, pressed for the proposal to be considered afresh, in consultation with the commercial parties involved and with our major trading partners. In the absence of consensus, the presidency concluded that the position should be closely monitored; that the council should be consulted immediately if there were any unforeseen difficulties; that the transition to the new approach should be conducted in a reasonable and flexible manner; and that in any event the Commission should report to the council on experience with the new approach.

The council also formally adopted three measures on which it had previously reached a common position: a directive on the training and certification of seafarers, a directive on rules and standards for classification societies and a regulation on port fees for oil tankers.

The council agreed a resolution calling for a European contribution to the development of a global satellite navigation system.

It agreed that consideration of the negotiating mandates for aviation and land transport agreements and Switzerland should be resumed immediately, with a view to agreeing them, at the latest, at the next Transport Council in March 1995.

There was an exchange of views on the scope of a draft directive on the interoperability of the high-speed train network. The matter was referred back to Coreper for further discussion.

The council discussed a proposed directive on the appointment of dangerous goods advisers by companies concerned with the transport of dangerous goods. The United Kingdom, supported by a number of other delegations, questioned the need for such a directive. A compromise proposal was referred back to Coreper for further discussion.

The council also discussed trans-European networks, air traffic management, road transport negotiations with eastern European countries and measures to help Community shipping. No votes were necessary.

Bedford

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many letters he has received from the Bedford area on the desirability of urgently completing the bypassing arrangements for the town;

(2) how many vehicles of all descriptions cross the *(a)* Newnham bridge, *(b)* Bedford Town bridge and *(c)* Prebend Street bridge in Bedford daily;

(3) what he estimates to be the cost of constructing a mile of motorway; and what were the figures *(a)* 10 and *(b)* 20 years ago.

Mr. Watts: These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir Trevor Skeet, dated 29 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Questions about road schemes in Bedfordshire since these are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I will answer your questions in the order in which they appeared on the Order Papers for 22 and 23 November.

22 November 1994

35. The inclusion in the national roads programme of a bypass for any town is not dependent solely upon the size of that urban area. When assessing the inclusion of a potential scheme the Department must have particular regard to the benefits to local people, the levels of strategic traffic that will be removed from the town and to the benefits that will accrue to the national roads network.

The roads programme includes bypass schemes for several other towns around the country that are of a similar size to Bedford, including Hastings, Wigan, Gateshead and Carlisle.

36. The £38 million contract for the Bedford Southern Bypass, began in August this year and we expect the new road to open to traffic in Summer 1996.

With regard to other parts of the full bypass, in April this year the Secretary of State for Transport announced the outcome of his Review of the roads programme which examined the relative merits, in terms of economic costs and benefits, environmental impact, and the contribution of trunk road schemes to the strategic network. The Review concluded that the proposals for Bedford are in the main sufficiently important to be taken forward but that there are other schemes nationally that are considered to require a higher priority.

The A428–A421 element of the Bedford Western Bypass has been placed in the longer term category and will be developed by the Agency as the road programme rolls forward. A consortium of local development interests has however suggested that they could provide, at their own expense, a single carriageway link along the protected corridor for the bypass between the A428 and A421 as part of new development for which planning permission has been sought. Progress on the new scheme would depend on the decisions on the planning application.

As you are aware, a public inquiry to hear objections to the proposals for the Norse Road link element of the Bedford Southern Bypass has been arranged for January next year. Progress on the scheme beyond that stage would be dependent upon the inquiry Inspector's Report and the joint decision of the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment.

The Agency will progress these schemes as quickly as circumstances allow but their implementation is subject to the completion of the remaining statutory procedures and to the availability of resources.

37. The Agency is not able to calculate a figure for any financial loss incurred by Bedford because it does not yet have a Bypass. We can, however, give an estimate of the benefits which would accrue generally from its construction and the relief it provides to the existing road network. Our cost/benefit computer programme (COBA) is used to calculate a monetary figure, which compares the cost of a new road with travel benefits, such as journey time, vehicle operating costs, and reduction in accidents. The figures are calculated over a 30 year period and discounted. A strongly positive figure represents good value for money.

For the Bedford Southern Bypass the benefits could be as much as +£82.7 million, for Bedford Western Bypass +£41.1 million and for the Norse Road Link +£13.0 million. I emphasise that these figures represent the benefit accruing globally, not just to the towns or villages bypassed.

38. Our forecasts suggest that traffic flows on the completed Bedford Southern Bypass will range between 17,000 to 23,000 vehicles (24 hour Average Annual Daily Traffic) along the length of the scheme. This information is taken from the latest traffic model that is being prepared for use at the Norse Road Link public inquiry.

The Southern Bypass will include a full grade separated junction with the A6 trunk road south of the town in order to allow easy access for traffic between the two routes. From this point the existing A6 route through Bedford will be available for traffic travelling to and from the north.

39. In the past ten years £31,085,158 has been spent on trunk road schemes in northern Bedfordshire, £43,577,768 has been spent in the south of the County and £59,560,890 on the maintenance and on small improvements to the trunk road and motorway network covering Bedforshire as a whole. In addition, we make allocations to the County for their major schemes. Recent examples are the A5065 Luton Dunstable Relief Road, the A507 Shefford, Clifton, Henlow Bypass, the A422 Stagsden Bypass and the A507 Arlesey Stotfold Bypass. We also made significant contributions to the reconstruction of the County and Longholme Bridges at Bedford.

23 November 1994

35. By 24 November 1994, the Secretary of State for Transport had received 55 letters from local people, organisations and companies in response to the current "Getting Bedford Moving" campaign. A reply will be sent to all those who have written.

36. Traffic flows recorded on the 3 bridges in Bedford are:

(a) Newnham Bridge: 30,600

(b) Bedford Town Bridge: 27,600

(c) Prebend Street Bridge: 28,400

(All vehicles, Average Annual Daily Traffic 1993)

37. The average cost of constructing a mile of motorway is about £7.6 million per mile, excluding VAT and design costs at 1992 prices. Using price indices we have calculated the equivalent cost 10 years ago to be about £6.6 million/mile and 20 years ago £2.11 million/mile.

Bedford (Road System)

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what towns of the size of Bedford or larger remain without by-passes in England;

(2) what are his plans for the completion of the full bypass for Bedford;

(3) what he assesses to be the loss incurred by Bedford as a result of the inability of its road infrastructure to cope with the traffic;

(4) how many vehicles the southern route in Bedford is expected to carry when completed; and how he expects vehicles to reach the A6 from the route travelling north;

(5) how much money has been allocated for major roads *(a)* in the south of the county of Bedfordshire and *(b)* in the north of the county during the past 10 years.

Mr. Watts *[holding answers 28 November 1994]:* These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Laurie Haynes to Sir Trever Skeet, dated 29 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Questions about road schemes in Bedfordshire since these are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I will answer your questions in the order in which they appeared on the Order Papers for 22 and 23 November.

22 November 1994

35. The inclusion in the national roads programme of a bypass for any town is not dependent solely upon the size of that urban area. When assessing the inclusion of a potential scheme the Department must have particular regard to the benefits to local people, the levels of strategic traffic that will be removed from the town and to the benefits that will accrue to the national roads network.

The roads programme includes bypass schemes for several other towns around the country that are of a similar size to Bedford, including Hastings, Wigan, Gateshead and Carlisle.

36. The £38 million contract for the Bedford Southern Bypass, began in August this year and we expect the new road to open to traffic in Summer 1996.

With regard to other parts of the full bypass, in April this year the Secretary of State for Transport announced the outcome of his Review of the roads programme which examined the relative merits, in terms of economic costs and benefits, environmental impact, and the contribution of trunk road schemes to the strategic network. The Review concluded that the proposals for Bedford are in the main sufficiently important to be taken forward but that there are other schemes nationally that are considered to require a higher priority.

The A428–A421 element of the Bedford Western Bypass has been placed in the longer term category and will be developed by the Agency as the road programme rolls forward. A consortium of local development interests has however suggested that they could provide, at their own expense, a single carriageway link along the protected corridor for the bypass between the A428 and A421 as part of new development for which planning permission has been sought. Progress on the scheme would depend on the decisions on the planning application.

As you are aware, a public inquiry to hear objections to the proposals for the Norse Road link element of the Bedford Southern Bypass has been arranged for January next year. Progress on the scheme beyond that stage would be dependent upon the inquiry Inspector's Report and the joint decision of the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment.

The Agency will progress these schemes as quickly as circumstances allow but their implementation is subject to the completion of the remaining statutory procedures and to the availability of resources.

37. The Agency is not able to calculate a figure for any financial loss incurred by Bedford because it does not yet have a Bypass. We can, however, give an estimate of the benefits which would accrue generally from its construction and the relief it provides to the existing road network. Our cost/benefit computer programme (COBA) is used to calculate a monetary figure, which compares the cost of a new road with travel benefits, such as journey time, vehicle operating costs, and reduction in accidents. The figures are calculated over a 30 year period and discounted. A strongly positive figure represents good value for money.

For the Bedford Southern Bypass the benefits could be as much as +£82.7 million, for Bedford Western Bypass +£41.1 million and for the Norse Road Link +£13.0 million. I emphasise that these figures represent the benefit accruing globally, not just to the towns or villages bypassed.

38. Our forecasts suggest that traffic flows on the completed Bedford Southern Bypass will range between 17,000 to 23,000 vehicles (24 hour Average Annual Daily Traffic) along the length of the scheme. This information is taken from the latest traffic model that is being prepared for use at the Norse Road Link public inquiry.

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DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Public Bodies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give a full list of all persons appointed to public bodies identifying the salary paid and known political allegiances.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Such information is not held centrally. Details of the remuneration of full and part-time public appointments are given in "Public Bodies 1993", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Details of political allegiance of persons appointed are not sought.

Crown Servants

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will name the current members of the Advisory Committee on the Acceptance of Business Appointments by Crown Servants, indicating their occupation and background and which other public and private sector board posts they hold.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The members of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on Business Appointments are:

The right hon. the Lord Carlisle of Bucklow QC - Chairman
The Lord Bridges GCMG - Deputy Chairman
Sir John Blelloch KCB
Sir Denys Henderson
Sir Charles Huxtable KCB CBE
Sir Robin Ibbs KBE
The right hon. Peter Shore MP
The right hon. the Lord Thomson of Monifieth KT

Lord Carlisle, Lord Thomson and Mr. Peter Shore are senior parliamentarians and former Ministers, Lord Bridges is a retired diplomat; Sir John Blelloch is a retired senior civil servant; Sir Charles Huxtable is a retired senior Army officer; Sir Robin Ibbs is Chairman of Lloyds bank; Sir Denys Henderson is chairman of ICI and the ZENECA group.

Three members of the advisory committee hold public appointments in other advisory bodies sponsored by my Department: Sir John Blelloch is a member of the Security Commission; Lord Thomson is a member of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee and the Standing Committee on Standards in Public Life; Mr Peter Shore is a member of the Standing Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Details of other public and private sector board posts held are a matter for individual committee members, and are not sought as a matter of course by my Department.

Animal Experiment

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which of the events in the national week of science and technology, supported by his Department, will be dealing with the issue of animal experimentation.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The programme for next year's national week of science, engineering and technology will not be finalised until the new year. At present there are no events planned which deal with the issue of animal experimentation and which would be supported by my Department.

Expenditure Plans

Mr. Mans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the expenditure plans of his Department in the period 1995–96 to 1997–98.

Mr. David Hunt: Provision for the Office of Public Service and Science, HMSO, Central Office of Information is £1,339 million in 1995–96, £1,357 million in 1996–97 and £1,386 million in 1997–98.

Planned expenditure on public service tasks—OPSS, HMSO, COI—is £54 million in 1995–96, £53 million in 1996–97 and £53 million in 1997–98.

Provision for science is £1,285 million in 1995–96, £1,304 million in 1996–97 and £1,333 million in 1997–98. As a result, the science budget, which is provision excluding EC funding to research council institutes, has been maintained in 1995–96 at its 1994–95 level in real terms, almost 2 per cent. above its level in 1993–94.

I shall be announcing the allocation of the 1995–96 science budget in due course.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences;

(2) to ask the Minister without Portfolio how much public money he will spend in his ministerial capacity on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season;

(3) to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by Government Whips in their offices and official residences including No. 12 Downing street.

Mr. David Hunt: I have been asked to reply. Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. Such costs as relate to Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and Science, Central Office of Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office are covered in running costs expenditure, which is published in the annual report, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year;

(2) to ask the Minister without Portfolio how many official Christmas cards he intends to send in 1994 in his ministerial capacity; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year;

(3) to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many official Christmas cards the Government Whips intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Members, Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card the Chief Whip intends to send this year.

Mr. David Hunt: I have been asked to reply.

I shall write to the hon. member when the number of Christmas cards sent by my office is known, and will be glad to send him one and to place one in the Library. The Minister without Portfolio and the Government Whips do not have official Christmas cards.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all executive agencies, their parent department and their date of establishment.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The information requested is as follows:

	Launch Date
Lord Chancellor	
HM Land Registry[1]	2 July 1990
Public Record Office[1]	1 April 1992
Public Trust Office	1 July 1994
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	
Wilton Park	1 September 1991
Chancellor of the Exchequer	
Central Statistical Office[1]	19 November 1991
HM Customs and Excise[2]	1 April 1991
Inland Revenue[2]	1 April 1992
Paymaster[1]	1 April 1993
Royal Mint[1]	2 April 1990
Valuation Office[1]	30 September 1991
Secretary of State for the Home Department	
Fire Service College	1 April 1992
Forensic Science Service	1 September 1991
HM Prison Service	1 April 1993
United Kingdom Passport Agency	2 April 1991
President of the Board of Trade	
Accounts Services Agency	1 October 1991
Companies House	3 October 1988
Insolvency Service	21 March 1990
Laboratory of the Government	30 October 1989

	Launch Date
Chemist	
National Physical Laboratory	3 July 1990
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	18 April 1989
NEL	5 October 1990
Patent Office	1 March 1990
Radiocommunications Agency	2 April 1990
Secretary of State for Transport	
Coastguard	1 April 1994
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	2 April 1990
Driving Standards Agency	2 April 1990
Highways Agency	1 April 1994
Marine Safety Agency	1 April 1994
Transport Research Laboratory	2 April 1992
Vehicle Certification Agency	2 April 1990
Vehicle Inspectorate	1 August 1988
Secretary of State for Defence	
Army Base Repair Organisation	1 April 1993
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment	1 April 1991
Defence Accounts Agency	1 April 1991
Defence Analytical Services Agency	1 July 1992
Defence Animal Centre	1 June 1993
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency	22 November 1994
Defence Operational Analysis Centre	1 July 1992
Defence Postal and Courier Services	1 July 1992
Defence Research Agency	2 April 1991
Disposal Sales Agency	1 October 1994
Duke of York's Royal Military School	1 April 1992
Hydrographic Office	6 April 1990
Logistic Information Systems Agency	21 November 1994
Maintenance Group Defence Agency	2 April 1991
Meteorological Office	2 April 1990
Military Survey	2 April 1991
Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation	1 April 1992
Queen Victoria School	1 April 1992
RAF Signals Engineering Establishment	22 November 1994
RAF Training Group Defence Agency	1 April 1994
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)	24 April 1991
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	
ADAS	1 April 1992
Central Science Laboratory	23 April 1994
Central Veterinary Laboratory	2 April 1990
Intervention Board[1] [4]	2 April 1990
Pesticides Safety Directorate	1 April 1993
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	2 April 1990
Secretary of State for National Heritage	
Historic Royal Palaces Agency	1 October 1989
Royal Parks Agency	1 April 1993
Secretary of State for the Environment	
Building Research Establishment	2 April 1990
Ordnance Survey[1]	1 May 1990
Planning Inspectorate [5]	1 April 1992

	Launch Date
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	6 July 1989
Security Facilities Executive	15 October 1993
The Buying Agency	31 October 1991
Secretary of State for Wales	
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)	2 April 1991
Secretary of State for Social Security	
Social Security Benefits Agency	2 April 1991
Social Security Child Support Agency	5 April 1993
Social Security Contributions Agency	2 April 1991
Social Security Information Technology Services Agency	2 April 1990
Social Security Resettlement Agency	24 May 1989
Social Security War Pensions Agency	13 April 1994
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	
Central Office of Information[1]	5 April 1990
Chessington Computer Centre	1 April 1993
Civil Service College	6 June 1989
HMSO[1]	14 December 1988
Occupational Health Service	2 April 1990
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	2 April 1991
Secretary of State for Scotland	
Historic Scotland	2 April 1991
Registers of Scotland[1]	6 April 1990
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	1 April 1992
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	12 April 1991
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	1 April 1993
Scottish Prison Service	1 April 1993
Scottish Record Office[1]	1 April 1993
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	5 April 1994
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	
Compensation Agency	1 April 1992
Driver and Vehicle Licensing NI	2 August 1993
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	1 April 1992
Northern Ireland Child Support Agency	5 April 1993
Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland	1 April 1992
Rate Collection Agency	1 April 1991
Social Security Agency (NI)	1 July 1991
Training and Employment Agency (NI)	2 April 1990
Valuation and Lands Agency	1 April 1993
Secretary of State for Education	
Teacher's Pensions Agency	1 April 1992
Secretary of State for Health	
Medical Devices Agency	27 September 1994
Medicines Control Agency	11 July 1991
NHS Estates	1 April 1991
NHS Pensions	20 November 1992
Secretary of State for Employment	
Employment Service	2 April 1990

	Launch Date
Attorney General	
Government Property Lawyers	1 April 1993
Minister for Overseas Development	
Natural Resources Institute	2 April 1990

[1]Agencies that are Government Departments.

[2]Government Department operating on Next Steps lines.

[3]The Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for ADAS in Wales.

[4]The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are jointly responsible for the Intervention Board.

[5]The Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for the Planning Inspectorate in Wales.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the chief executives of all executive agencies, their civil service grade, and their salary range; and whether they were outside appointments or appointed through open competition.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The information is reproduced in the table.

Agency	*Present Chief Executive*	*Grade*	*[1]Remuneration in 1993–94*	*Method of appointment*
Accounts Services Agency	Mike Hoddinott	5	43,974	internal
Adas	Dr. Julia Walsh	2	80,563	open competition, direct entrant
Army Base Repair Organisation	Brigadier Jim Drew	—	53,000	armed forces
Building Research Establishment	Roger Courtney	3	61,529	internal
CADW	John Carr	5	49,752	open competition, direct entrant
Central Office of Information	Mike Devereau	3	69,166	internal
Central Science Laboratory	Dr. Peter Stanley	3	61,531	open competition, serving civil servant
Central Statistical Office	Bill McLennan	1A	114,063	open competition, direct entrant
Central Veterinary Laboratory	Dr. Tony Little	3	62,806	open competition, serving civil servant
Chemical Biological Defence Establishment	Dr. Graham Pearson CB	3	59,599	internal
Chessington Computer Centre	Robert Edwards	5	49,200	internal
Civil Service College	Dr. Stephen Hickey	3	[5]59,533	open competition, serving civil servant
The Coastguard Agency	Chris Harris	4	[2]49.744	open competition, serving civil servant
Companies House	David Durham	4	50,000	open competition, direct entrant
Compensation Agency	Denis Stanley	5	[1]47,357	open competition, direct entrant
Defence Accounts Agency	Mike Dymond	4	55,051	internal
Defence Analytical Services Agency	Paul Altobell	4	55,422	internal
Defence Animal Centre	Colonel Roache	—	[4]44,309	armed forces
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency	Brigadier Richard Kirby	—	[5]55,958	armed forces
Defence Operational Analysis Centre	David Daniel	4	[5]48,624	internal
Defence Postal and Courier Service	Brigadier Tweedie Brown	—	[5]62,889	armed forces
Defence Research Agency	John Chisholm	2	147,238	open competition, direct entrant
Disposals Sales Agency	Keith Ellender	6	[2]42,930	internal
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Stephen Curtis	3	57,142	open competition, serving civil servant
Driver and Vehicle Licensing (NI)	Brendan Magee	5	[4]36,379	open competition, serving civil servant
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency (NI)	Brian Watson	6	40,017	open competition, serving civil servant
Driving Standards Agency	Dr. John Ford	5	[2]47,500	open competition, direct entrant
Duke of York's Royal Military School	Col. Gordon Wilson	—	43,698	armed forces
Employment Service	Mike Fogden CB	3+	67,557	open competition, serving civil servant
Fire Service College	Nigel Finlayson	5	[5]64,383	internal
Forensic Science Service	Dr. Janet Thompson	3	62,946	open competition, serving civil servant
Government Property Lawyers	Tony Osborne	3	59,380	internal
Highways Agency	Lawrence Haynes	2	[3]100,000	open competition, direct entrant
Historic Royal Palaces Agency	David Beeton	3	60,903	open competition, direct entrant
Historic Scotland	Graeme Munro	3	55,415	internal
HM Prison Service	Derek Lewis	2	133,280	open competition, direct entrant
HMSO	Dr. Paul Freeman CB	2	68,000	open comptition, serving civil servant
Hydrographic Office	Rear Admiral Nigel Essenhigh	—	[2]60,747	armed forces
The Insolvency Service	Peter Joyce	3	57,847	open competition, serving civil servant

Agency	Present Chief Executive	Grade	[1]Remuneration in 1993–94	Method of appointment
Intervention Board	Guy Stapleton	3	55,586	internal
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	Dr. Richard Worswick	3	63,000	open competition, direct entrant
HM Land Registry	John Manthorpe CB	2	67,000	open competition, serving civil servant
Logistics Information Systems Agency	Brigadier Allan Pollard	—	[3]55,958	armed forces
Marine Safety Agency	Robin Bradley	4	[3]45,680	open competition, direct entrant
Medical Devices Agency	Alan Kent	4	[3]53,776	open competition, direct entrant
Medicines Control Agency	Dr. Keith Jones	3	82,698	open competition, direct entrant
Meteorological Office	Professor Julian Hunt	2	82,000	open competition, direct entrant
Military Survey	Major General Mike Watson	—	[2]60,486	armed forces
National Physical Laboratory	Dr. Peter Clapham	3	62,645	open competition, serving civil servant
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	Dr. Seton Bennett	5	55,263	open competition, serving civil servant
Natural Resources Institute	Anthony Beattie	3	60,831	internal
Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation	Capt. Wade Graham	—	[3]45,854	armed forces
NEL	William Edgar	3	86,000	open competition, direct entrant
NHS Estates	John Locke	3	65,620	open competition, direct entrant
NHS Pensions Agency	Alec Cowan	5	50,911	open competition, direct entrant
Northern Ireland Child Support Agency	Patrick Devlin	5	45,665	open competition, serving civil servant
Occupational Health Service	Dr. Elizabeth McCloy	3	[2]56,512	open competition, direct entrant
Ordnance Survey	Professor David Rhind	3	59,001	open competition, direct entrant
Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland	Mike Brand	5	48,320	internal
Patent Office	Paul Hartnack	3	62,751	open competition, direct entrant
Paymaster	Keith Sullens	5	43,000	open competition, serving civil servant
Pesticide Safety Directorate	Geoff Bruce	4	54,929	open competition, serving civil servant
Planning Inspectorate	Chris Shepley	3	[3]52,839	open competition, direct entrant
Public Record Office	Mrs. Sarah Tyacke	3	59,550	open competition, direct entrant
Public Trust Agency	Miss Julia Lomas	4	[3]56,000	open competition, direct entrant
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	Marcus Black	5	47,864	open competition, direct entrant
Queen Victoria School	Brian Raine	5	[3]43,048	open competition, direct entrant
Radiocommunications Agency	Jim Norton	3	[2]69,000	open competition, direct entrant
RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency	Air Vice Marshal Richard Kyle MBE	—	[2]60,941	armed forces
RAF Signals Engineering Establishment	Air Commodore Peter Ayee	—	[3]55,045	armed forces
RAF Training Group Defence Agency	Air Vice Marshal John May	—	[3]56,710	armed forces
Rate Collection Agency (NI)	David Gallagher	6	38,534	open competition, serving civil servant
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	Michael Geddes	3	59,278	open competition, direct entrant
Registers of Scotland	Alan Ramage	4	[3]47,197	open competition, serving civil servant
Royal Mint	Roger Holmes	3	56,000	open competition, direct entrant
Royal Parks	David Welch	5	46,073	open competition, direct entrant
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	Dr. Robert Hay	5	42,806	open competition, direct entrant
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	Andrew MacLeod	5	41,296	internal
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	Norman Macleod	6	40,375	open competition, serving civil servant
Scottish Prison Service	Edward Frizzell	3	54,700	internal
Scottish Record Office	Patrick Cadell	5	43,294	open competition, direct entrant

Agency	Present Chief Executive	Grade	[1]Remuneration in 1993–94	Method of appointment
Security Facilities Executive	John King	5	47,203	open competition, serving civil servant
Service Children's Schools (NWE)	Ian Mitchelson	4	50,808	open competition, direct entrant
Social Security Agency (NI)	Alec Wylie	3	55,878	open competition, serving civil servant
Social Security Benefits Agency	Michael Bichard	2	83,012	open competition, direct entrant
Social Security Child Support Agency	Miss Ann Chant	3	[5]51,362	internal
Social Security Contributions Agency	George Bertram	3	[5]55,659	internal
Social Security IT Services Agency	Ian Magee	3	57,919	open competition, serving civil servant
Social Security Resettlement Agency	Paul Winstanley	6	[3]46,000	internal
Social Security War Pensions Agency	Peter Mathison	5	[3]49,490	open competition, direct entrant
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	Ken MacRae	6	[3]44,287	internal
Teachers' Pensions Agency	Mrs. Denyse Metcalfe	5	50,470	open competition, direct entrant
The Buying Agency	Stephen Sage	5	[3]43,067	internal
Training and Employment Agency (NI)	Julian Crozier	3	60,590	internal
Transport Research Laboratory	John Wootton	3	72,400	open competition, direct entrant
UK Passport Agency	David Gatenby	5	[5]53,269	open competition, serving civil servant
Valuation and Lands Office	David Bell	3	55,555	open competition, serving civil servant
Valuation Office	John Langford	2	[5]77,152	open competition, serving civil servant
Vehicle Certification Agency	Derek Harvey	5	45,915	internal
Vehicle Inspectorate	Ron Oliver	4	53,854	open competition, serving civil servant
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	Dr. Mike Rutter	4	53,411	open competition, direct entrant
Wilton Park Conference Centre	Richard Langhorne	5	[4]44,000	open competition, direct entrant

[1] The Chief Executive's actual remuneration, including bonuses, and taxable benefits, in 1993–94 as shown in the Annual Report and Accounts of the agency.
[2] A new Chief Executive was appointed part way through 1993–94 and the current annual salary, excluding any bonus or other taxable benefits, for the present Chief Executive is provided.
[3] The Agency was launched in 1994 and has therefore yet to produce its first annual Report and Accounts. The current annual salary, excluding any bonus or other taxable benefits, is provided.
[4] The Agency was launched part way through 1993–94 and the current annual salary, excluding any bonus or other taxable benefits, is provided.
[5] A new Chief Executive has been appointed and the figure provided relates to the Chief Executive in post during 1993–94.

EDUCATION

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary for Education what steps he will take to avoid the creation of budgeting difficulties in colleges of further and higher education as a consequence of changes in the allocation of support from the single regeneration budget in 1995–96.

Mr. Boswell: The budgets of further and higher education colleges are matters for the institutions themselves and for the funding councils. If the hon. Member is aware of any particular difficulty, he should raise it with them in the first instance.

School Books

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of schools in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sector spent (i) more than £1,000 and (ii) less than £500 on books in the years 1992–93 and 1993–94 and what are the projections for the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: Figures for expenditure on books by individual schools are not collected centrally.

Youth Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education from which lines of the local authority revenue outturn and revenue accounts returns the estimate of £220 million was made for local authority expenditure on the youth service which can be found in table 3 of the Department for Education and Office for Standards in Education departmental report.

Mr. Boswell: The estimate of £220 million for local authority spending on the youth service in 1993–94 was calculated by apportioning total local authority expenditure on education, as recorded on local authority revenue account returns for 1993–94, pro rata to the breakdown of spending in 1993–94 produced by the local authority associations as part of their 1993 report into education spending needs. The expenditure figures used in the calculation were taken from lines 1-11 and 77 of the RA returns. Income in respect of technical and vocational education initiative, WRFE, Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council/Universities Funding Council payments, EC grants and other grants recorded on the same forms were then netted off.

Final outturn data for 1993–94 will not become available until next year. This is likely to be different from

the estimate shown above. The latest outturn data available is for 1992–93. Local authority Revenue Outturn forms show that net recurrent spending on the youth service in that year was £274 million. The provisional 1992–93 figure shown in the 1994 DFE/Ofsted departmental report was £232 million.

Audit

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether she will include higher and further education establishments and teacher training colleges in her audit next year of accessibility of schools.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be asking the Further Education Funding Council to consider whether further information on accessibility to further education sector institutions is required in the light of its statutory responsibilities for students with disabilities. The remit letter sent to the Higher Education Funding Council for England on its establishment asked it to consider how access for students with special needs could be facilitated. It is for the Funding Council to decide what information it needs to collect in order to enable it to fulfil that remit and its other functions.

Expenditure Plans

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about her Department's expenditure plans for the financial years 1995–96 to 1997–98.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in a statement today, the Department for Education and Ofsted's spending programme in 1995–96 will total £10,958 million. That total is £427 million or 4.1 per cent. higher than equivalent expenditure in 1994–95.

[1]*£ million*

	Outturn 1993–94	*Estimated outturn 1994–95*	*Spending plans 1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Cash Terms	9,810	10,530	10,960	11,230	11,240
Real Terms (1993–94 prices)	9,810	10,320	10,400	10,400	10,180

[1]Figures rounded as in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

In a demanding public expenditure survey, the Government have had to look for greater efficiency and economy in the delivery of education, but they have maintained priority for this service within their spending plans. In particular, the Government have allowed for growth in the number of students in further education, have extended the scope of the specialist schools programme and have increased the level of support for capital expenditure on schools. Provision is made for continuing growth in the grant-maintained schools programme. As announced last year, participation in higher education has been stabilised at a level where almost one in three young people will be entering higher education. I am announcing measures to promote the private finance initiative in further and higher education; both sectors will be able, in collaboration with the private sector, to increase the planned level of capital work over the next few years.

The plans announced today do not cover the expansion which the Government intend to make in provision for children under five. There will be a further statement about that in due course.

Schools

Specialist Schools Programme

The Government's technology colleges programme has been an outstanding success. It is widening choice for parents, and helping to raise standards in the key subjects of technology, science and maths. Already 50 grant-maintained and voluntary aided schools have received matching funding under the programme from the Government and from private sponsors. As envisaged in the White Paper, "Choice and Diversity", I am now extending the initiative to foreign languages. I also intend to open the programme to county and other maintained secondary schools. Our plans include £15 million, £20 million and £25 million in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively to allow for the extension of the programme.

Capital Expenditure on Schools

Total central Government provision for capital expenditure on county, voluntary and grant-maintained schools is £621 million, £672 million and £661 million in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively. In the first two years, this is an increase of £14 million and £27 million respectively over the figures announced at the time of the last Budget. I also expect the private finance initiative to make an increasing contribution in the schools sector. I shall shortly announce further details of the allocations of grant to voluntary aided schools, and annual capital guidelines to local education authorities. The Funding Agency for Schools will in due course announce the allocations to grant maintained schools.

GM Schools

More than 1,000 schools are now grant-maintained. The Government's expenditure plans provide for further expansion. The GM sector's rate of growth will continue to be determined by parents' decisions in ballots at individual schools; the Government will ensure that every school which becomes grant-maintained receives the necessary funding.

The great bulk of recurrent funding for GM schools is found within the totals for local authority expenditure. Central Government's recurrent expenditure on GM schools is planned to be £83 million in 1995–96. This will be increased in 1996–97 and 1997–98 in line with the increase in GM schooi numbers.

Further Education

The Government continue to give a high priority to further education, as the key to enhancing the competitiveness and prospects for growth of the economy. Our plans will deliver the national targets for education and training, taking the United Kingdom to the top of the international league for participation in education and training among 16-19 year olds. We have been encouraged by the success of the new FE sector in increasing its student numbers, and intend to extend its

period of growth: with continued efficiency gains from colleges, that will continue up to and including 1997–98.

The total grant for the Further Education Funding Council is planned at £3,029 million, £3,133 million and £3,128 million in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively.

The contribution towards capital expenditure within those totals is planned to be some £480 million over the next three years. In addition to maintaining planned funding levels, we are introducing new flexibility in capital and recurrent funding so as to enable colleges to make the most effective use of their resources, and to borrow against the security of Exchequer-funded as well as other assets. This should promote effective estate management and encourage the use of private sector finance, so making possible a significant acceleration in colleges' capital programmes.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement of 14 September 1994 set out the Government's approach to public sector pay in the year now beginning. I shall set as a condition of my grant to the FEFC that it requires institutions in the further education sector to take account of the principles set out in the Chancellor's statement. Any failure by institutions to observe these principles may be expected to have an adverse effect on the level of grant made available to the Council in 1996–97. I shall also withhold £50 million of grant against certification by institutions in the sector that they are continuing to make flexible contracts with lecturers.

Vocational Qualifications

High quality vocational qualifications are central to our future economic development. We introduced general national vocational qualifications to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of young people who seek a first class alternative to academic examinations or work focused national vocational qualifications. GNVQs are a great success. We must now consolidate early progress and ensure that concerns about retaining standards are addressed. We therefore plan to allocate £23 million to this area over the next three years. These additional resources will be used to ensure that all GNVQs meet the same high standards as we continue to expect of traditional academic qualifications, and to develop the part I GNVQ, a new vocational qualification of high quality designed for 14-16 year olds of all abilities, which we shall be piloting in schools from 1995.

Higher Education

Student Numbers

The forecast number of students in higher education has been revised to take account of final enrolment figures for 1993–94. The plans also allow for additional EC students arising from the enlargement of the EC with effect from 1 January 1995. The net effect of these changes is that planned total student numbers are reduced by 2,000 and 7,000 in 1995–96 and 1996–97 compared with the figures underlying last year's Budget; numbers in 1995–96 will still be 2 per cent. higher than in the previous year. Within the planned totals, it should be possible for universities and colleges to expand further the number of part-time students and to keep the participation rate for young people at over 30 per cent. through to 1997–98.

The Teacher Training Agency will be responsible for initial teacher training courses from the academic year 1995–96 onwards. I have asked the Higher Education Funding Council and the TTA to work together to continue to control the number of students in higher education over the next three years.

Tuition Fees

The maximum tuition fees reimbursed through mandatory awards in 1995–96 will be the same as for 1994–95:

	£
Classroom-based courses	750
Laboratory and workshop-based courses	1,600
Clinical elements of medical, dental and veterinary courses	2,800

Grant to the funding Council and the Teacher Training Agency

The total grant for the HEFCE for recurrent and capital expenditure is planned at £3,613 million, £3,596 million and £3,561 million in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively. The total grant for the TTA for recurrent and capital expenditure is planned at £126 million, £174 million and £170 million in these three years; this includes funding for all the functions of the Agency, including the promotion of teaching as a career, as well as grant support for courses of initial teacher training.

The HEFCE and TTA will now have more flexibility in their planned total grant to manage their recurrent and capital allocations. As with the parallel change for the FEFC, this is intended to promote effective estate management by universities and colleges and to promote increased opportunities to borrow from the private sector to fund capital projects, in line with the Government's private finance initiative. The allowance for capital expenditure within the HEFCE grant is £350 million in 1995–96, £393 million in 1996–97 and £388 million in 1997–98. When taken together with the increased flexibility, this should enable higher education institutions to increase their capital investment as compared with previous plans. The TTA grant includes provision for estates formula and equipment funding related to the provision of courses of initial teacher training. All higher education institutions are eligible to apply to the HEFCE for capital funds for major projects.

I have set as a condition of my grant to the HEFCE and TTA that they require institutions in the higher education sector to take account of the principles set out in the Chancellor's statement on public sector pay of 14 September 1994. Any failure by institutions to observe these principles may be expected to have an adverse effect on the level of grant made available in 1996–97.

Student support

The plans allow for the level of student support through the main rates for grants and loans to be increased over the next three years in line with inflation. In 1995–96, loan and grant together will increase by 2.5 per cent. in line with the forecast change in the retail price index, exclusive of mortgage interest payments. Planned expenditure in the financial year 1995–96 is £644 million on loans and £1,102 million on maintenance grants. Access funds are being increased to some £28 million a year.

The main allowances, including dependants' allowances, will also be increased by 2.5 per cent. in 1995–96. However, I have decided to phase out the means-tested allowance payable as part of the maintenance grant to students over 26 who had previously

been in employment. I have also decided to introduce a new rate of loan. This will apply to students who are studying in London and living away from the parental home but who could conveniently live with their parents while studying. There are already special arrangements for grant for such students.

The Government decided last year to accelerate the shift from grant to loan so that by 1996–97 the main rates of grant and loan will be broadly equal. The new plans provide for the main grant rate to be reduced by about 8 per cent. in 1995–96 with a corresponding increase in the loan rates. The parental contribution scales under the awards regulations will be adjusted so that, for parents who residual income has risen at the same rate or slower than the rise in national average earnings, the assessed contribution will continue to fall in real terms.

Ofsted

Expenditure provision for the Office for Standards in Education is planned at £98 million, £116 million and £121 million in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively. This will enable Ofsted, the non-ministerial Government Department which monitors standards in schools in England, to complete the implementation of the new school inspection arrangements, which started in September 1993 for secondary schools and in September 1994 for primary and special schools.

Truancy

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is the total cost of the grants from her Department to install electronic equipment in schools to combat truancy;

(2) if she will name the schools and/or local education authorities which have benefited from grants from her Department to install electronic equipment to combat truancy.

Mr. Forth: The truancy and disaffected pupils programme of the grants for education support and training—GEST—scheme includes experimentation with different methods of registration, including the appropriate use of information technology, as one of a number of activities which may be funded through grant. In the 1994–95 programme, 35 local education authorities included an IT element in their approved GEST proposals. It is not possible to identify the cost of this element separately. The 35 LEAS were:

Barking and Dagenham
Barnsley
Birmingham
Bradford
Buckinghamshire
Camden
Cheshire
Coventry
Croydon
Derbyshire
East Sussex
Hammersmith and Fulham
Hampshire
Haringey
Hounslow
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Knowsley
Leeds
Lincolnshire
Liverpool
Newham
Salford
Sandwell
Sheffield
Solihull
Staffordshire
Stockport
Tameside
Wakefield
Wandsworth
Westminster
West Sussex
Wigan
Wolverhampton

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will name the schools which are fully operating the electronic equipment in schools to combat truancy.

Mr. Forth: It is for individual schools and governing bodies to determine whether or not to install electronic equipment to combat truancy. Details of those which have done so are not collected centrally.

Grant-maintained Schools Foundation

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what are the annual running costs of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation offices in London, Bolton, Kirklees and Willenhall;

(2) how much rent per annum the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation pays for its head office and its regional offices in Bolton, Kirklees and Willenhall;

(3) how many staff are employed by the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation in its offices in London, Bolton, Kirklees and Willenhall.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation's budget estimates for 1994–95 included £56,000 for rent and £401,000 for other running costs, including staffing, for its London office; and £8,000 for rent and £148,000 for other running costs, including staffing, for its local offices in Bolton, Kirklees and Walsall.

There are currently 7.7 full-time equivalent staff employed at the London office and four full-time staff at the three local offices.

Case Study Booklets

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many voluntary schools have ordered copies of the case study booklet on former voluntary schools; and how much her Department spent on the production of the booklet;

(2) how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools have ordered copies of the case study booklet on the experiences of grant-maintained primary schools; and how much her Department spent on the production of the booklet.

Mr. Robin Squire: The three "Experiences" booklets about primary, secondary and former voluntary grant-maintained schools each provide factual information

on grant-maintained status through case studies of seven schools. It is not possible to disaggregate the production costs of these booklets: the combined total cost of all three booklets was £112,500. To the end of October, some 11,100 copies of the primary booklet, 11,700 copies of the secondary booklet and 10,200 copies of the former voluntary booklet had been distributed. The Department does not keep records of the number of schools ordering these booklets.

GM Conferences

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many "Going GM" conferences her Department has organised in each year since 1989–90; at what cost; and how many schools attended each conference.

Mr. Robin Squire: The numbers of "Going GM" conferences organised by the Department are as follows:

1989–90 Nil
1990–91 Nil
1991–92 Nil
1992–93 11
1993–94 18
1994–95 8 (to date).

The total cost of these 37 conferences is estimated to be £583,000. The number of schools represented at each conference has varied from 22 to 139, with an average of 78. Most schools send more than one delegate to these conferences.

Doncaster College for the Deaf

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement in respect of the Further Education Funding Council's decision not to accept Doncaster college for the deaf as a recognised college of further education for the deaf.

Mr. Boswell: The Further Education Funding Council has confirmed that it will continue to fund places for students with learning difficulties and disabilities at Doncaster college for the deaf in cases which meet the council's published criteria for such placements.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to provide information via Internet; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Department is enthusiastic about the potential for using the Internet to facilitate the exchange of information. There are many opportunities and challenges arising from the new communications technology that need to be addressed in all areas of education.

The Department is undertaking pilot projects on the type of material best suited to this style of display. Press notices, including those containing statistical tables, could be made available electronically in this way. Electronic versions of departmental circulars and administrative memoranda might also provide a helpful reference service for educational bodies, as would current awareness lists of publications available from my Department and related bodies. The dissemination of information could be speeded up by providing electronic order forms.

In due course, advantage will be taken of the information pages of the Internet to hold reference material and departmental advice on a range of topics.

The Department will be participating in the follow up to the consultative meeting on information superhighways organised by the Government centre for information systems on 21 November, which has led to the formation of a number of collaborative open groups to look into various aspects of future superhighway development.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the application of the Trustee Investments Act 1961 to colleges of further education.

Mr. Boswell: An authoritative legal interpretation is a matter for the courts. My right hon. Friend is aware of differing external advice on the application of the Act to further education corporations. In the absence of an authoritative interpretation of the Act, it would be prudent for further education corporations to act on the basis that the Act applies to them. The Further Education Funding Council for England has issued guidance on the Act in its publication "Guide for College Governors" and in its circular 93/13.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the application of the Trustee Act 1925 to the governors of further education colleges; and what external advice she has received on the question.

Mr. Boswell: An authoritative legal interpretation is a matter for the courts. My right hon. Friend is aware of differing external advice on the application of the Act to further education corporations. In the absence of an authoritative interpretation of the Act, it would be prudent for further education corporations to act on the basis that the Act applies to them. For the purpose of whether members of corporations may receive any remuneration for their services as a member, my right hon. Friend considers that the lawfulness of any such payment will also depend on whether she has approved the payment in writing.

SCOTLAND

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has to suggest that BSE is either horizontally or maternally transmitted; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: There is no unequivocal evidence from field or experimental studies that the disease can be passed from cow to cow—horizontal transmission—or from a cow to its calf—vertical or maternal transmission.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum

how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. Lang: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available. As regards amounts spent on official hospitality, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 October, *Official Report*, column *594* to the question by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor).

Students (Exam Results)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students in each of the last three years in Scotland were dissatisfied with the higher grades allocated to them and asked for for their papers to be remarked; and in how many cases original marks were *(a)* upgraded, *(b)* downgraded and *(c)* unchanged.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The conditions for the award of the Scottish certificate of education do not include specific provisions for the remarking of candidates' scripts after the issue of results. Presenting centres are however able to appeal on behalf of candidates for reconsideration of an award at higher grade at band "C" or above on the basis of attainment other than that produced in the Scottish Examination Board's set examination. The table sets out information in relation to higher grade appeals submitted in each of the last three years.

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
No. of appeals submitted	16,488	16,731	18,761
No. of successful appeals	6,902	7,467	7,764
No. of unsuccessful appeals	9,586	9,264	10,997

Source:
Scottish Examination Board.

Teachers

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of expenditure incurred in training *(a)* a teacher with a postgraduate certificate and *(b)* a teacher with a bachelor of education in Scotland for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94 inclusive; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Comprehensive information for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94 is not available. The information set out in the table is based upon returns from teacher education institutions detailing course costs for the years 1990–91 and 1991–92 and funding allocated to institutions by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council for teacher education in 1993–94. The figures include also an estimate of student support costs, assuming entitlement to full maintenance grant and loan at the "home" rates.

Estimated annual cost per student

Course	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
PGCE Primary (one year postgraduate course)	7,110	7,220	Not available	7,200
PGCE Secondary (one year postgraduate course)	7,690	7,290	Not available	7,200
BEd Primary (4 year course)	6,680	6,570	Not available	6,760
BEd Secondary (4 year course)	7,850	6,620	Not available	7,450

Education (Complaints)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to improve the complaints procedures for parents in Scotland this year; and in which education authorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is important that education authorities have good complaints procedures so that parents can secure proper redress if things go wrong in schools. While such complaints procedures are primarily a matter for education authorities, the Scottish Office Education Department recently provided funding of £6,000 to the Scottish Consumer Council toward research in this field. The results of the research are contained in a report by the council on complaints and redress in Scottish schools, published in August 1994, entitled "Could Do Better". I welcome the report as a valuable contribution to the improvement of complaints procedures.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what grants will be available from the local authorities to support the work of educational, social and cultural organisations after the present regional councils cease to exist.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It will be for the new councils to determine the nature and level of support to educational, social and cultural organisations in the light of their statutory and other responsibilities. They will do so by taking into account both the information provided by their predecessors on funding of voluntary organisations and expenditure priorities for the resources available to them.

Dounreay

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent reports his Department has received from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority on radiological safety and contamination at the Dounreay nuclear facility.

Sir Hector Monro: My Department receives regular reports from Dounreay, the most recent was an interim report on radioactive metallic particle finds on the Dounreay foreshore and was received by HM industrial pollution inspectorate on 27 October.

Loganair

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has as yet imposed financial penalties on Loganair in respect of the number of cancelled passenger flights between Glasgow and Barra; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The level of financial support paid to Loganair for the operation of the Glasgow-Tiree-Barra air service in the current financial year has been abated to take account of the number of cancellations on the route.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what feasibility studies he carried out on the passenger air link service between Glasgow and Barra before awarding it to Loganair.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The award of the contract to Loganair was made on the basis of a full evaluation of the bids received.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the terms and conditions arranged between his Department and Loganair for supplying a passenger air service between Glasgow and Barra.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The terms and conditions of contract between Loganair and the Scottish Office require the operator to provide a specified service between Glasgow and Tiree and Barra in return for the provision of financial support, up to a specified limit, based on the deficit incurred in operating the service. In general terms the operator is required to operate in accordance with the CAA regulatory regime, to advise the Scottish Office of any failure to operate the specified service, and to provide detailed financial information on the performance of the service. The contract can be terminated by either party with six months' notice and the consent of the Secretary of State is required for every change in the capacity, frequency, nature or any other attribute of the service.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current cost of the public subsidy paid to Loganair for operating a passenger air service between Glasgow and Barra.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The financial support provided by the Scottish Office is for the operation of the air service between Glasgow and Tiree and Barra. The service operates as a combined service for part of the year and the Glasgow to Barra route is not identified separately. Financial support of up to £115,000 is payable for the operation of the service for each year of the contract between Loganair and the Scottish Office.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints to date his Department had received in respect of the Loganair-Shorts 360 passenger air link service between Glasgow and Barra; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has received 15 letters about the reliability of the air service between Glasgow and Tiree and Barra since the introduction of the Shorts 360 aircraft in March 1994. In addition, a petition containing 147 names was received requesting the replacement of the Shorts 360 aircraft on the Barra leg of the air service. In responding to the correspondence it was emphasised that the operation of the service was being monitored closely and that discussions were underway with the operator on ways in which improvements in reliability could be achieved quickly.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reason Loganair gave his Department for suspending the De Haviland Twin Otter air link between Glasgow and Barra and replacing it with the Short 360; and what negotiations it had with his Department before implementing the change.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Loganair's decision to dispose of its Twin Otter on the Glasgow-Tiree-Barra air service was made on the ground of the aircraft's age. The Shorts 360 aircraft was introduced with the intention of upgrading the service to improve passenger comfort, and increasing passenger and freight capacity. The Scottish Office, as the contractor, was consulted about the proposed change.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many times the Loganair-Shorts 360 aircraft passenger service between *(a)* Glasgow and Barra and *(b)* Barra and Glasgow has been cancelled since the service first became operational; and what percentage of total services this represents.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the period 28 March 1994 to 24 November 1994 inclusive, there were 210 scheduled rotations by the Shorts 360 on the Glasgow-Barra-Glasgow element of the Glasgow-Tiree-Barra air service. During this period 42 rotations, or 20 per cent. of the total, were cancelled. It is estimated that 22 rotational cancellations were linked to the operational limitations of the Shorts 360 aircraft.

Business Rates

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on business rates for 1995–96.

Mr. Lang: The estimated outcome of the 1995 revaluation will allow the average non-domestic rate poundage in Scotland to be reduced from its present level. I therefore propose to prescribe for 1995–96 a single rate poundage applying throughout the country of 43.2p and, at the same time, to abolish industrial derating entirely.

The introduction of a unified business rate poundage of 43.2p for Scotland, at the same level as in England, represents the successful culmination of the progress that has been made in recent years towards harmonising poundages. In the years after 1995–96 we will maintain a unified business rate in Scotland and it will continue to be pegged at the same level as in England to ensure a level playing field for Scottish business. This harmonisation will continue through future revaluations, and maintaining it will not be a burden on the Scottish Office expenditure programmes.

Taking together the effects of the forthcoming revaluation with this decision on the level of the rate poundage, I estimate that there will be significant local and sectoral shifts in rate burdens. My Department's consultation paper, published last month, outlined proposals for transitional arrangements to phase in the effect of these shifts on rate bills. In the light of responses to that paper, and the package of support announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer today, I now propose that no business will face year-on-year increases of more than 10 per cent., after allowing for inflation. For property with a new rateable value of less than £10,000, the maximum real increase will be 7.5 per cent., while for part-residential subjects with a rateable value of less than £10,000 the corresponding limit will be 5 per cent.

The Exchequer contribution, amounting to £72 million in 1995–96, will cover part of the cost of the scheme. The remaining element will be met by limiting real reductions in rates bills, in line with one of the options presented in the consultation paper. For 1995–96, the limits will be 10 per cent. for properties with a new rateable value below £10,000 and 5 per cent. for larger ones.

Other details of the transitional arrangements will be based on the proposals in the consultation paper. My officials intend to hold further detailed discussions with

the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Assessors' Association in the light of responses to the paper. Once these consultative discussions are concluded, regulations giving effect to these proposals will be laid before Parliament.

Common Services Agency

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in the sale of the building division of the Common Services Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Following an invitation to tender, 41 companies including a joint in-house management team and company expressed interest. This resulted in seven bids and following further clarification of these and negotiations with the parties I am pleased to announce that the Common Services Agency has with my consent accepted the offer from W.S. Atkins. The result is a receipt of £250,000 plus VAT to be re-invested in health care in Scotland and the continuity of employment for around 100 staff who will transfer with their existing workload to their new employers on 1 December 1994. The transfer is subject to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and will be a clean break for the agency with no continuing liabilities and warranties to be underwritten by it.

I regard the outcome as in the best interests of the taxpayer, of the staff and for the NHS in Scotland.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce details of the 1995–96 Scottish local government finance settlement.

Mr. Lang:

Government Support Expenditure

I propose that Government supported expenditure—GSE—for 1995–96 should be set at £6,116.9 million. Inclusive of additional provision for care in the community, this is an increase of 1.72 per cent. on the current year's figure.

Grant Aided Expenditure

I estimate that local authorities will incur £798.7 million on loan and leasing charges in 1995–96. This amount is top-sliced from GSE, leaving a residual amount for grant aided expenditure—GAE—of £5,318.2 million. This figure is 1.11 per cent. higher than that for the current year. I shall announce GAE figures for individual local authorities as soon as possible.

Aggregate External Finance

I further propose that Government-determined support for local authority current expenditure—that is, aggregate external finance (AEF)—for 1995–96 should be set at £5,306 million. This is an increase of 0.64 per cent. on the current year's figure. Proposals for the distribution of AEF to individual local authorities are again likely to be issued before Christmas.

Provisional Capping Principles

To assist local authorities in their budgeting process, I have again decided to announce provisional capping principles for the year ahead. I have the power to cap a Scottish local authority either where I consider that its planned expenditure is excessive or where there is an excessive increase in its planned expenditure as compared with the previous year. My provisional capping principles for 1995–96 are:

(a) *for regional and islands councils*

any increase in budget between 1994–95 and 1995–96 of more than 0.7 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is above the local authority's grant aided expenditure (GAE) assessment for 1995–96;

(b) *for district councils*

any increase in budget between 1994–95 and 1995–96 of more than 0.5 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is above the local authority's GAE assessment for 1995–96; and

(c) *for all local authorities*

any budget for 1995–96 more than 12.5 per cent. above the local authority's GAE assessment will be excessive save that:

(a) if that budget is 30 per cent. or less above the authority's GAE assessment for 1995-96 and that budget is no greater than the budget set by that authority for 1994–95, the authority will not be capped;

(b) if that budget is 60 per cent. or less above the authority's GAE assessment for 1995–96 and that budget is at least 5 per cent. below the budget set by that authority for 1994–95, the authority will not be capped;

(c) if that budget is at least 10 per cent. below the budget set by the authority for 1994–95, the authority will not be capped.

Council Tax Transitional Relief Scheme

As we are now approaching the third year of the council tax and tax payers have had an opportunity to adjust to the new system, I have decided not to continue in 1995–96 the transitional relief scheme which has operated for the past two years.

In determining the level of this settlement, I have assumed—in line with the Government's general approach to public sector pay—that any pay increases for Scottish local authority employees will be fully funded by efficiency savings. The settlement includes provision for a number of additional burdens being placed on local authorities next year including improvements to school and social work transport, the continued introduction of devolved school management, child care developments and the costs of the elections of the shadow councils.

This is a tight settlement but, having regard to the low level of inflation and the Government's approach to public sector pay, a realistic one. The onus is now on local authorities to act sensibly in setting their budgets and council tax levels for next year. I shall not hesitate to use my capping powers to prevent excessive expenditure.

Nurses

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of qualified nursing staff by specialty for each region in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: As information requested is rather lengthy I am arranging for a copy of the reply to be sent to the hon. Member and will place a copy in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Travel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many overseas visits he and each of his Ministers made between 1 January and 30 June; during how many

he or each of his Ministers participated in fund-raising activities for the Conservative party; and if he will list the Ministers and the countries in which these activities took place.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Between 1 January and 30 June 1994, Ministers in my Department made 11 overseas visits in their official capacity. Fund-raising activities for the Conservative party are not part of our official duties.

Exports

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was Scotland's share of United Kingdom exports in each year since 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* As shown in the table, Scottish exports continue to rise. The Scottish Council Development and Industry's survey of Scottish manufactured exports revealed that, in 1993, exports reached a new high of almost £11.5 billion. The growth rate of 19.2 per cent. from the previous year indicates that the opportunities presented by a competitive currency and lower interest rates over the past two years have been grasped by Scottish industry.

Scottish manufactured exports have grown faster in the last two years than in the previous six

Scotland's share of United Kingdom exports 1994–95

Year	Per cent. share	Year	Per cent. share
1974	10.4	1984	9.6
1975	11.2	1985	9.6
1976	12.3	1986	8.9
1977	11.5	1987	9.6
1978	9.5	1988	10.0
1979	9.1	1989	9.4
1980	9.0	1990	9.5
1981	9.8	1991	9.6
1982	9.3	1992	10.1
1983	9.6	1993	10.3

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the value of Scottish exports to the Scottish economy in *(a)* absolute terms and *(b)* as a percentage of gross domestic product in each year since 1979.

Mr Lang *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* As Scottish gross domestic product is not calculated on an expenditure measure, it is not possible to make direct comparisons with this data.

Value of Scottish Exports 1979–93

Year	Value Current Prices £ million
1979	3,410
1980	3,762
1981	4,024
1982	4,065
1983	4,532
1984	4,953
1985	5,522
1986	5,300
1987	6,393
1988	7,166
1989	7,664
1990	8,574
1991	8,833

Value of Scottish Exports 1979–93

Year	Value Current Prices £ million
1992	9,682
1993	11,540

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the value to Scotland's economy of exports from the *(a)* food and drink, *(b)* chemicals, *(c)* oil and gas, *(d)* engineering, *(e)* electronics, *(f)* financial services and *(g)* tourism sectors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Strong growth recorded in all Scotland's major exporting industries over the period.

Sectoral performances in 1993 reveal food and drink exports were worth some £2.5 billion, of which £2.1 billion is whisky; chemicals worth £1.3 billion; engineering, including mechanical, transport equipment and motor vehicle parts £1.4 billion; electronics, including computers, £4.9 billion; tourism £670 million provisional figure—financial services worth £285 million, rising to around £393.7 million if legal and accountancy figures are included.

Oil and gas sector exports in the period were estimated to be worth some £850 million. This figure relates to exports generated by service sector and supply companies in the world marketplace. Such Scottish companies export around 20 per cent. of their annual turnover.

North Lanarkshire Council

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he makes of the cost to his Department of setting up the new North Lanarkshire council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The cost to my Department of setting up the new Lanarkshire council has not been quantified but is likely to be minimal.

Road Safety

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given to regional and islands councils on the gritting of roads leading to schools which are not designated bus routes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* No specific advice has been given to regional and islands councils on the gritting of roads leading to schools which are not designated bus routes. Regional and islands councils determine their own priorities for gritting roads for which they are responsible.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given to education authorities on school bussing in adverse weather conditions and where access to a school requires school buses to travel on roads other than designated bus routes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* None. Under sections 50 and 51 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, responsibilities for the

provision of school transport are placed on individual education authorities.

M80 Motorway

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects construction to commence on the proposed M80 motorway between Stepps and Haggs; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* After widespread consultation, a decision will be taken shortly on the proposed route for the M80, followed in due course by initiation of the appropriate statutory procedures. The construction timetable will be dependent on completion of the statutory procedures and the availability of finance.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full national vocational qualifications have been awarded in the current year and in each year since 1992; at which levels these awards were made; and how many, at each level, were awarded in construction, engineering, manufacturing, health and social care, business administration, accounting and financial services and management, respectively.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The available information on Scottish vocational qualifications is set out in the table.

Standard occupational classification group	*SVQ Level 1*	*SVQ Level 2*	*SVQ Level 3*	*SVQ Level 4*	*SVQ Level 5*
Constructing	—	44	6	—	—
Engineering	42	—	44	—	—
Manufacturing	—	91	—	—	—
Providing health, social care and protective services	248	225	1	—	—
Providing business services	589	684	43	10	8
Other	648	879	—	—	—
Total	1,527	1,923	94	10	8

Source:
Data files supplied by SCOTVEC.

Refugees (College Fees)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the current practice whereby colleges charge asylum seekers and political refugees the home student rates of fees for part-time study; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The Scottish Office Education Department is currently consulting further higher education institutions about the possibility of allowing them to charge part-time students from overseas a different rate of fees from home students. It is not our intention to change how individuals granted refugee status are treated. Institutions have specifically been asked as part of the consultation if they are likely to offer concessions to students who have applied for refugee status. Their responses will be taken into account in taking any proposals forward.

Community Care

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what considerations led him to favour the private sector for the development of a mixed economy of community care; what consideration he gave to the use of the voluntary sector or direct local provision; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Prior to 1 April 1993 local authorities purchased no community care services from the private sector. Since then the Government have transferred considerable resources to local authorities which under previous arrangements would have been used to purchase residential and nursing homes care from the private and voluntary sectors. The new arrangements are based on local authorities undertaking an enabling role. They should commission services offering quality and value for money. That involves not only arranging care in their own provider units but purchasing care from providers in the private and voluntary sectors.

While many authorities have taken on this role on an even-handed, basis some appear to wish to use the additional resources to favour their own provider units even when these do not offer best value for money. The Secretary of State has encouraged authorities to make best use of the resources available to meet the care needs of the people in their areas.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what priority he gives to *(a)* quality and standards, *(b)* accessibility and affordability for all and *(c)* cost-efficiency in the development of a mixed economy of community care.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The Government, in their guidance to local statutory and independent sector agencies, have pointed to the importance of all these factors. Local authorities are responsible for evaluating the relative importance of each of these factors as they relate to individuals' needs. In doing so they must also take full account of individuals' choice.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce an inspection and registration procedure for domiciliary care in the community.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* My right hon. Friend has no such plans at present.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the evidence he has that the development of the mixed economy of community care has been unsatisfactory.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The Scottish Office publishes a range of annual indicators on community care, including the development of the mixed economy.

Forests

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date Her Majesty's Treasury was invited to comment on the Forest Enterprise framework document.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* HM Treasury is assisting with the preparation of the framework document and a draft was discussed with it on 21 October.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to present the Forest Enterprise framework document to Parliament and to publish it for public consultation.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The finalised framework document will be published and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the areas of land identified by the Forestry Commission or Forest Enterprise for sale since 1981 but which have not been sold, with the size of those areas, the county or, if in Scotland, region in which they are situated and the year in which they were identified for sale.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The Forestry Commission keeps records of all the land it has sold and of land it currently has on the market. It does not, however, retain records on cases where land was put on the market and then later withdrawn, for whatever reason. The information requested is therefore not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 30 November 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures he has taken to support alternative dispute resolution.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has welcomed the growth of private alternative dispute resolution services where the parties do not need the compulsion, finality and certainty that only the courts can provide. My officials have carefully studied reports of ADR experience in this country and abroad. However, before committing public money to ADR the Lord Chancellor is concerned to have much greater certainty that such methods would produce the benefits to the Department which its supporters claim.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are three top secret and 124 secret files out of a total of 105,535 files in the Lord Chancellor's Department. These figures refer to individual file parts. The proportion of top secret and secret files is 0.002 per cent. and 0.117 per cent respectively.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices, his official residence in London and official residences.

Mr. Howard: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available, but no public expenditure is envisaged in relation to Christmas festivities.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that all chief constables define crimes accurately when compiling statistics.

Mr. Maclean: When recording offences police consult Home Office rules for classification and counting of crimes which are standard for all the police forces in England and Wales. The classification of crimes is determined by precise statutory definitions. A comprehensive set of counting rules is used by police forces in order to maintain the consistency of recording multiple, continuous and repeated offences. Whilst these detailed rules are issued centrally, many decisions still have to be taken locally about the recording and counting of criminal incidents. When carrying out force inspections, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary looks carefully at how forces record crime. If it seems that crimes are being wrongly recorded, HMIC will advise forces to adjust their practice.

Criminal Justice Act

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and on the Bill which led to it.

Mr. Maclean: About 2,000 letters have been received from members of Parliament, most of them covering representations from constituents about the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill or Act or aspects of them. In addition, around 2,500 letters have been received direct from members of the public, together with representations from groups with a particular interest in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been charged under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Mr. Maclean: Information on numbers of people charged is not collected centrally. Information on the number of people cautioned and the number of court proceedings for offences committed under the Criminal Justice Act 1994 will become available from the autumn of 1995.

Police (Disciplinary Code)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Police Federation about police officers incurring debt due to the Child Support Act and their disciplinary code; what response he has given to the suggestion to change the disciplinary code; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: None. On 28 June, the president of ACPO wrote to chief constables expressing confidence that the service would be compassionate to officers who experienced financial difficulties as a result of Child Support Agency commitments.

The Government have already announced that new police disciplinary procedures will be implemented under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. These will give police managers greater discretion when dealing with officers in debt, however the debt was incurred.

Fire Services

Mr. Chidgey : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of fire appliances arrived at emergencies in the London area within *(a)* three minutes, *(b)* four minutes, *(c)* five minutes, *(d)* six

minutes, *(e)* seven minutes, *(f)* eight minutes, *(g)* nine minutes, *(h)* 10 minutes, *(i)* 11 minutes and, *(j)* 12 minutes, in 1992, 1993 and in the current year to date.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The data requested are shown in the table; 1993 is the latest year for which data are available.

Response times[1] to fires in London, 1992 and 1993

Response times (minutes)	1992 Number of fires	1992 Cumulative percentage	1993 Number of fires	1993 Cumulative percentage
Within 3	5,650	27.3	5,142	25.7
4	6,319	57.9	5,769	54.5
5	5,269	83.3	5,015	79.5
6	1,639	91.3	1,941	89.2
7	776	95.0	1,048	94.5
8	476	97.3	529	97.1
9	209	98.3	244	98.3
10	129	99.0	139	99.0
11	59	99.2	57	99.3
12	29	99.4	36	99.5
Over 12 minutes or unknown	129	100.0	105	100.0

[1] The interval between the time of the first call taken by the brigade and the time the first appliance arrived at the fireground.

Source:
Home Office fire statistics

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the data he has for the response times for fire appliances in Hampshire in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The data requested are shown in the table:

Response times to fires in Hampshire, 1992 and 1993

Response time	1992 Number of fires	1992 Cumulative Percentage	1993 Number of fires	1993 Cumulative Percentage
Within 5 minutes	1,970	51.8	1,890	54.8
6–10 minutes	1,439	89.7	1,263	91.5
11–15 minutes	279	97.0	211	97.6
16–20 minutes	49	98.3	31	98.5
Over 20 minutes	27	99.0	8	98.7
Unknown	38	100.0	44	100.0

Note:
1) The interval between the time of the first call taken by the brigade and the time the first appliance arrived at the fireground.

Source:
Home Office fire statistics.

Omasese Lumumba

Mr. Cohen : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now place in the Library the internal prison report into the death of Mr. Omasese Lumumba; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 30 November 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the death of Mr. Omasese Lumumba.

Subject to considerations of security and to the Coroner's consent, before an inquest, the Prison Service is generally prepared to disclose copies of documents provided to the Coroner to anyone who is a "properly interested person"under the Coroner's rules.

Reports of follow-up internal investigations, including statements taken by the investigating governor, are not disclosed as the Prison Service needs to be able to conduct its own review of the case in confidence.

A similar policy applies to the deaths of persons in the custody of the Prison Service detained under the Immigration Act.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average wait for asylum applications; and how many applicants have waited for *(a)* six months, *(b)* one year, *(c)* two years and *(d)* over two years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The estimated average length of time between the receipt of an asylum application and the decision, for cases decided in the period 1 August 1994 to 31 October 1994, on applications received since the introduction of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 on 26 July 1993 was 6.8 months.

In the period 1 August 1994 to 31 October 1994, there were 6,105 decisions made on applications for asylum. Of these, 1,600 took under six months to decide; 1,525 took between six months and a year; 1,385 took between one and two years; and 1,595 took longer than two years for an initial decision on their application for asylum.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the length of time each detained asylum seeker has been held in custody; what review he undertook of their cases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: On 18 November 1994, 654 people who had claimed asylum at some stage were detained under powers contained in the Immigration Act 1991. Of this total, 167 had been detained for less than 1 month; 125 between one and two months; 233 between two and six months; and 129 had been in detention for more than six months.

The initial decision to detain is reviewed within 24 hours by an immigration service inspector. Thereafter, all detention is reviewed locally at least every seven days.

After one month the case is reviewed at immigration service headquarters. These reviews continue monthly and at an increasingly senior level. In addition, I receive a monthly report on all cases where detention has been maintained for more than 12 months.

Private Security Services

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provisions of training and health and safety practices for people working in the private security service.

Mr. Maclean: The Government believe that training is essentially a matter for the private security industry and its customers. We welcome the industry's efforts to develop and raise standards in this area. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 applies to those employed by private security companies as it does to other employees in the workplace.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to introduce regulations to ensure a minimum standard of conduct for private security operators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to do so.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much money has been spent on hospitality by the Commission for Racial Equality in each of the last five years; if he will indicate *(a)* the nature and cost and *(b)* the purpose of each event; how many (i) guests and (ii) commission personnel enjoyed the hospitality at each event; and if he will make a statement;

(2) under what authority the Commission for Racial Equality may extend hospitality in public houses to the staff of right hon. and hon. Members; what was the purpose of the reception for research assistants planned by the commission for Thursday 24 November in the Red Lion pub, Whitehall; why that reception was subsequently cancelled; if he will ensure that public funds are not used by the commission for such purposes in the future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to suspend all payments to the Commission for Racial Equality until such time as the House has the opportunity to consider proposed legislation for its abolition.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what funds have been made available to the Commission for Racial Equality in each of the last five years for which figures are available; for what purpose those funds are intended; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give a breakdown by *(a)* ethnic background and *(b)* salary of the numbers of people currently employed by the Commission for Racial Equality.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is detailed in the Commission for Racial Equality's annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Police Pay

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that police authorities fully compensate police officers for any losses incurred as a result of changes in pay day arrangements.

Mr. Maclean: It is for a police authority, within the terms of regulation 46 of the Police Regulations, to fix the pay day for members of the police force. I am confident that if a police authority decided to change existing arrangements it would manage the process so as to ensure that police officers were not disadvantaged.

Conservative Party Conference, Brighton

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state *(a)* the number of payments made, *(b)* the total sum, *(c)* the highest individual award and *(d)* the average time taken to make the payment in respect of persons injured in the Brighton bombing at the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. member to the answer given to the hon. member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 19 October at column *246*.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average cost per person per month for bail hostel accommodation.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The total average cost per person per month for approved probation/bail hostel accommodation in 1993–94 was £1,451, reflecting occupancy in the system as a whole of only 68 per cent. With improved occupancy, the projected figure for 1994–95 is £1,232.

Greyhound Racing

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to consult interested parties about the proposals to deregulate the controls on betting on greyhound racing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have today issued a consultation document which gives details of the proposed changes to the law controlling betting on greyhound racing. These will give consumers a wider range of betting opportunities and remove the outdated restrictions governing betting on the sport. At the same time we shall ensure that sufficient safeguards are maintained to protect consumers.

One of the key benefits is the proposed introduction of a new system of inter-track tote betting. Customers will have the freedom to bet into large linked pools on races at other licensed tracks. There will be provision for local authorities to oversee the operation of inter-track betting.

The other deregulatory measures, such as removal of the requirement for an accountant to be present whenever totes are operated, represent sensible improvements in the current controls. Such changes will not, in the view of those representatives of local authorities previously consulted, interfere with the proper supervision of tote betting at greyhound tracks.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation process, we propose to bring forward these changes by means of a draft order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out

Act 1984. Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Libraries.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Howard: As at 31 December 1993, the Home Office held 707 top secret and 86,049 secret files, representing 0.015 per cent. and 1.8 per cent. respectively of the approximate total—4.8 million—of the Department's files at that time.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mining Licences

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements are being implemented for existing licenses mine owners to renew their licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is a matter for the Coal Authority. I am asking the Coal Authority to write to the hon. Member.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mrs. Anne Campbell : To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his plans to increase the security of temporary on-site nuclear waste storage facilities at nuclear power stations.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The safety of storage facilities for radioactive waste on nuclear power station sites is a matter on which the operator must satisfy the regulatory authorities.

Post Office

Dr. Marek: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money has been raised by *(a)* capital receipts arising from the reductions in the numbers of Crown post offices in the last 15 years and *(b)* for savings in revenue expenditure consequent on the reductions.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The reduction in Crown post offices since April 1989, largely due to the conversion programme of Crown post offices to agency status, had by March 1994 yielded £5.0 million in capital receipts and £20.7 million in annually recurring revenue savings.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress towards the entry into force of the chemical weapons convention; and if it remains his policy that the United Kingdom should become an original signatory of the convention.

Mr. Heseltine: It remains the Government's policy to ratify the chemical weapons convention as soon as possible. The necessary implementing legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time and other Government legislative priorities permit.

Life Assurance Companies

Mr. Denham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what sanctions are available to his Department to bring against the directors of life assurance companies which have been found to be in serious breach of regulations governing the financial service industry.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 the Secretary of State's powers are exercisable in relation to insurance companies rather than in relation to individual directors. However, under that Act the Secretary of State shall not authorise a company to carry on insurance business, and may withdraw an existing authorisation, if it appears to him that any director, controller, manager or main agent of the company is not a fit and proper person to hold the position held by him. The powers of intervention set out in sections 38 and 41 to 45 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 are also exercisable on these grounds.

Fraud Investigations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy that findings of DTI inspectors will continue to be made available to police investigating fraud.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Yes. It is and will remain my Department's policy to do so in appropriate cases.

Waste Paper and Packaging

Mr. Gallie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are being taken to bring stability to the United Kingdom waste paper and packaging collection market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Stability in the market cannot be guaranteed, since waste paper is an internationally traded commodity, and as such is subject to fluctuating demand and price. I believe, however, that two developments will help bring about greater stability than that experienced in recent months as a result of packaging waste management regulations in other countries.

The first is the adoption of the proposed EC Directive harmonising member states' regulations in this area, which the Government has supported. I am hopeful that such adoption will occur before the end of 1994. The second is the introduction of industry measures in response to our producer responsibility initiative for packaging. These should lead to co-ordinated recycling activity which is related to demand, and does not trigger the distorting effects of over-collection which have been apparent elsewhere.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Ian Taylor: No central record is kept by my Department of files marked "top secret" and "secret". Offices throughout the Department may possess in their registries any number of files bearing protective markings. The information requested is therefore not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Dounreay

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what grounds AEA technology jobs at Dounreay have been privatised.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government's intention to privatise what is now AEA Technology was announced last February by my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, 17 February 1994, *Official Report*, columns *922-24*. The announcement outlined the criteria on which decisions on the form of privatisation will be taken. As announced in the Queen's Speech, a Bill to provide for privatisation will be introduced this Session.

Scottish Hallmarks

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received concerning the continuity of the Scottish hallmark, the lion rampant and Edinburgh castle marks in relation to proposals emanating from the European Commission on hall-marking and assay offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have received no specific representations concerning the Scottish marks. The Government are aware of the depth of feeling in the industry at large, in the assay offices, and amongst consumer organisations, that traditional marks, including town marks, should continue to be allowed under the terms of the proposed directive. The Government will continue to argue for their use.

Life assurance

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the implications for unit-linked life assurance policies of the High Court judgement in the case of Fuji *v.* Aetna

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In July this year the Vice Chancellor the right hon. Sir Donald Nicholls gave judgment in the Chancery Division of the High Court on a preliminary point arising in a dispute between a life insurance company and one of its policyholders—Fuji Finance Inc. *v.* Aetna Life Insurance Ltd. and Another. The Vice Chancellor decided that a particular contract which purported to be a contract of life insurance was not, as a matter of law, a contract of insurance at all. The feature of the contract which led to this conclusion was that there was no difference, once the contract had run for five years, between the amount payable on the death of the life assured at a given time and the amount that could be obtained by surrendering the policy at the same time.

An appeal has been launched against this judgment, and the outcome of that appeal may obviously affect the position. But on the basis of the judgment it appears possible that other linked policies which offer no greater return on death than on surrender may similarly not be regarded as contracts of insurance. However, the judgment did not express an opinion about policies which, during the majority of their term, carry on somewhat higher additional level of benefit on death, or include some other guarantee in relation to the benefits payable on death but not on surrender.

The Department of Trade and Industry does not monitor as a matter of course the terms of individual life insurance policies. However, prior to the Vice Chancellor's judgment, the level of additional benefit on death included in a linked policy was not considered by the Department to be critical in determining whether the policy was a contract of insurance. The Department would have taken into account other features of the contract; and it seems likely that, had the question been raised, policies of the kind described in the judgment would have been treated by the Department as life assurance policies. I understand that the Financial Services Act regulators and the Inland Revenue have taken a similar view: as, presumably, have life assurance companies and their policyholders. It is understandable, therefore, that the judgment has created some concern in the insurance industry, particularly as it is not yet clear how far it affects contracts that are similar to, but not on all fours with, the particular policy that was considered in this case.

Companies which have not already done so will wish to take advice upon the legal implications of this judgment for linked policies issued by them. It may however be helpful to them to explain the Government's attitude to certain statutory provisions which appear relevant.

Section 16 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 prohibits insurance companies from carrying on activities other than in connection with or for the purposes of their insurance business; and the Act confers upon the DTI certain powers of intervention if there is a failure to comply with that section. The Department has taken the view that the judgment has created sufficient uncertainty about the status of contracts carrying no additional benefit on death that it would wish to know if companies propose to continue to issue any such policies. As regards other policies, the Department does not propose to take any action while the judgment is under appeal. However, when the outcome of the appeal is known, it will clearly need to review the position with a view to ensuring that the terms of the section are met for the future.

Companies will also need to bear in mind that their authorisation to carry on investment business under Section 22 of the Financial Services Act 1986 relates only to insurance business and other business that can be conducted in accordance with section 16 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982.

In considering whether to use its enforcement powers in relation to investment business carried on in contravention of section 3 of the FSA, one of the factors which the Securities and Investments Board will take into account, in relation to business carried on prior to the judgment, is that contracts of the kinds likely to be affected have been consistently treated as contracts of insurance. Investors considering whether to take action under section 5 of the FSA will also need to take account of the same factor.

My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is making a separate statement about the tax implications of the judgment.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council on 17 November.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Council adopted a resolution setting a date of 1 January 1998 for the liberalisation of the provision of telecommunications infrastructure, with a possibility of five years additional transition period for Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Greece and two years for Luxembourg. The United Kingdom, supported by five other countries, called upon the Commission to submit proposals for an earlier liberalisation of the use of alternative infrastructure for those services already liberalised at the Community level.

The Council also agreed a common position on a directive on standards for digital television. In addition, the Council agreed, in principle a common position on a decision on guidelines for the development for the integrated services digital networks as a trans-European network. The Council also reached agreement on all the outstanding issues on a decision on interchange of data between Administrations, except funding. The decision was referred back to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further discussion of the budget. The text of a Council Resolution on access to the space segment and the reform of the international satellite organisations was agreed.

There was a short debate on the draft directives on mutual recognition of satellite and telecommunications licences. The Commission made presentations on the results of its consultations on the Green Paper on Mobile and Personal Communications and its communication on transport telematics. The Commission also stated that it expected to produce proposals on liberalisation of postal services during the first part of 1995.

No formal vote was taken at this Council.

Tile and Sanitary Ware Manufacturing

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultation he has had with the United Kingdom tile and sanitary ware manufacturers concerning the implications of granting aid to encourage inward investment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* I have had no consultation with the United Kingdom tile and sanitary ware manufacturers with regard to the implications for granting aid to encourage inward investment. The United Kingdom industry is not consulted about individual applications for assistance. The likely impact on the United Kingdom industry of assistance towards investment projects is always assessed before decisions are made on whether or not grant should be offered.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance he has approved for inward investment in Turkish sanitary ware and ceramic tile manufacturing to Merseyside.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* I cannot comment on discussions between companies and the Department which are commercially confidential.

H. L. Foods Ltd.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money H. L. Foods, through its cannery at Wisbech, has been paid from assisted area status funding to purchase equipment; how much of this was spent on purchasing equipment from Hobson plc's former cannery at Lowestoft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* We do not disclose information on individual cases, which is given on a commercial in confidence basis.

Capcom Financial Services

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to appropriate authorities in the USA concerning the affairs of Capcom Financial Services of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* No representations have been made by me to the appropriate authority in USA concerning the affairs of CAPCOM Financial Services of London.

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about Capcom Financial Services of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* It is not the practice of the Department to comment on the affairs of individual companies.

Oil and Gas Exploration

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what environmental advice he received on blocks 106/24, 106/25 and 106/30A prior to offering them for tender.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Those environmental Departments and organisations who provided advice following consultation, both generally for the Round and in respect of blocks 106/24, 106/25 and 106/30a are indicated on the following list.

Countryside Commission[1]
Department of the Environment[1]
Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland[1]
Dyfed Wildlife Trust[1]
Friends of Cardigan Bay[2]
Friends of the Earth Cymru[1]
Greenpeace[1]
Joint Countryside Advisory Service[1]
Joint Nature Conservation Committee[2]
who in turn consult—
English Nature
Countryside Council for Wales
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Scottish Natural Heritage
Sea Mammal Research Unit
North Wales Wildlife Trust[2]
The National Trust[1]
RSNC Wildlife Trusts Partnership[2]
Strangford Lough Management Committee[1]
Welsh Office[2]
The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust[1]
Wildlife and Countryside Link[2]
World Wide Fund for Nature[2]

[1] Those who provided advice on the Round.
[2] Those who have specifically mentioned blocks 106/24, 106/25 and 106/30a in their advice.

Coal Industry

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who much the chairmen and members of the British Coal Authority are to be paid; and, for each member, what other publicly funded posts they hold.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Sir David White receives a salary of £18,000 a year as part-time Chairman of the Coal Authority. Mr Neville Washington, its full-time chief executive, receives a salary of £55,000 plus pension and a car allowance. He is also eligible for a non-pensionable performance bonus. The other part-time members receive a salary of £5,500 per annum.

The other paid public appointments held by the members of the Coal Authority are:

Sir David White: Chairman of the Nottingham health authority;

Mr. Roy Lynk: Industrial tribunal member in Nottingham; and

Mr. Leslie Rendell: the retiring director of planning and transport of Warwickshire county council.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fire Certificate

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what applications were made in the last year for the Houses of Parliament to receive a fire certificate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ray Powell : No application has been made for a fire certificate in the last year. Home Office fire inspectors have recently surveyed the Palace of Westminster and are expected to be in a position to issue a fire certificate in 1995.

Access Passes

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will list those organisations, excluding media organisations, whose employees have, to date, been issued by the House authorities with passes giving access to the House; what are the main criteria which are observed in determining eligibility for passes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* As the number of organisations whose employees are issued with passes is very large, I will write to the hon. Member.

PRIME MINISTER

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to order a public inquiry into illegal and improper activities by the Welsh Development Agency.

The Prime Minister: None. The mistakes of the past are being thoroughly investigated by the new management team. The chief executive of the agency is keeping the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee fully informed.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has stated clearly that the highest standards should be observed in all the Welsh Development Agency's dealings.

Ministers' Cars

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what rules apply to the marque of official cars used by Ministers.

The Prime Minister: Cabinet Ministers are normally given the choice of a Rover Sterling, Rover 827Si or any other vehicle from the Rover 800 series.

Other Ministers are normally given the choice of a Rover 416, 2-litre Montego, 2-litre Vauxhall Cavalier, 2-litre Ford Mondeo or diesel equivalents.

Steroids

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will set up a public inquiry into the use of steroids in hospitals;

(2) if he will make a statement on the use of steroids;

(3) what consideration he is giving, with the Secretary of State for Health, to measures to reassure the public regarding the use of steroids;

(4) if he will inquire into the case of Mrs. Niven of 11 Alvin close, Binley, Coventry.

The Prime Minister: Corticosteroids are long-established medicines which are important in the treatment of many serious illnesses, and their overall benefits to patients outweigh their side-effects. The Department of Health has fully investigated the effects of corticosteroids, given by mouth or injection, on the body's immune system. Advice about patients who are susceptible to chickenpox has been issued to all doctors.

A public inquiry is not appropriate. It is for doctors to decide the appropriate treatment for their patients with the benefit of advice from their professional bodies. The circumstances surrounding Mrs. Niven's death were fully investigated by the Coventry and Warwick hospital and the outcome discussed with her family.

The Department of Health has issued a press statement regarding the safety of corticosteroids, advising patients using these medicines who are concerned to see their doctor and not to stop their medication suddenly. As with all licensed medicines, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health continues to monitor their safety.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

The Prime Minister: Approximately 1 to 2 per cent. of the files held in my office are top secret, approximately five per cent. are secret.

Citizens Charter (Mr. Purnell)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from Mr. David Hernandez Purnell; and what was his response.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* I have received a number of representations. These relate to a specific matter which is the responsibility of the Highways Agency. The agency is giving active consideration to the case.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement regarding the letter of 13 November to the Treasury Solicitor from a constituent of the hon. Member for Woolwich, a copy of which was forwarded to him; and what assessment he has made of the conformity of Her Majesty's Government's action with the spirit of the citizens charter.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* I have nothing further to add to the reply that my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science, gave to the hon. Member on 28 November, *Official Report,* columns *483-84.*

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Committee of the Regions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union have been held since it was established under the Maastricht treaty; what reports have been received from the Committee to date; what responses have been made to these reports; and what has been the cost of United Kingdom required representation to the Committee.

Mr. David Davis: There have been five plenary meetings of the EC's Committee of the Regions. The Council has so far received 20 opinions from the Committee. The Council makes no formal response to opinions, but takes them into account during the decision-making process. No attendance is required at Committee meetings. Members receive travel and subsistence allowances for meetings which they do attend. We do not hold information on expenses paid to individual Committee members.

Short Stay Visas

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many short stay visas were issued last year; and what were the figures for the 10 main countries of origin.

Mr. Baldry: In 1993, 609,297 single entry visit visas, and 12,230 short term multiple entry visas, valid for six months, were issued to people seeking to make visits of six months or less.

The top countries where these visas were issued—not all were to nationals of the country concerned—were as follows:

Country	*Number of applications issued*
India	60,153
Russia	58,277
USA	39,589
Pakistan	36,647
Turkey	36,227
Thailand	30,606
Nigeria	24,470
Iran	16,835
China	15,687

The British Trade and Cultural Office in Taipei also processed 51,264 applications during 1993.

Jonathan Moyle

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome of Her Majesty's Government's representation and investigations into the death of Jonathan Moyle.

Mr. Baldry: It is for the Chilean authorities to investigate the circumstances of Mr. Moyle's death. We have co-operated with them fully from the outset. On 9 September 1991 a verdict was announced that Mr. Moyle's death was

"attributed to third party involvement where the identity of the third party cannot be ascertained".

The case is being investigated further and a report will be submitted to the Chilean Court of Appeal for consideration. We await the court's findings and in the light of those will consider what further action needs to be taken. An inquest into Mr. Moyle's death is also being conducted by HM coroner for the district of Exeter and East Devon.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Blaenau, Gwent may expect a letter on the extension of article III to the Anglo-American mutual defence agreement on atomic matters promised in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report,* column *1382;* and if the letter will be published in the *Official Report.*

Mr. David Davies: I wrote to the hon. Member on 22 November. The text of the letter was as follows:

"I promised to write to you in response to your recent Parliamentary Questions on the 1958 UK/US Mutual Defence Agreement.

As you know, the 1958 Agreement enables the United Kingdom and the United States to co-operate on the use of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes. While the main part of the Agreement is not time-limited, Article III bis, which relates to the two-way exchange of special nuclear materials and other products, requires periodic amendment to ensure its continuing relevance and validity. The most recent amendment to this article, which was ratified in 1984, expires at the end of this year. We and the United States have agreed that there should be a further amendment to enable these exchanges to continue for another ten years.

Article VI of the Agreement addresses questions of the security and physical protection of the information and materials exchanged. While both the UK and US operate rigorous and effective materials control and accountancy arrangements, we have decided that it would be prudent to acknowledge explicitly the existence of these arrangements in the text of the Agreement. We have therefore agreed that Article VI should be amended accordingly.

The text of the amendment to the Agreement was agreed in May this year following discussions between officials of the two Governments. The 1994 amendment was laid before Parliament on 21 October. The Ponsonby Rule requires it to remain there for 21 sitting days before it can be ratified".

I am arranging for a copy of this letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Algeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what attempts have been made to have an integrated European Union approach to the current political situation in Algeria; and what was the outcome.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 30 May 1994 the EU ministerial troika visited Algiers. The conclusions of the European Council at Corfu on 24–25 June 1994 included a passage on Algeria. The EU issued a joint statement on Algeria on 26 September 1994.

Unfortunately the cessation of violence and the dialogue for which the EU has called have not come about.

Oil Spills, Russia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help is being sent by Her Majesty's Government to Russia for oil spills in the north of Russia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We stand ready to help, but Russia has made it clear that no international assistance is required for the present.

Apes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the World Society for the Protection of Animals about the killing of the great apes of Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have received no representations from the World Society for the Protection of Animals about the killing of the great apes of Africa. It is a matter for the individual countries involved to pass the domestic legislation to prevent the killing of their apes. We are, however, always concerned by reports of cruelty to animals and encourage others to adopt our own high standards of animal welfare.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Baldry: FCO departments hold as many current files as is necessary for their operational needs. A proportion of these, consistent with security requirements, are top secret and secret. A breakdown of these could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Indonesia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Indonesia concerning the abuse of human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Our regular discussions with the Indonesians cover a wide range of issues, including human rights. With European Union partners, we have most recently expressed concern about the conviction and sentencing of Mr. Muchtar Pakpahan.

Science and Technology

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken to review the work of science and technology sections at British missions overseas to fulfil one of the commitments of the 1993 White Paper, "Realising our Potential: a Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology".

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am pleased to be able to inform the House that in the first half of this year an interdepartmental team from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Office of Science and Technology and the British Council carried out a major review of science and technology work in diplomatic missions and British Council offices overseas. I have just endorsed the report of this review. It will be published on 1 December 1994. I have arranged for a copy of the report to be deposited in the Library of the House.

Gibraltar

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar on the position of Moroccan workers employed at the British military base who may become redundant in the near future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply.

During my recent visit to Gibraltar I met the Gibraltar Government Minister for the Environment and Tourism and we discussed the announced reductions in the MOD presence in Gibraltar and the implications for locally entered staff, including Moroccan employees.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Moi University, Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it was a condition of the British funding of the Margaret Thatcher library at Moi university in Kenya that there should be academic freedom at the university.

Mr. Baldry: The library will make an important contribution to learning and the output of graduates, particularly in science and technology, on which Kenya's development depends. While good government is a criteria in the allocation of United Kingdom aid, no specific condition was made relating to academic freedom when the project was approved in 1987.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost to the British funds of the construction of the Margaret Thatcher library at Moi university in Kenya.

Mr. Baldry: Construction costs paid for from the British aid programme, including architects' fees, amounted to £4.44 million. The overall project, including the provision of training and books, will be completed within the total agreed allocation of £8.373 million.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British firms have benefited from the construction of the Margaret Thatcher library at Moi university in Kenya.

Mr. Baldry: Ove Arup and Partners were the project engineers. UBM Overseas Ltd. (UK) supplied the materials. In addition, Triad Architects Planners were involved in the design and supervision work.

Population Control

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on countries in which advertising campaigns are portraying those who do not use artificial contraception or choose to have large families as irresponsible or anti-social; if he will list those countries in which such campaigns are run; and if he classifies such campaigns as coercive.

Mr. Baldry: We do not have comprehensive information on advertising campaigns in this area.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department takes to monitor population policies in countries in which projects connected with population receive funding from his Department.

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Administration, or the relevant multilateral organisations to which it contributes, examine national population policies in the course of the design and management of projects which they fund; they will also seek to contribute, where appropriate, to further development of these policies.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department takes to ensure that projects funded by his Department do not assist coercive population control strategies in countries where the projects are based.

Mr. Baldry: We do not support any population activities in which there is coercion of individuals to practise family planning, or to accept any particular type of contraception. We scrutinise proposals prior to funding and monitor their implementation to ensure that coercive approaches are avoided.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has regarding countries which tie education, health and development provision to contraceptive use or offer such provision on beneficial terms to contraceptive users; if he will list those countries where he is aware that this occurs; and whether he classifies such practices as coercive.

Mr. Baldry: We do not have detailed information. We believe that the use of contraception should be a matter of free individual choice. Governments were discouraged at the international conference on population and development from either the use of incentives or disincentives in promoting contraception use. We strongly supported this recommendation.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on projects funded by the core funds of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations fund for population activities and what steps his Department takes to monitor these projects.

Mr. Baldry: The United Nations Population Fund 1993 inventory of population projects and the International Planned Parenthood Federation 1994 annual report supplement contain details of these organisations' activities. Copies of both these publications are in the Library of the House.

We regularly assess the policies and programmes of UNFPA and IPPF in relation to our policies.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he classifies as coercive methods taken by countries pursuing population policies, where projects are funded by his Department, to create peer pressure to use artificial contraception.

Mr. Baldry: We support activities which help people to be more aware of the choices available to them in family planning. We support the exercise of free individual choice and oppose coercive methods.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the will list all grants for population policies and initiatives, given by his Department to projects, agencies or Governments giving in each case the amount of the grant, the terms of the project and the country in which the project is based.

Mr. Baldry: We will place in the Library a list of population and reproductive health projects and programmes supported under the aid programme in calendar year 1993.

Tanzania

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current bilateral aid programme for Tanzania, set out by sector.

Mr. Baldry: In 1993–94, we disbursed £20.7 million to Tanzania through the bilateral aid programme. Of this, £10 million was in the form of conditional balance of payments support. The remainder was used to support projects in the following sectors:

	£ million
Natural resources	1.9
Economic infrastructure	3.8
Financial sector	0.2
Public administration	0.7
Education	1.3
Health and population	1.3
Miscellaneous	1.5

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the agreement he has entered into in respect of the modernisation of the port of Tanga, Tanzania.

Mr. Baldry: An exchange of letters formalising this project took place on 14 November. Under this agreement, ODA will support rehabilitation and maintenance work at Tanga Port, and provide training and supervision. The cost to the British aid programme will be £4.69 million. The project is expected to be completed in 1997.

EDUCATION

Bullying

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the extent of bullying of disabled pupils in schools; and what specific guidance she gives to schools and local education authorities on this matter.

Mr. Forth: Ofsted's framework for inspection requires inspecting teams to obtain the views of pupils, parents and teachers on the incidence of bullying and the school's response to it. Reports should include an evaluation of the measures taken by the school to prevent and eliminate bullying.

The Department's anti-bullying pack, "Don't Suffer in Silence", published in September, included practical guidance on strategies that schools can adopt to combat bullying of pupils, including those with special educational needs. In addition, the Department stressed the importance of effective action against bullying in guidance on pupil behaviour and discipline, sent to local education authorities and all maintained schools in May as part of the "Pupils with Problems" series of circulars.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her estimate of the total cost of making 50 per cent., 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. of *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools fully accessible to disabled people, such accessibility to include the provision of appropriate toilet facilities.

Mr. Forth: The best source of cost information is an independent report from Coopers and Lybrand issued in April 1993. These estimates, based on a large sample of schools, indicated that the costs for providing physical access to all primary schools would be about £400 million and to all secondary schools about £1,300 million. The survey estimated that to make 50 per cent. of secondary schools 100 per cent. accessible would be £251 million; it did not include analogous figures for primary schools. It did not provide full figures for 75 per cent. of schools in either sector. These data include the cost of ramps, lifts and disabled toilets. They do not include corner widening, means of escape or specialist furniture.

Ofsted

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what were the targets for the number of school inspections to be undertaken by Ofsted in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* in the current school year; and if she will break the targets down for (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools, (iii) special schools and (iv) sixth-form colleges;

(2) how may *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* special schools and *(d)* sixth-form colleges were inspected by Ofsted in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) in the current school year.

Mr. Forth: These are matters for her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files her Department holds.

Mr. Boswell: The Department does not hold any files classified as top secret; 78 of the Department's holding of approximately 265,000 files are classified as secret.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which right hon. and hon. members have visited the headquarters of the Student Loans Company since it was set up.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department currently has in excess of 120,000 files, of which approximately 300 are classified as secret and four top secret.

Indemnity Undertakings

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many indemnity undertakings were given by Departments under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980 for the six month period ending 30 September 1994; and what is the value of any contingent liabilities in respect such undertakings given at any time which remain outstanding as at 30 September 1994.

Mr. Dorrell: The information that my hon. Friend requests is as follows:

In the six-month period ended 30 September 1994, the following undertakings to indemnify were given by the relevant departments for items on loan to national and non-national institutions:

Department of National Heritage	503
Scottish Office Education Department	108
Welsh Office Education Department	39
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	19

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time and outstanding at 30 September 1994 are:

	£
Department of National Heritage	1,730,975,529
Scottish Office Education Department	394,655,574
Welsh Office Education Department	36,265,802
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	4,573,154

National Lottery

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has had with the Millennium Fund Commission concerning its powers in relation *(a)* to the choice of schemes for financial support in Wales, *(b)* to amending any such schemes which are applicants for assistance and *(c)* to amending the constitutions and personnel of sponsoring bodies of such applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The Millennium Commission was consulted on directions issued under section 26(1) of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 concerning matters to be taken into account when considering applications and, under section 26(3), for securing the proper management and control of lottery proceeds. Within this framework, it is for each distributing body to establish their own processes for handling applications and, in my capacity as Secretary of State, I have had no specific discussions with the commission on any of these matters. As chairman of the commission, however, I am directly involved in the development of its policies and procedures. The Millennium Commission issued detailed guidance for applicants on November 28 which will explain how applications for funding should be prepared and submitted.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make it his policy to ensure an increase of national lottery sales outlets in Montgomeryshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked Peter Davis, the director general of the national lottery, who is responsible for regulating the

operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. and learned Gentleman, and to place copies his response in the Libraries of the House.

Open Government

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the charging policy of his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible in respect of inquiries under the code of practice on access to Government.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 22 November 1994]:* In line with guidance on charging produced by the Office of Public Service and Science, which recognises the diversity of cost and operational structure across the range of bodies implementing the code, my Department has developed the following scheme of charges for information under the code of practice on access to Government information.

My Department and the two agencies for which I am responsible make no charge for responding to straightforward enquiries. Charges will, however, be made where the cost of responding to the inquiry would exceed a threshold—currently £100. This will normally represent half of one day's work charged at an average cost for staff undertaking the work.

Above the £100 threshold, charges may be made according to the average daily rates of the staff undertaking the work. Charges are designed to cover, but not exceed, the cost of processing the request for information and are payable whether or not the request for information can be supplied in full. Where it is proposed to make a charge, the Department and its agencies will write to the inquirer and ask them to pay in advance for the material requested.

Those responding to inquiries will at all stages keep applicants informed of the likely charges to be made by providing an estimated charge, which is normally payable before further work is undertaken.

EMPLOYMENT

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Miss Widdecombe: Ministers intend to send an estimated 480 cards this year. They would cost *(a)* £330 to buy and *(b)* £86 to post. The information at *(c)* is not available. I intend to place a copy of the official card, which supports the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund, in the Library in the new year.

Employment of Children

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has substantially to increase the penalties for employing children or allowing children who are under age to work in factories or businesses.

Mr. Oppenheim: Breaches of the Employment of Women, Children and Young Persons Act 1920, which prohibits children from working in factories, already attract a maximum fine of £5,000. Local byelaws which set strict rules on the employment of children provide for a maximum penalty of £1,000.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases before industrial tribunals in the last year have been heard before a chairman alone.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Industrial Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) Regulations 1993 gave effect as from 16 December 1993 to provisions in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 which empower industrial tribunal chairmen to hear certain cases without lay members. From 16 December 1993 until the end of October 1994, 3,148 cases have been heard before chairmen sitting alone.

Unemployment

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people between the ages of 16 and 25 years in Lewisham, East *(a)* are registered unemployed and *(b)* have been unemployed for 12 months or more; and what are these figures expressed as a percentage in that age group in that area.

Mr. Oppenheim: In October 1994 the total number of unemployed claimants aged under 25 years in Lewisham East stood at 1,257 down 6 per cent. on the year, and the number of the latter who were unemployed for over a year stood at 398, down 10 per cent. on the year.

Claimant unemployment rates by age are only available nationally and are publish in table 2.15 of the *Employment Gazette,* a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people between the ages of 16 and 25 years are registered as unemployed in each of the London boroughs; and what the figures are as a percentage of that age group in each borough and in London as a whole; how many have been unemployed for 12 months; and what this figure is expressed as a percentage in that age group in each borough and in London as a whole.

Mr. Oppenheim: Claimant unemployment rates by age are only available nationally and are published in table 2.15 of the *Employment Gazette.* Information on the numbers of claimant unemployed in each London borough, analysed by age and duration of claimant, is available for the months of January, April, July and October and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Non-EU Employees

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits have been issued in connection with LEAR Seating Corporation in Coventry in the last six months.

Mr. Oppenheim: A total of 18 work permits have been issued to Lear Seating (UK) Ltd. within the last six months.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits were issued to

residents in the United States of America, Canada and Mexico to undertake temporary work in the United kingdom in each of the last three years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The number of work permits issued to nationals of the United States, Canada and Mexico in each of the last three years is shown in the following table:

Year	*USA*	*Canada*	*Mexico*
1991	10,851	742	51
1992	11,617	916	55
1993	11,633	1,004	75

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the need to employ temporary labour from outside the European Union from LEAR Seating Corporation in Coventry.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have received no representations concerning this issue other than applications for work permits.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department group holds *(a)* 24 top secret files and *(b)* 1,033 secret files.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

The Attorney-General: The number of current top secret and secret files held in the Departments for which I am responsible is as follows:

	Top Secret	*Secret*
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	29	326
Crown Prosecution Service	2	14
Treasury Solicitor's Department	10	101
Serious Fraud Office	—	—

Pergau Dam

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what involvement he had in the Foreign Secretary's defence in the recent Pergau dam court case.

The Attorney-General: By convention, the Law Officers do not normally disclose whether they have been asked to advise on a particular issue or the substance of any advice that they may have given.

Victims Compensation Scheme

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what involvement he had in the Home Secretary's defence in the recent victims compensation scheme court case.

The Attorney-General: By convention, the Law Officers do not normally disclose whether they have been asked to advise on a particular issue or the substance of any advice that they may have given.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all those instances where contracting out of a function or service, previously provided in-house, has resulted in an identifiable improvement in the quality of the service provided.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The following list shows functions contracted out under the competing for quality programme in the period from 1 April 1992 to 31 December 1993 where departments have informed the efficiency unit that an improved quality of service has been specified.

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Document Creation Unit (ADAS)
Buildings and Estate Management
Marine Surveillance
Library
Recruitment (up to Grade 7)

Central Office of Information
Catering
Office Services—Custody
Office Services—Cleaning

Central Statistical Office
Catering

HM Customs and Excise
Staff Restaurant, Queens Dock
Catering—Custom House, London
Catering—Dorset House, London
Catering–Manchester HQ
Debt Recovery Services
Vehicle Fleet Management

Ministry of Defence
Works Services: Cyprus, Gibraltar, Falklands, Belize
Harrier Support
Helicopter Support: Osprey, Heron, Seah
Tailoring (Northern Ireland)
Ration Delivery (Northern Ireland)

Department for Education
Catering

Department of Employment
Travel Services
Van Service Sheffield-Runcorn
Estates Maintenance
ERC Courses for Disabled (Employment Service)

Department of the Environment
Planning Inspectorate IT Project Management

Export Credits Guarantee Department
IT Operational Support
Receptionist/Telephonist Services

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Purchasing Services

Department of Health
Operation and redevelopment of Hospital Episodes Statistics System
Office and Building Service London
Office Services, Quarry House

HMSO
Typing Services Publications

Home Office
Waste Disposal (Forensic Science Service)
Estate Management (Forensic Science Service)
Escort Services
HM Prison Blakenhurst
Prison Education

Inland Revenue
Writing Training Material
Reprographic
IT Services

Intervention Board
Travel Service

HM Land Registry
Legal Services
Surveys

Department of National Heritage
Hampton Court Garden Maintenance

Department of National Savings
Catering Services, Durham
Press Cuttings

Northern Ireland Civil Service
Property Certificate Service
Date Preparation
Operating Mainframe Computer

Office of Public Service and Science
Reprographics (Chessington Computer Centre)
Press Relations (Civil Service College)
Catering and Related (Civil Service College)
Distribution (Civil Service College)
London Centre Relocation (Civil Service College)
Building and Grounds Maintenance (Civil Service College)
Catering (RAS)
Reprographics (RAS)

Ordnance Survey
Hardware Maintenance
Bulk Enveloping and Dispatch

Scottish Office
Catering, Fire School
Department of Social Security
Travel Services (Benefits Agency)
Facilities Management (HQ)
Audit (ITSA)

Department of Trade and Industry
Database Maintenance
Stationery Supply

HM Treasury
Internal Audit

Treasury Solicitor's Department
Security

ENVIRONMENT

Retailers (Planning Permission)

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to make it easier for retailers to get planning permission for new sites in or near town centres.

Mr. Gummer: As part of their strategy to revitalise their town centres I have encouraged local authorities to assess the capacity of their town centre for further retail development and to promote retail development in or on the edge of town centres through their development plan.

Home Renovation Grants

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many home renovation grants were made in 1984, 1989 and the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In 1984 and 1989 local authorities awarded 229,000 and 98,000 home improvement grants respectively. In 1993 90,000 grants were given under the new provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Town Centres

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which modern supermarkets in the right place can improve local services and attract new investment to the town centre economy.

Mr. Gummer: Retail developments in town centres increase the choice, widen the opportunities available, and add to the attraction of those centres. Supermarkets located in the right place, in or next to town centres, can provide the anchor for other types of retailing, and thus help ensure the viability of town centres.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being undertaken to encourage the revitalisation of town centres.

Mr. Gummer: I have taken a number of measures, including:

issuing guidance to local planning authorities to focus retail development in or next to town centres through policies and proposals in their development plans;

advising on good practice for local authorities to help them implement this guidance; and

encouraging positive promotion of town centres and town centre management.

I intend to consider this matter further, among other issues, at a symposium on quality in town and country which I am hosting on 12 December.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue new guidance on change of use of buildings in town centres.

Sir Paul Beresford: Current planning policy guidance on the change of use of buildings in town centres is contained in planning policy guidance note No. 6, "Town Centres and Retail Developments", issued in July 1993. There are no current proposals to issue new guidance.

There are, however, proposals to extend permitted development rights so that the use of space above shops can be changed to a single flat or back again without a planning application, provided there is no material alteration to the outside of the building.

Homelessness

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homeless families there are *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in Greater London and *(c)* in Redbridge; how many there were in 1979; and what plans he has to reduce the numbers.

Mr. Curry: During the 12 months ending June this year 128,062 households were accepted as statutorily homeless by local authorities in England, 30,920 by the London boroughs and 586 by the London borough of Redbridge. The equivalent figures for 1979 were 55,530, 16,400 and 311. The number of acceptances over the previous 12 months has now fallen for nine successive quarters.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the most recent homelessness figures.

Mr. Curry: The most recent figures show that for nine quarters in succession English local authorities have accepted fewer households as statutorily homeless than in the same period 12 months previously. Moreover, the number of households in temporary accommodation fell 13 per cent. and the number in bed-and-breakfast hotels went down 27 per cent., compared with 12 months earlier. I find these figures encouraging.

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make a statement about the Government's plans in respect of homelessness legislation.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction told the House on 18 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *21-23*, we intend to introduce legislation when parliamentary time permits.

Food Retailers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage genuine competition between different food retailers.

Mr. Gummer: My policy is to locate retail development in or near town centres where the proximity of competing businesses facilitates competition from which consumers can benefit.

The market place remains the main stimulus to competition. Through planning policy guidance notes Nos. 6 and 13, competition is being encouraged to take place in a way that reinforces rather than undermines the vitality and viability of existing town centres.

Environmental Protection

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in environmental protection in the last year.

Mr. Atkins: Significant progress has been made over the last twelve months. This will be extensively reported both in my Department's annual report early next year and in the annual White Paper report on the environment which I will publish in spring.

Environmentally Friendly Transport

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussion he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport to encourage the use of environmentally friendly transport.

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend regularly discusses matters concerning transport and the environment with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Most recently, we discussed the Government's initial response to the report on transport produced by the Royal Commission on environmental pollution.

Council House Sales

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in England since May 1979.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: More than 1.4 million tenants bought their homes from English local authorities and new towns between April 1979 and June 1994.

Housing Association Rents

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the current levels of housing association rents.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received 230 representations concerning the level of housing association rents since 1 January 1994.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the percentage increase in rents for new housing association assured tenancies between 1989 and 1994; and what has been the changes in retail prices index over the same period.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Average rents for new housing association assured tenancies increased by 84.5 per cent. between 1989 and the first half of 1994. Over the same period, the proportion of the total housing association stock represented by these lettings rose from 10 per cent. to 14 per cent.

The retail prices index increased by 24.4 per cent. over the same period.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with local authorities on this year's standard spending assessment settlement.

Mr. Curry: I have had discussions with the local authority associations in the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. Ministers have also received delegations from individual local authorities, including one from Coventry city council on 24 November 1994.

Private Housing Renewal Programmes

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a statement on the outcome of his consultation on the future of private housing renewal programmes.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am still considering the options for longer-term changes to the house renovation grant system following last year's public consultation. We will make an announcement in due course.

River Thames

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the River Thames can be put to better use.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes).

Packaging Waste

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made recently to increase the percentage of packaging waste recycled.

Mr. Atkins: We have challenged the packaging industry to devise an industry-led scheme to substantially increase the recovery and recycling of packaging waste by the year 2000. The industry has published its proposals which would lead to a doubling of packaging value recovery levels to nearly 60 per cent. by the year 2000.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the effects on services in Northumberland of the standard spending assessment and capping systems.

Mr. Curry: My Department has received a large number of letters on this issue.

Negative Equity

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of people trapped in negative housing equity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Estimates of negative equity vary. Based on Department of the Environment house price data, in the third quarter of 1994 an estimated 644,310 households were affected by negative equity. This is a fall of almost 9 per cent. on the second quarter and is 47 per cent. lower than the peak in the fourth quarter of 1992.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *66*, if he will provide a regional breakdown of households suffering negative equity and an estimate of the sums involved.

Mr. Robert B Jones: An estimate of the number of households affected by negative equity and the value of negative equity by region based on Department of the Environment house price data, is as follows:

Region	*Number of households (thousands)*	*Value (millions)*
South East	346	-1713
Greater London	80	-248
South West	115	-376
East Anglia	51	-237
East Midlands	11	-16
West Midlands	11	-14
Wales	4	-3
Yorkshire and Humberside	17	-16
North West	7	-3
North	1	—
Scotland	—	—
Northern Ireland	1	-1
United Kingdom	644	-2,628

Arts, Museums and Libraries

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had on the effect of local government reorganisation on the funding of arts, museums and libraries by local authorities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Local Government Commission consults bodies connected with the arts, museums and library services before making recommendations for the structure of local government. We allow time to receive and consider representations from interested parties on those recommendations before taking decisions on them. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage is consulting representatives of the local authority associations and expert bodies in these fields with a view to issuing guidance, where necessary, to new authorities.

Water Pollution

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to reduce pollution in rivers.

Sir Paul Beresford: We have ensured that the National Rivers Authority has the powers and the resources to maintain and improve the quality of our rivers. Around 90 per cent. of rivers in England and Wales are of good or fair quality.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the main sources of *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* phosphates in the water supply, given in order of importance with the percentage contribution made by each source.

Mr. Atkins: The pesticides most frequently detected in supplies are atrazine, simazine, diuron, isoproturon, mecoprop and chlorotoluron. The first three were mainly used for weed control in non-agricultural situations such as roads, railways and on other hard surfaces. However,

the approvals for the use of atrazine and simazine in these situations were withdrawn in August 1993. The other three pesticides are almost exclusively used for weed control in cereals. While concentrations of individual pesticides in drinking water sometimes exceed the legal requirement of 0.1 µg/litre, there is no evidence that any of these contraventions was of such a magnitude or duration as to endanger the health of consumers. Investment is in hand to deal with these exceedances.

Phosphates can be found in water supplies derived from surface water sources; groundwater sources usually contain insignificant levels. Phosphates originate mainly from sewage effluents, industrial effluents or from agricultural run-off from inorganic fertilisers.

Figures for the percentage contribution for pesticides and phosphates from each source are not available as the respective amounts vary between rural and urban environments and between ground water and surface water sources and at different times of the year.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost in the last three years to water and river authorities of making water supplies drinkable.

Mr. Atkins: Water industry capital expenditure on the drinking water compliance programme during the period 1990–91 to 1993–94 was around £2.5 billion at 1993–94 prices.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of removing *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* phosphates from the water supply in each of the last three years.

Mr. Atkins: Information is not available in the form requested. However I understand that capital expenditure by water companies in England and Wales on new treatment to remove pesticides from water put into supply was £122 million in 1992–93 and that in 1993–94 and 1994–95 companies were planning to spend £170 million and £207 million respectively. There is not normally a requirement to remove phosphate from water before it is put into supply as drinking water.

Integrated Pollution Control

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes are to be made to the scheme of fees and charges for integrated pollution control operated by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Atkin: Minor changes to the HMIP Integrated Pollution Control Fees and Charges Scheme 1994–95 take effect from 1 December 1994. They are consequent upon changes in the governing legislation made by Statutory Instruments Nos. 1271—The Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 1994, and 1329—The Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances etc.) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1994. Copies of the amendment to the scheme are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to each recommendation proposed by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux in its document entitled "Taxing Times, CAB Evidence on the Council Tax", dated September 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration wrote to the chief executive of the national association on 17 October responding to each recommendation which relates to the policy and legislative framework of the council tax. A copy of his letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Air Pollution

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to tackle severe air pollution, including winter smog.

Mr. Atkins: Many measures are already in place to reduce emissions of pollutants into the air. These include catalytic converters, which have been required on all cars since the end of 1992. As a result, the risk of episodes of high pollution is expected to decrease over the next few years. In March, the Government published a consultation paper, "Improving Air Quality", which initiated wide-ranging and constructive debate. The Government intend to publish then proposals shortly.

Women's Refuges

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made towards achieving a comprehensive network of women's refuge provision; what was the outcome of the consideration by Ministers of the need for improved co-ordination of refuge provision; what information he has about local authorities without a refuge in their area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The provision of women's refuge is best decided by local authorities and other agencies taking into account issues such as the local supply of housing available for short-term use in emergency situations. The ministerial group on domestic violence met on 17 May and discussed, among other issues, the need for a centrally co-ordinated policy on refuge provision. The Group agreed to consider this further at its next meeting.

The Department does not hold information about the number of local authorities without a refuge in their area.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: Officials have been asked to investigate the feasibility of publishing a range of departmental information through Internet. No firm decision has yet been taken by the Department to use this service.

Race Bank

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the Hull university report on the dredging on Race Bank; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Atkins: The report was commissioned by the National Rivers Authority and it is up to them to decide

whether or not to publish it and whether to place a copy in the House Library.

Rented Housing

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total output of rented homes by housing associations and local authorities in the current year; and what the figure was for 1978–79.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment gave to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Alfed Morris) on 29 November 1994.

Construction Industry

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken within his Department to support his sponsorship of the construction industry.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Following a reorganisation of sponsorship activities last year, my Department has undertaken, and is continuing to undertake, an enhanced range of activities to encourage the success and competitiveness of the construction industry both at home and overseas.

These include:

Consultation arrangements between the Department and the industry, comprising twice-yearly meetings between the Secretary of State for the Environment and senior industry representatives on strategic issues; regular briefing meetings between the industry representatives and Ministers on specific construction-related topics, thus enabling Ministers to hear industry's views and concerns at first hand; meetings of a consultative group set up to discuss current issues and concerns at official level; a consultative committee on construction industry statistics set up to discuss initiatives on the provision of statistical and market intelligence information; and the publication of "Construction Monitor", a monthly newsletter published with *Building* magazine, containing European, United Kingdom and statistical information.

Sponsorship activities, including helping to take forward the implementation of the Latham Report into the construction industry's procurement and contractual arrangements; progressing the practical implementation of the Construction Products Directive; the establishment with the industry of the Construction Procurement Group which aims to help reduce the United Kingdom's excessive trade deficit in construction products; the launch of a Construction Benchmarking Challenge which is providing financial assistance towards the establishment of four benchmarking clubs; carrying out strategic analyses of specific sectors of the industry to identify ways of improving Government support; proposals to promote prompt payment arrangements in Government construction contracts through use of standard contract conditions; provision of an improved range of statistics and other information to help industry decision makers; policy opposition to the use of on-demand bonds; and proposals to reform the Architects' Registration Acts to simplify the current system.

Research and Innovation initiatives, including the establishment of a whole industry research strategy group to develop a joint Government industry strategy for research and innovation; establishment of a construction industry panel under the Government's Technology Foresight programme; increasing the proportion of total research and development spend allocated to collaborative projects funded jointly with industry; the launch of the construction industry European research club with strong DoE encouragement to help the United Kingdom construction industry to increase its participation in European research, and gain increased access to funding; the launch of the LINK/IDAC integration in design and construction programme to encourage improvements in the quality and competitiveness of the United Kingdom construction industry through academic/industry research into the construction process; and support for the Construction Quality Forum which seeks to improve quality in construction through information exchange.

Export Services, including carrying out six trade missions in 1994, the setting up of a number of building material task forces; the production of a new video to promote the British construction industry around the world; and the organisation of inward visits by overseas clients.

Ealing Council

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the financial balances of Ealing council in *(a)* May 1990 and *(b)* May 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Ealing council reported a deficit in reserves of £12,000 at 1 April 1990 and a surplus in reserves at 1 April 1994 of £40,891,000 (or £43,682,000 including those earmarked for local management of schools).

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many bids under the single regeneration budget have been received by his Department; and what is the amount of money that is to be allocated.

Mr. Curry: A total of 469 bids were received by Government offices in the regions for funding from the single regeneration budget. A total of £125 million will be allocated to bidders in respect of successful projects in 1995–96, subject to satisfactory performance.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what payment will be made to support small businesses under the single regeneration budget in 1995–96; and what is the percentage difference from the provision made for this purpose in the current year.

Mr. Curry: Support for small businesses is one of the priorities of the single regeneration budget and commitments from constituents programmes, including the business start-up scheme and regional enterprise grant, will continue to be honoured in 1995–96. The overall level of resources given to support small businesses in 1995–96 will depend upon the outcome of the first bidding round.

Repossessions

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate of the number of

households likely to lose their home through repossession for mortgage arrears in the next 12 months.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department does not make forecasts of the number of households likely to lose their home through repossession for mortgage arrears.

The latest available figures on mortgage possessions were published by the Council for Mortgage Lenders in July. These showed that in the first half of 1994, 25,020 properties were taken into possession by mortgage lenders, representing 0.24 per cent. of all mortgaged properties. This compared with 31,780 in the first half of 1993, and 26,760 in the second half of 1993.

The figures for the second half of 1994 and 1994 as a whole will be published by the CML on Wednesday 25 January 1995.

Dog Fouling

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to act upon the recommendations of the advisory group on litter concerning dog fouling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The period for consultation on the Advisory Group's recommendations ended on 14 October and we have been considering the comments made. The Government's response to the advisory group will be made in due course.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department holds 14 top secret and some 1,900 secret files. These represent 0.1 per cent. of all files held.

Council Rents

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the average levels of council rent in each London borough at constant prices for each year since 1979.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today placed in the Library a table showing the average weekly local authority rents for each London borough for the financial years 1988–89 to 1994–95, expressed in constant prices. Information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Safer Cities

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the selection of contractors to manage the next wave of safer cities projects.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am pleased to announce that, following a tender competition, contractors have been selected to manage the 20 new safer cities projects which my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction announced on 15 July 1994.

After careful evaluation of the tenders, three organisations have been chosen to run the projects: Crime Concern, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and the Society of Voluntary Associates. All three organisations have significant experience in crime prevention, project management, and working with voluntary agencies.

Crime Concern will manage projects in Bolton, Hackney, Kensington and Chelsea, Portsmouth, Southwark and Westminster.

NACRO will manage projects in Bournemouth, Brighton, Easington, Great Grimsby, Merseyside, Norwich, Oxford, Sandwell, Scunthorpe, Wansbeck and York.

SOVA will manage projects in Camden, Lincoln and Newham.

We expect preliminary work to begin December, and projects will start to come on stream early in the new year.

Departmental Property

Mr. Barry Field : To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce targets for the reduction of Government Departments' empty residential property; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In response to the report of the task force on Government Departments' empty houses, the Government undertook to monitor empty residential property owned by Departments and to set annual targets. Targets for reduction in 1994–95 are set out in the table.

	Total stock at 1 April 1994	*Empty at 1 April 1994*	*Empty as percentage of total stock*	*Target for reduction of number of empty properties held at 1 April 1994*[1]
Department of Transport	3,845	887	23	484
Home Office	4,524[2]	498	11	335
Ministry of Defence	68,106	11,006	16	3,550[3]
Department of Health	15,000[4]	1,800[5]	12	700
Scottish Office	1,601[4]	158	10	60
Welsh Office	239	43[7]	18	37

Notes:

[1] Includes properties to be sold, leased or reoccupied.

[2] Excludes figures for the provincial police authorities.

[3] Targets relate to stock figures at 1 April 1994. More properties will become empty during the year as others are occupied or disposed of.

[4] Most up-to-date figures available are as at 31 December 1992.

[5] Excludes bed-spaces in hostels.

[6] NHS figures included in the stock are as at 1 April 1993.

[7] Excludes properties awaiting demolition or conversion to non-residential use.

We will monitor performance and publish achievement against these targets at the end of the financial year.

My Department will shortly issue revised guidance for Government Departments on how to secure better use of their empty residential property. This will reflect the recommendations made by the task force. The Welsh Office will issue similar guidance separately.

Notes

1. Includes properties to be sold, leased or reoccupied.
2. Excludes figures for the provincial police authorities.
3. Targets relate to stock figures at 1 April 1994. More properties will become empty during the year as others are occupied or disposed of.
4. Most up-to-date figures available are as at 31 December 1992.
5. Excludes bed-spaces in hostels.
6. NHS figures included in the stock are as at 1 April 1993.
7. Excludes properties awaiting demolition or conversion to non-residential use.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those countryside stewardship scheme sites which have been withdrawn from the scheme for allowing additional public access, the grounds on which each decision was taken, the date when payments ceased and whether the Government will seek repayment of moneys already spent for which the contracted services or public access was not satisfactorily delivered.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* Information about countryside stewardship agreements with access elements, which have been either terminated or amended through the removal of the access element, is given below. There are various reasons for the termination or amendment of agreements, including the sale of the property, the death or bankruptcy of the scheme participant, or non-compliance with the conditions of the agreement. Payments under the scheme are made annually in arrears and in eight cases payments had not been made before the agreements came to an end or were amended. In other cases, payments were withdrawn. In no case was repayment of grant required. The management of the scheme, including the negotiation of agreements with scheme participants, is a matter for the Countryside Commission.

Region	*Year of agreement*	*Number of agreements terminated or where access element removed*
South West	1991	5
	1992	2
Eastern	1991	2
	1992	1
	1993	1
North West	1992	1
Midland	1991	5
	1992	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	1991	1
South East	1991	4
Northern	1991	1

SCOTLAND

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the management allowances payments made to general practitioner fund-holding practices and practices preparing to be fundholders *(a)* by value and *(b)* in total for each (i) family health services authority and (ii) region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table. GP fundholding has delivered many improvements in quality of care for patients. The costs of the management allowance—at about 2 per cent. of budgets set presents excellent value for money. These figures are only available for those years for which audited health board accounts have been completed.

Health Board	*1990–91 £000*	*1991–92 £000*	*1992–93 £000*
Argyll and Clyde	16	59	134
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	77
Borders	—	—	26
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—
Fife	—	27	36
Forth Valley	—	23	86
Grampian	—	85	539
Greater Glasgow	—	35	90
Highland	—	—	32
Lanarkshire	—	—	178
Lothian	16	33	119
Ork ney	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—
Tayside	5	44	193
Western Isle	—	—	—
Scotland	37	306	1,510

(1) The expenditure includes both revenue and capital components.

Highlands and Islands Objective/Status

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on progress towards the implementation of agricultural measures under Highlands and Islands objective 1 status, following his Department's consultation process which ended on 31 May; if he will indicate the number and range of responses received; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Department received 17 responses earlier this year to its consultation paper on the proposed Highlands and Islands Agricultural Programme from local authorities, agricultural and wildlife organisations, and a range of other public and private bodies. Most of the responses broadly welcomed the proposals. The Highlands and Islands agricultural programme, modified in the light of comments received and discussions with the European Commission, was approved for European Community funding on 29 July. The approved programme has three elements: the agricultural business improvement scheme, which is expected to open for applications towards the end of December; the crofting township development scheme, which should start next January; and the marketing scheme, which should come into operation next spring.

Health Care International

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the rough estimate of the cost of adapting the Health Care International hospital for use as an NHS hospital, referred to in his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *964*.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The very rough estimate given was at least £25 million. The actual figure would of course depend on the specification.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Lang: My Department employs two special advisers, although one post is presently vacant.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, which starts at £19,503. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Rent Acts

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider extending the amendment of the definition of residential occupier in terms of section 22(5) of the Rent (Scotland) Act 1984, in relation to any premises to a person occupying such premises and willing to make payment of a rental in respect thereof who has been denied security of tenure by his or her landlord for the express object of eviction.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no plans at present to change the definition of residential occupier.

Glasgow North Ltd.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the most recent deficit of Glasgow North Ltd.;

(2) how many staff are currently employed by Glasgow North Ltd.; and if he will place a list of their grades in the Library;

(3) what amounts have been given to date in interest free loans to the staff of Glasgow North Ltd.;

(4) how many senior officials of Glasgow North Ltd. resigned in the last two weeks;

(5) how many visits *(a)* to the United States of America and *(b)* elsewhere abroad representatives of Glasgow North Ltd. made in the past two years; and what was the cost per person and duration of such trips.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: These are matters for Glasgow North Limited. The Secretary of State has no locus in the management of the company.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a list of the urban aid projects for which Glasgow North Ltd. has responsibility and also indicating *(a)* how many staff have been allocated to each project and *(b)* the capital and revenue costs for each.

Lords James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Urban programme projects currently managed by Glasgow North Ltd.

Project title	*Number of staff*	*Capital costs* £	*Annual revenue costs (for four years)* £
Regeneration through reskilling	9	12,900	222,800
Community economic development project	3	4,160	71,000
Rosemount business start-up units	2	44,500	43,940
Information technology bus	2	90,000	71,300
Jobs from construction	2	4,900	120,400
Three initiatives (development of local regeneration strategies)	7	122,900	201,100
Access to training opportunities resource	—	—	[1]106,000
Child care employment and development projects	2	13,500	127,200

[1] Funding is used to provide job specific training packages to enable individuals to compete more favourably in the labour market.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the budget submitted for the IT Bus project owned by Glasgow North Ltd.; and what was the eventual cost.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The costs submitted for the IT bus project in the 1993–94 urban programme competition were as follows:

	£
Capital expenditure	90,000
Annual revenue expenditure (for four years)	71,300

I understand from Glasgow district council, the sponsoring local authority, that the level of urban programme capital funds expended on the project was within budget.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what urban aid projects have been awarded to Glasgow North Ltd. in the years *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94; and if he will give the value of these projects.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Project title	*Capital cost* £	*Annual revenue cost (for four years)* £
1992–93		
Community economic development project	4,160	71,000
1993–94		
Rosemount business start-up units	44,500	43,940
Information technology bus	90,000	71,300

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My Department's press releases are already available via Internet. My officials are considering the provision of further selected information.

Historic Scotland

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what reasons Historic Scotland was denied access on payment, to the direct labour force of English Heritage based at Berwick, for work on sites in the Tweed valley.

Mr. Lang: Under the National Heritage Act 1983, English Heritage does not have powers to carry out works on sites situated outside England.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which health boards in Scotland have purchased treatment from private sector hospitals; which private hospitals have had such contracts; which medical specialities and what number of patients have been involved; and what is the value of such contracts.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Centrally available information on NHS patients treated in Private Hospitals is shown in the tables. The information shown refers to health board of residence and may include treatments purchased by GP fundholders.

National health service patients seen at private hospitals, 1992

Health board of residence/hospital	*Specialty general surgery*	*Orthopaedics*	*Cardiothoracic surgery*	*Plastic surgery*	*Acute mixed*	*All specialities*
Argyll and Clyde						
Ross Hall	—	70	19	—	—	89
Nuffield	—	—	—	—	44	44
Total	—	70	19	—	44	133
Ayrshire and Arran						
Ross Hall	—	2	31	—	—	33
Nuffield	—	—	—	—	2	2
Total	—	2	31	—	2	35
Dumfries and Galloway						
Ross Hall	—	—	11	—	—	11
Total	—	—	11	—	—	11
Fife						
Ross Hall	—	—	3	—	—	3
Total	—	—	3	—	—	3
Forth Valley						
Ross Hall	—	—	19	—	—	19
Total	—	—	19	—	—	19
Greater Glasgow						
Bon Secours	—	—	—	1	5	6
Nuffield	—	—	—	1	65	66
Ross Hall	—	—	70	—	1	71
Total	—	—	70	2	71	143
Lanarkshire						
Ross Hall	—	—	19	—	1	20
Nuffield	—	—	—	—	9	9
Total	—	—	19	—	10	29
Lothian						
Ross Hall	—	—	4	—	—	4
Nuffield	—	—	—	—	1	1
Murrayfield	8	—	—	—	1	9
Total	8	—	4	—	2	14
Tayside						
Ross Hall	—	—	54	—	—	54
Total	—	—	54	—	—	54
Western Isles						
Ross Hall	—	—	1	—	—	1
Total	—	—	1	—	—	1

National health service patients seen at private hospitals, 1992

Health board of residence/hospital	Specialty general surgery	Orthopaedics	Cardiothoracic surgery	Plastic surgery	Acute mixed	All specialities
Scotland						
Bon Secours	—	—	—	1	5	6
Nuffield	—	—	—	1	121	122
Ross Hall	—	72	231	—	2	305
Murrayfield	8	—	—	—	1	9
Total	8	72	231	2	129	442

National health service patients seen at private hospitals, 1993

Health board of residence/hospital	Specialty urology	Plastic surgery	Acute mixed	All specialties
Argyll and Clyde				
Bon Secours	—	6	4	10
Nuffield	—	4	94	98
Ross Hall	1	17	1	19
Total	1	27	99	127
Ayrshire and Arran				
Bon Secours	—	6	2	8
Nuffield	—	1	9	10
Ross Hall	—	10	11	21
Total	—	17		17
Dumfries and Galloway				
Bon Secours	—	1	—	1
Ross Hall	—	4	—	4
Total	—	5	—	5
Fife				
Ross Hall	—	1	—	1
Total	—	1	—	1
Forth Valley				
Bon Secours	—	2	2	4
Nuffield	—	—	1	1
Ross Hall	—	3	—	3
Total	—	5	3	8
Grampian				
Ross Hall	—	1	—	1
Total	—	1	—	1
Greater Glasgow				
Bon Secours	—	33	59	92
Nuffield	—	7	27	34
Ross Hall	17	33	—	50
Total	17	73	86	176
Lanarkshire				
Bon Secours	—	23	11	34
Nuffield	—	8	26	34
Ross Hall	—	3	—	3
Total	—	34	37	71
Lothian				
Murrayfield	—	—	1	1
Total	—	—	1	1
Western Isles				
Nuffield	—	1	1	2
Total	—	1	1	2

National health service patients seen at private hospitals, 1993

Health board of residence/hospital	*Specialty urology*	*Plastic surgery*	*Acute mixed*	*All specialties*
Scotland				
Non Secours	—	71	78	149
Nuffield	—	21	158	179
Ross Hall	18	72	1	91
Murrayfield	—	—	1	1
Total	18	164	238	420

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of Newcastle disease were identified in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* There have been no recorded cases of Newcastle disease in Scotland over this period.

Forests

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and which local authorities have responded to the consultation paper, "Our Forests, the Way Ahead;" and how many and which local authorities have expressed reservations about the proposal to continue with the disposal of woodland and the loss of public access in these woodlands.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* Four local authorities in Scotland have responded: Highland regional council, Kincardine and Deeside district council, Midlothian district council and Strathclyde regional council. Each of these local authorities has expressed reservations about the proposals for securing public access to woodlands sold by the Forestry Commission, although the sale of woodlands does not, of course, necessarily lead to a loss of public access.

WALES

Drugs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the budget for 1992–93 for the education of young people about the effects of substance abuse and drug taking;

(2) what was the budget for 1993–94 for the education of young people about the effects of substance abuse and drug taking.

Mr. Richards: Drug prevention work is undertaken by a number of agencies from both the statutory and voluntary sectors, which receive funds from various sources. In 1992–93 the Welsh Office made available some £200,000 to help fund activities concerned with the prevention of drug misuse. The budget for 1993–94 was nearly £240,000. Funding is also available to local education authorities for health education (including drugs) under the grants for education support and training programme.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish a separate environmental protection agency for Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government feel that a joint agency will be most effective in addressing current problems, most of which are common to England and Wales.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Llywd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will assist local authorities to extend the provision of concessionary travel to pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local councils in Wales already provide concessionary fares schemes for pensioners. Money from the taxpayer for such schemes is provided through the local government revenue settlement. It is for individual councils to decide on the financial support that they wish to allocate for this purpose.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows: *(a)* five *(b)* 84. These represent 0.008 per cent. of the Department's holding of files.

Dog Fouling

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to act upon the recommendations of the advisory group on litter concerning dog fouling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside.

Housing Finance

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will consult on his housing revenue account subsidy proposals for 1995–96; and what his proposals will be.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has issued draft housing revenue account subsidy determinations for 1995–96 today. Local authorities and other consultees have been invited to let us have their views by 22 December 1994. I will be placing copies of the draft determinations together with estimates of guideline rents and management and maintenance allowances in the Library of the House. The proposed average guideline rent for 1995–96 is £33.58 a week. Increases range between £1.82 and £2.82 a week according to the estimated capital values of each authority's stock.

The proposed average management and maintenance allowance per dwelling would increase by 3.75 per cent to £854, an increase of £31. Across Wales the total estimated

management and maintenance allowances would increase to nearly £177 million. Thirty-two councils would have a higher allowance than in 1994–95 while no authority will have a lower per dwelling allowance than this year.

These proposals strike a reasonable balance between the need to contain public expenditure and the need to ensure that housing is provided for council tenants at acceptable cost. The overall percentage increase in guideline rents is lower than in 1994–95.

Local authorities determine their own expenditure and set their own rents, but I hope that they will follow the Government's lead in adopting a balanced approach.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. Hague: The cost of decorations, Christmas parties and other festive activities is not normally met out of departmental budgets. For details of total expenditure on official hospitality, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 28 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *857*. Disaggregated information of the kind requested is not available.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Hague: Ministers at this Department intend to send 930 official Christmas cards in 1994, at a cost of £384.75, inclusive of value added tax. Postage costs are estimated at a maximum of £176.70. Staff time spent on the process will be minimal.

Copies of the official Christmas card are on order and so not yet available. Copies will be placed in the Library later.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish tables to show, for each Child Support Agency office, *(a)* performance in relation to overall clearance targets, *(b)* the total number of cases outstanding, *(c)* the number of people who have requested that their assessments be reviewed due to change of circumstances, *(d)* the number of cases still outstanding and how many of those have been outstanding for longer than (i) six months and (ii) 12 months and *(e)* how many appeals are outstanding, and for how long.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Mark Fisher, dated 29 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the performance of the Child Support Agency against overall clearance targets and the number and age of change of circumstances reviews and appeals.

The Agency does not collect all of the information in the format that your require. The information available relates to each Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC) and is shown in the attached tables.

Prior to August 1994 the Agency did not count the number of reviews requested following a change of circumstance. Since August, the Agency has identified the age of all such outstanding reviews and has monitored the issue of review forms.

I hope that this reply is of help.

Time taken to clear cases - between 1 April 1994 and 30 September 1994

	Per cent.
40 days or less	38
More than 40 days and up to 100 days	10
More than 100 days	52

B) Total cases outstanding at 30 September 1994

	Number
Dudley	64,191
Hastings	58,569
Falkirk	86,344
Plymouth	68,520
Birkenhead	89,237
Belfast	106,953
Agency	473,814

C) Change of circumstance review forms issued

CSAC	*August*	*September*	*Total*
Dudley	480	305	785
Hastings	598	466	1,064
Falkirk	174	124	298
Plymouth	618	673	1,291
Birkenhead	249	493	742
Belfast	187	128	315
Agency	2,306	2,189	4,495

D) Change of circumstance review requests outstanding—by age at 30 September 1994

CSAC	*0–3 months*	*3–6 months*	*> 6 months*
Dudley	1,757	1,174	2,072
Hastings	3,199	475	104
Falkirk	1,166	139	6
Plymouth	N/A	N/A	N/A[1]
Birkenhead	761	188	191
Belfast	513	281	130
Agency[2]	7,396	2,252	2,503

[1] Figures not available for Plymouth CSAC in this format. Total number of reviews outstanding at Plymouth CSAC = 4,113.
[2] Does not include total figure for Plymouth CSAC.

E) Appeals outstanding by age at 30 September

CSAC	*0–3 months*	*3–6 months*	*> 6 months*
Dudley	284	14	—
Hastings	137	131	88
Falkirk	300	215	—
Plymouth	499	165	6
Birkenhead	449	123	—

E) Appeals outstanding by age at 30 September

CSAC	0–3 months	3–6 months	> 6 months
Belfast	204	143	51
Agency	1,873	791	145

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Mr. Hague: This Department employs one special adviser.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

Benefits

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide comparable figures both regionally and nationally on the number of employed people claiming *(a)* housing benefit, *(b)* council tax benefit and *(c)* family credit in each year since 1979.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the tables.

Table a. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for employed people

Standard Statistical Regions	Housing Benefit (thousands) May 1989	May 1990	May 1991	May 1992	May 1993	Council Tax Benefit (thousands) May 1993
North (including Cumbria)	12	11	16	14	18	25
Yorkshire and Humberside	14	26	16	24	21	33
East Midlands	11	13	14	17	17	25
East Anglia	9	8	8	9	11	13
London	33	34	42	44	47	30
South East (excluding London)	28	32	43	41	46	43
South West	18	21	22	22	24	28
West Midlands	24	24	24	25	24	29
North West (excluding Cumbria)	30	21	29	29	35	54
Wales	11	15	12	11	13	11
Scotland	36	32	30	31	32	31
Great Britain	226	236	255	268	288	321

Source:
The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample enquiry taken at the end of May for each year.

Notes:
1. For Housing Benefit, comparable figures, including the regional analysis, are not available prior to 1989.
2. Council Tax Benefit was introduced in April 1993. Figures for Community Charge Benefit are not comparable.
3. The figures given are those cases without Income Support who have earnings, which may be part-time or full time.
4. The figures are for benefit units, not individuals. A benefit unit may be a couple or a single person.
5. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Therefore the sum of the regions may not equal the total for Great Britain.

Table b. Family Credit

DSS administrative regions	Family Credit Thousands May 1989	May 1990	May 1991	May 1992	May 1993
Northern	54	56	62	72	88
Midlands	54	58	66	74	91
London north	32	35	39	45	57
London south	27	28	31	38	48
Wales and south west	46	47	49	57	68
North western	53	53	59	65	79
Scotland	37	38	42	47	57
Great Britain	303	315	347	397	489

Source:
Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of awards as at the end of May each year.

Note:
1. Family Credit replaced Family Income Supplement in April 1988.
2. Figures relate to families. A family includes at least one person in employment as an employee or self employed.
3. In April 1992, the qualifying hours for Family Credit were reduced from 24 to 16.
4. The figures are shown by DSS administrative region, as a breakdown by standard statistical region is not available.
5. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Therefore the sum of the regions may not equal the total for Great Britain.

Income Support

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the most recent figures to date, and over the most recently available 12-month period, of those couples who are eligible under the current £15 earnings disregard rule; and, where the claimant has been unemployed for two years or more, *(a)* how many have declared earnings from part-time employment of less than £15 per week and *(b)* how many have had their income support payments abated because their earnings from part-time employment have exceeded £15 per week.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the form requested. The number of couples who are eligible for the £15 disregard is in the table:

	All cases	*No disability premium in payment*	*Disability premium in payment*
All Cases	31,000	25,000	6,000
Joint Part Time Earnings for: up to £15.00	11,000	9,000	2,000
Over £15.00	20,000	16,000	4,000

Source:
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry - February 1994.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those refused benefits under the habitual residence test have appealed against the decision.

Mr. Roger Evans: I am informed by the president of the Independent Tribunal Service, His Honour Judge Bassingthwaigthe, that this information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if it is Government policy that all those refused income support under the habitual residence test should also be refused social fund grants, social fund loans and crisis loans regardless of their circumstances.

Mr. Roger Evans: Social fund applicants must be in receipt of income support to be eligible for a community care grant or budgeting loan. Crisis loans are available to applicants who are not in receipt of benefit and may be paid to those who fail the habitual residence test.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many new claims for attendance allowance have been made to each disability benefit centre in each month since April 1992 which have either *(a)* resulted in an award or *(b)* been rejected; and, in each case, whether (i) examining medical practitioner evidence was provided, (ii) general practitioner factual reports were provided or (iii) the claim was decided solely on the statement of evidence provided by the claimant;

(2) how many new claims for attendance allowance have been refused, broken down by reason for refusal, in each month since April 1992 at each disability benefit centre and for the country as a whole.

Mr. Hague: The administration of attendance allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 29 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for information about Attendance Allowance (AA) claims at each Disability Benefit Centre (DBC).

I apologise for the delay in providing you with this information.

Information in respect of reasons for refusal of AA claims is not available. However, the information that is available has been enclosed and a copy has been placed in the Library.

It should be noted that the figures given may not accurately reflect new claims received within each month at each DBC because relevant statistics are compiled at the date a claim is cleared rather than the date it is received.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Social Fund

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual administrative cost of the social fund; and how many complaints there have been from customers and their representatives in each region in relation to their applications in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration cost of the social fund in 1992–93, the most recent year for which figures are available, was £208 million. This amount includes expenditure on information technology development and capital costs of £17 million, including the investment costs of introducing the improved social fund computer system.

Information concerning complaints about the social fund is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. An applicant for a discretionary payment who is dissatisfied with the decision has the right to have the application reconsidered by applying for a review. Information on the review process and details of the number of social fund review applications are given in the Secretary of State's annual report on the social fund for 1993–94. A copy for the report is in the Library.

Widow's Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* widows and *(b)* war widows ceased to claim widow's benefit on re-marriage in each of the last five years.

Mr. Arbuthnot: For *(a)* information for the period 1 April 1989 to 31 September 1992 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Provisional figures for the period since then are as follows:

1 October 1992 to 31 March 1993 = 990
1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994 = 2,050
1 April 1994 to 30 September 1994 = 1,060

Information on the number of widows who ceased on re-marriage to claim war widows pension is as follows:

1990—60
1991—48
1992—32
1993—34
1994—41[1]

[1] January to October 1994 inclusive.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund applications which have been turned down went to appeal in each region in each year since the establishment of the fund; and how many appeals were successful.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested, which is for the regulated social fund system, is set out in the

table below. A comprehensive and independent review system is available for those customers who are dissatisfied with a decision arising out of applications to the discretionary social fund.

Social Fund Appeals—Southern Territory

Year	Benefit	Lodged appeals	Appeals heard and decided	Appeals heard and decided in appellants favour
1987–88	Funeral payments	104	55	16
	Maternity payments	145	70	14
1988–89	Funeral payments	206	159	38
	Maternity payments	178	148	35
1989–90	Funeral payments	336	191	43
	Maternity payments	257	124	19
1990–91	Funeral payments	400	232	39
	Maternity payments	240	108	18
1991–92	Funeral Payments	433	262	70
	Maternity Payments	220	103	25
1992–93	Funeral payments	466	247	56
	Maternity payments	168	79	29
1993–94	Funeral payments	356	211	44
	Maternity payments	144	59	13

Social Fund Appeals—Wales and Central Territory

Year	Benefit	Lodged appeals	Appeals heard and decided	Appeals heard and decided in appellants favour
1987–88	Funeral payments	100	29	9
	Maternity payments	249	83	5
1988–89	Funeral payments	203	164	28
	Maternity payments	264	242	28
1989–90	Funeral payments	250	198	37
	Maternity payments	232	110	14
1990–91	Funeral payments	296	214	43
	Maternity payments	138	81	12
1991–92	Funeral payments	312	195	42
	Maternity payments	151	82	16
1992–93	Funeral payments	269	155	34
	Maternity payments	173	84	15
1993–94	Funeral payments	295	155	26
	Maternity payments	132	63	14

Social Fund Appeals—Scotland and Northern Territory

Year	Benefit	Lodged appeals	Appeals heard and decided	Appeals heard and decided in appellants favour
1987–88	Funeral payments	88	26	0
	Maternity payments	176	37	6
1988–89	Funeral payments	180	126	24
	Maternity payments	305	254	39
1989–90	Funeral payments	192	154	21
	Maternity payments	187	107	17
1990–91	Funeral payments	200	116	19
	Maternity payments	141	59	12
1991–92	Funeral Payments	245	131	23
	Maternity Payments	149	70	6
1992–93	Funeral payments	368	195	39
	Maternity payments	195	85	14
1993–94	Funeral payment	337	162	39
	Maternitypayments	137	53	12

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: Department of Social Security press releases issued electronically through the Central Office of Information are already accessible to users of the Internet. CCTA[1]'s Government information service,

launched last week, will help Departments make information more widely available and the Department is considering how to make best use of this new service to expand the range of information provided electronically.

Note[1]: CCTA, now the Government Centre for Information Systems, is part of the Office of Public Service and Science.

Child Benefit

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current take up rate for child benefit; what is the annual administrative cost for child benefit; and how many complaints there have been from customers in each region over the past year in relation to their application.

Mr. Roger Evans: Child benefit take-up is estimated to be nearly 100 per cent. The administrative cost for Child Benefit in 1992–93—the latest available—was £136.4 million. Information is not readily available to identify customer complaints by region and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to issue the incapacity benefit rules.

Mr. Hague: Regulations setting out the detailed provisions of incapacity benefit were laid before Parliament on 24 November 1994. Notes on these regulations are due to be placed in the Library on 1 December 1994.

Invalidity Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the European Court of Justice to deal with the referral concerning the payment of invalidity benefit to women aged 60 to 65 years in the test case of Mrs. Graham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: A ruling by the European Court of Justice is not expected before July 1995 at the earliest.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of national average earnings invalid care allowance has been in each year since the benefit was introduced.

Mr. Hague: Invalid care allowance was never intended to be a wage for carers; some carers may also be in employment and benefit from the earnings limit.

The information requested is in the table.

Uprating Date	*ICA Standard Rate (£)*	*Average gross weekly earnings (£)*	*ICA as percentage of average earnings*
July 1976	7.90	68.38	11.6
November 1976	9.20	70.18	13.1
November 1977	10.50	76.19	13.8
November 1978	11.70	86.34	13.6
November 1979	14.0	102.82	13.6
November 1980	16.30	121.86	13.4
November 1981	17.75	135.87	13.1
November 1982	19.70	147.23	13.4
November 1983	20.45	158.05	12.9
November 1984	21.50	168.14	12.8
November 1985	23.00	182.51	12.6
July 1986	23.25	194.05	12.0
April 1987	23.75	202.16	11.7
April 1988	24.75	219.34	11.3
April 1989	26.20	240.55	10.9
April 1990	28.20	263.10	10.7
April 1991	31.25	285.65	10.9
April 1992	32.55	303.37	10.7
April 1993	33.70	315.45	10.7
April 1994	34.50	326.46	10.6

Notes:
Average weekly earnings are those for all full-time adults employees.
The table relates to standard rate ICA only. Information about dependency increases is not included.

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what basis and what calculations are used to determine the level of *(a)* invalid care allowance and *(b)* carer premium.

Mr. Hague: The answers are as follows:

(a) The standard rate of invalid care allowance is based on 60 per cent. of the standard retirement pension, and is uprated annually.

(b) A carer premium of £10 a week was introduced in 1990 to provide some additional help in income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit, for carers. This too has been uprated annually.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Hague: The Department of Social Security holds approximately 200 top secret or secret files out of a total of approximately 500,000 files.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current proportion of local authority

and housing association tenants who receive housing benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: The proportions of local authority and housing association tenants who were receiving housing benefit at the end of 1993 were 65 per cent. and 53 per cent. respectively.

Data Sources:
The housing benefit management information systems quarterly caseload count at the end of November 1993.
Housing and construction statistics December 1993, the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he intends to make changes to ensure that rent officers have sole jurisdiction for determining market rents for housing benefit purposes in the de-regulated private rented sector; and what implications this will have for rent assessment committees.

Mr. Roger Evans: We intend, as soon as practicable, to amend regulations so that decisions by rent assessment committees will no longer bind local authorities when dealing with housing benefit claims. The only determinations to which local authorities will have to have regard for housing benefit purposes—for tenants in the de-regulated private rented sector—will be those made by the rent officer service. The proposed change would not remove existing rights to seek a determination from rent assessment committees on contractual rent levels. We will consult with the local authority associations in the normal way.

TREASURY

Construction Industry

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures will be included in the 1995 Finance Bill to take forward the proposed changes to the construction industry tax deduction scheme.

Sir George Young: The 1995 Finance Bill will contain legislation providing for changes to the construction industry tax deduction scheme in accordance with the Government's announcement on 10 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *382*.

Life Assurance

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the taxation of unit-linked life insurance policies in the light of the High Court judgement in the case of Fuji v Aetna.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs has today made a statement about the regulatory implications of this judgment.

The uncertainty of the judgment has created about the tax position is also of concern to the Government, because of the volume of policyholders' money invested in policies which may be affected. In our view it is clearly in the interests of those policyholders that uncertainty should, so far as possible, be removed. It is also right that the tax treatment of policies already sold should follow the common understanding, at the time of their sale, that they were indeed insurance contracts. This understanding was shared by the insurers, their policyholders, and the Inland Revenue. We shall, if necessary, propose legislation to this effect.

We shall not be able to decide on the details of the legislation that may be required until the outcome of the appeal is known, but our broad intention would be to provide that where a contract which was not, as a matter of law, a contract of insurance has been entered into by a life insurance company of a friendly society on the basis that it was a contract of life insurance, with the consequence that it formed part of the long-term business of the insurer, then the contract would be treated, for all tax purposes, as though it were a contract of life insurance. We would propose to introduce provisions having analogous effect in relation to the reinsurance of such policies, and in relation to policies written outside the United Kingdom. We shall also consider, in the light of the final decision in the case, whether it is appropriate to propose similar legislation in relation to capital redemption contracts.

The proposed legislation would apply to policies written at any time in the past, in relation to both past and future direct tax liabilities, except that tax liabilities which have already become final on a different basis will not be disturbed. In addition, where an assessment to income tax or capital gains tax that relates to a particular contract has been made on a taxpayer on the basis that the contract was not one of insurance, and become final, the proposed legislation will not apply to any other assessment to either of those taxes made on the same taxpayer, or on their personal representatives, in relation to the same contract. I should also emphasise that the effect of the legislation would simply be to re-characterise the contracts in question as contracts of life insurance, and would not otherwise affect their status for tax purposes. In general, the proposed legislation would not affect contracts to be written in the future, but we will consider the matter in the light of the final judgement in the Fuji case.

Inland Revenue Powers

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government intends to publish the report of the independent inquiry by Mr. Philip Ely into the powers of the Board of Inland Revenue to call for the papers of tax accountants; and how the Government intend to proceed on the matter.

Sir George Young: I have asked the Inland Revenue to arrange for early publication of Mr. Ely's report, and to consult with the main representative bodies to seek the best way of implementing the report's recommendations with a view to further legislation.

Unemployment Costs

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the cost of a registered unemployed person to the Exchequer in lost taxes and in unemployment related benefits.

Mr. Aitken: Information on the total cost of unemployment related benefits for Great Britain is given by the Department of Social Security in its annual report. In 1993–94 this is estimated to amount to £9,720 million. The average level of unemployment in 1993–94 was 2,750,000. The implied cost of an unemployed person is £3,535.

Estimates of tax revenues forgone involve estimating the indirect and direct taxes unemployed people would pay in employment. Any attempt to estimate these figures would depend on a large number of assumptions. Such

assumptions are inevitably arbitrary and any estimate of the cost of lost taxes is subject to a high degree of uncertainty.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total cost to the Exchequer since 1979 to date of *(a)* lost taxes and *(b)* unemployment related benefits due to the levels of registered unemployment.

Mr. Aitken: The amount of lost taxes as a result of unemployment cannot be estimated reliably. Estimating the indirect and direct taxes an unemployed person would pay in employment depends on a large number of assumptions. Such assumptions are inevitably arbitrary.

Information on the total cost of unemployment related benefits for Great Britain is given by the Department of Social Security in its annual report. Information for the years since 1978–79 is as follows:

Year	*Total £ million*
1978–79	1,321
1979–80	1,409
1980–81	2,387
1981–82	3,666
1982–83	4,552
1983–84	5,671
1984–85	6,290
1985–86	6,936
1986–87	7,134
1987–88	6,381
1988–89	5,240
1989–90	4,310
1990–91	5,070
1991–92	7,530
1992–93	9,110
1993–94	9,720

The figures are in cash terms, unadjusted for inflation.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he can provide an estimate of net savings to the Exchequer if there was a one million reduction in the unemployment total.

Mr. Aitken: The Department of Social Security estimates that a 100,000 fall in unemployment in 1994–95 would reduce expenditure on unemployment-related benefits by £365 million. The implied savings for a 1 million fall in the unemployment total is £3,650 million.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the expenditure and return on tax fraud investigations in the financial year 1993–94.

Sir George Young: Inland Revenue investigations into possible or actual tax fraud cost £137 million, with a potential return of £1,310 million.

Royal Household (Audit)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that all the accounts of the royal household funded from the public purse are audited by the National Audit Office.

Sir George Young: All public money administered by the royal household are fully and professionally audited. The majority relates to the Department of National Heritage grant-in-aid for property services in the English occupied royal palaces, which is audited by the National Audit Office. The remainder is civil list expenditure, which is audited by the Treasury under the Civil List Audit Act 1816. The Government have no plans to change these arrangements.

Civil Servants

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is *(a)* the annual salary and *(b)* the cost to public funds of benefits in kind of (i) the head of the home civil service, (ii) the secretary to the Cabinet, (iii) the head of the foreign civil service and (iv) permanent secretaries and deputy secretaries in each department of Government.

Sir George Young: The annual salary of the head of the Home Civil Service, who is also Secretary of the Cabinet, is £118,179 with effect from 1 April 1994. The annual salary of the head of the diplomatic service with effect from 1 April 1994 is £110,563.

Annual salaries for permanent secretaries, now grade 1 or grade 1A, and Deputy Secretaries, now grade 2, are listed in the table and are with effect from 1 April 1994.

Central records of the cost of non-cash benefits for these staff are not maintained. Information on the entitlement to such benefits is contained in the civil service management code, a copy of which is in the Library.

		£
Permanent Secretary to the Treasury	Flat rate	110,563
Grade 1	Flat rate	95,051
Grade 1A	Flat rate	87,435
Grade 2	Range maximum	79,396
	Range minimum	65,990

Privatisation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each company privatised since 1979 with the total share issue in each case.

Sir George Young: It is not practical to list all companies that have been privatised as many were subsidiaries of nationalised industries and were sold by the parent body, not the Government; consequently, information is not held centrally for all such sales. The table shows the companies privatised by Government and the major subsidiaries sold by their parent body. For each, the equity proceeds accruing are also given.

Major privatisations

Company	*Year of sale*[1]	*Gross equity proceeds*[2] *£ million*
BP [3]	1977	8,334
Fairey	1980	15
British Aerospace	1981	700
Cable and Wireless	1981	1,432
Amersham International	1982	71
NFC	1982	54
Britoil	1982	998
Associated British Ports	1983	100
International Aeradio	1983	60
Victaulic	1983	8
Enterprise Oil	1984	392

Major privatisations

Company	Year of sale[1]	Gross equity proceeds[2] £ million
Jaguar	1984	297
Sealink	1984	66
BT	1984	14,654
VSEL	1986	60
British International Helicopters	1986	14
National Bus Company (62 separate subsidiaries)	1986	[7]—
British Gas	1986	5,584
Leyland Bus	1987	4
Unipart	1987	30
British Airways	1987	892
Royal Ordnance	1987	190
DAB	1987	7
Rolls-Royce	1987	1,348
Istel	1987	48
BAA	1987	1,225
British Transport Advertising	1987	40
National Seed Development Organisation	1987	66
Rover Group [3]	1988	150
Professional and Executive Recruitment	1988	6
British Steel	1988	2,500
Travellers Fare	1988	12
British Rail Engineering (BREL)	1989	14
General Practice Finance Corporation	1989	145
Harland and Wolff	1989	8
Short Brothers	1989	30
10 water and sewerage companies	1989	5,113
Giroleasing	1990	33
Girobank	1990	112
Scottish Bus Group (10 separate subsidiaries)	1990	[7]—
12 regional electricity companies	1990	[4]5,182
National Power/PowerGen	1991	[5]2,228
Scottish Power/Scottish Hydro-Electric	1991	2,918
National Transcommunications	1991	48
Insurance Services Group	1991	70
[5] Trust ports	1992	[8]—
BTG	1992	[6]28
[4] Northern Ireland generating companies	1992	356
PSA projects	1992	-44
Northern Ireland Electricity (distribution company)	1993	348
[5] PSA building management companies	1993	10
DVOIT	1993	5
Londoon Buses (10 separate sales to date)	1994	[7]—
Forward	1994	5
DTELs	1994	7
Belfast International Airport	1994	33

[1] Year of the first sale. There may have been secondary offers or the first sale may have been one of a suite of sales of subsidiaries.

[2] There may in addition have been proceeds from the redemption of debt.

[3] Technically not a privatisation as the company was already classified to the private sector.

[4] Including the national grid which was owned by the regional electricity companies.

[5] The Government retain about 40 per cent. of each company.

[6] Includes dividends extracted pre-sale.

[7] Proceeds of individual sales initially retained by the parent body.

[8] Proceeds were split between the relevant port authorities and the Government.

Taxes and Incomes

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average impact on households in 1995–96 of *(a)* direct and indirect tax measures announced in the Budget and *(b)* all tax-related measures taking effect between 29 November 1994 and November 1995; and what has been the rise in real household disposable income per head since 1979.

Sir George Young: Real household disposable income per head has risen by nearly 50 per cent. since 1979. The impact on households of tax-related measures taking effect over the next year is shown in the table. After taking account of tax and inflation, real personal disposable income is forecast to rise by 1½ per cent. in 1995.

Impact on households of main tax-related measures in 1995–96. Impact of main direct and indirect tax changes affecting households relative to indexation and net of VAT compensation.

	November 1994 Budget measures (1)	All measures (2)
Households:		
Average	0.30	–2.80
Pensioners	0.50	–0.50

£ per week to nearest 5p
Gain (+)/ loss (–)
(1) Figures for new Budget measures (column (1)) show the impact of the main tax measures directly affecting households announced in the November 1994 Budget. Figures for all measures (column (2)) show the impact on households of new and pipeline tax-related measures taking effect over the next year, including measures announced in the November 1994, November 1993 and March 1993 Budgets.
(2) Estimates are taken from an analysis of the 1990–92 Family Expenditure Surveys uprated to 1995–96 earnings and price levels.

Civil Servants

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 October 1994.

Mr. Aitken: On 1 October 1994 there were 523,981 permanent staff in post in central Government, the lowest for 55 years. This is a decrease of 9,370 during the last six months and more than 40,000 since April 1992.

An analysis showing staff in post by Department has been placed in the Library.

Inheritance Tax Exemptions

Mr. Tipping : To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the countryside sites where public access has been granted by the landowner in return for exemption from inheritance tax, the amount of inheritance tax forgone in return for granting this access for each year for the past 10 years, the number of sites involved for that year for the past 10 years, and the steps that have been taken to publicise the access to these sites.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The normal rules of taxpayers confidentiality prevent me from giving details of individual cases where conditional exemption from inheritance tax has been granted.

The annual average cost of conditions exemption from inheritance tax, or its predecessor capital transfer tax, for

land and buildings is estimated to have been between £5 million and £10 million over the period 1984–85 to 1993–94.

There have been 133 designations of land for additional exemption from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax in England. Figures for designations of land on a year by year basis are not available at acceptable cost.

The owner of land which is conditionally exempt from inheritance tax is required to publicise the agreed public access arrangements. The heritage advisory agencies will discuss with each owner the appropriate level of publicity. Each case is considered individually and all relevant factors, including the existing level of publicity, are taken into account. Although the extent of public access may already be widely known, for example where substantial public access is already given, the owner will generally be required to take specific steps to publicise the public access arrangements, for example by advertising the access arrangements in a local tourist office or town hall. For new designations of scenic land in England, owners are required to display at all points of entry onto their land map boards showing the agreed public access.

TRANSPORT

Highways Agency

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the arrangements made for the composition of the Highways Agency.

Mr. Watts: I consider that the arrangements are working well.

Yugoslav Airlines

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the restrictions currently preventing Yugoslav Airlines from flying into London Heathrow airport; what action is being taken to allow such flights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Following the suspension of certain sanctions imposed in the Security Council of the United Nations, which permits passenger services to operate to and from Belgrade for an initial period, JAT Yugoslav Airlines has applied to my Department for permission to fly to Heathrow. The United Kingdom normally expects countries whose airlines fly here to be signatories to the Chicago convention on international civil aviation, which binds airlines to minimum safety standards in respect of maintenance of aircraft and flight operations and their oversight by the state's regulatory authorities. The federal republic of Yugoslavia is not a signatory to the convention, and we are discussing with it how we can be assured that international safety standards are being met before we permit JAT to operate to London.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory procedure was used for constructing the M11 link road.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 30 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Question about the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road since its construction is now an operational matter for the Highways Agency.

The statutory procedures followed were contained in the Highways Act 1980 and Acquisition of Land Act 1981.

Trains (Black Boxes)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by British Rail region the percentage of train stock currently fitted with a black box; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The information is not available in the form requested. Data recorders are fitted as standard to all new locomotives and electric or diesel multiple passenger units, and to those already in service that are expected to have a long residual life. There are currently 610 locomotives or multiple units fitted with data recorders. This figure includes passenger and freight locomotives and multiple units comprising two, three and four car units.

Rail Services

Mr Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each British Rail region since 1 August the number of services that have been affected by low ground adhesion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: This information is reported by Railtrack only if a notifiable accident results from low adhesion. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is investigating two such cases.

Station Safety

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many stations within the Network SouthEast operating region are unstaffed after 6 pm and at weekends; and if he will provide comparable figures for 1979.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* The information requested is not available in the form requested. A comparison with 1979 would in any event not be possible as Network SouthEast was not created until 1986.

However, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) on 14 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *508*. The figures in that reply are still current.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many permanently unmanned train stations there were throughout the United Kingdom in each year since 1991.

Mr. Watts: Of about 2,500 stations on the Railtrack network, some 1,000 or 40 per cent. are currently permanently unmanned. Since the number of unmanned station varies throughout the year, no definitive figures can be given for any previous year, but the overall number has been of the same order since 1991.

Rural Communities

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the

relationship between a petrol price increase and the opportunities for mobility in rural communities.

Mr. Norris: Higher fuel prices play an important part in meeting the threat of global warming by encouraging people to reduce their fuel consumption in a variety of ways. One is by purchasing smaller, more fuel—efficient cars and another is by driving less through making shorter or less frequent journeys or switching to other less polluting modes of transport. A further way is by adopting a sensible driving technique and keeping vehicles properly tuned and maintained.

There is less scope for switching to other modes, which is more likely in rural areas, but we would expect individuals to place more emphasis on the fuel efficiency of their vehicles. Statistics reveal that rural motorists currently achieve fewer miles per gallon than their urban counterparts. This flexibility of response illustrates the benefits of fuel price increases over other mechanisms for reducing fuel use, such as vehicle regulation.

Cycling, London

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the number of daily cycle journeys in London for each year since 1983; what plans he has for increasing cycle routes in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The estimated number of daily cycle journeys by Londoners is shown in the table for the years for which data are available:

1989: 290,000
1990: 240,000
1991: 240,000
1992: 240,000
1993: 220,000

The Department is currently considering a co-ordinated did from all 33 London local authorities for funds to implement the London cycle network. A decision on this will be announced shortly.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding has been given during the last 12 months to London councils to encourage cycling; and if he will list the funding to each London council.

Mr. Norris: Capital support has been available to assist London local authorities' general transport projects, including safety schemes. For 1995–96, a London cycle network "package" bid has been received on behalf of all 33 authorities. A decision on this will be announced shortly.

Meldon Quarry

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what income was received from the sale by British Rail of Meldon quarry, Somerset; and what percentage of receipts from privatisation since the passage of the Railway Act 1993 this represents.

Mr. Watts: The receipts from the sale by British Rail of Meldon quarry and other sales are the subject of confidentiality undertakings between British Rail and its bidders.

Choice

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his policy that people should be able to exercise a choice in their means of transport wherever practicable.

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the responsibilities of his Department in following up the crash of the Pan Am 103 at Lockerbie.

Mr. Norris: My Department deals with the United Kingdom national aviation security programme. Our responsibilities following the disaster have included thoroughly reviewing the programme and making substantial improvements to it in the light of what happened on 21 December 1988.

My Department also had responsibility through the air accidents investigation branch for conducting the technical investigation into the circumstances of the disaster.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement about aircraft noise; and what proposal he has in relation to noise at small airports;

(2) when he proposes to implement the recommendations of the review of air noise legislation contained in his latest report;

(3) what interim proposals he has to deal with aircraft noise;

(4) what assessment he has made of the local weakness in present planning legislation used by local authorities to deal with aircraft noise.

Mr. Norris: Airports can bring substantial economic and social benefits to their surrounding areas, but aircraft noise can also cause annoyance. It is important therefore, that aerodrome and aircraft operators minimise the disturbance to local communities caused by their operations, so far as is practicable and reasonable. All larger aerodromes and many smaller ones already take measures to reduce noise disturbance.

Aerodromes are also subject to planning legislation in the usual way, and it is for the local planning authority to assess all the relevant factors when considering planning applications. It is possible to exercise a measure of control over aircraft noise by way of conditions attached to planning permissions. Because aerodromes vary greatly in size, types of operation, and in their local circumstances, measure to minimise noise nuisance are best developed and monitored locally.

In March last year, following extensive consultation, the Government published their conclusions on new measures to control aircraft noise. The Government announced their intention—*Official Report*, 25 March 1993, column *706–7*—to introduce new legislation to give aerodromes powers to prepare and enforce noise amelioration schemes. These arrangements would build on the existing, mainly voluntary system of control. The Government will introduce the new legislation at a suitable parliamentary opportunity. There are no plans to

introduce interim measures, but consideration is being given to producing national guidance on mitigating aircraft noise.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to introduce restrictions on aircraft engine noise requirements on airports.

Mr. Norris: Under existing legislation, all civil jet aircraft operating into all United Kingdom airports must carry a noise certificate demonstrating compliance with standards agreed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. Civil propeller-driven aircraft certificated after 6 October 1977 are also required to comply with such standards. These standards are included in The Air Navigation (Noise Certification) Order 1990.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requests he has had from *(a)* airport authorities and *(b)* members of the public for noise mitigation schemes.

Mr. Norris: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to introduce legislation to outlaw old aircraft.

Mr. Norris: The Government have no plans to prevent aircraft from flying purely on the grounds of their age. The United Kingdom has, however, implemented directive 92/14/EEC, which requires older, noisier jets, the so called "chapter 2" types, to be phased out between 1995 and 2002. This legislation builds on earlier action to ban non-noise certificated jets and to prevent the addition of chapter 2 types to the United Kingdom register.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

(a) 25

(b) 12,000.

Traffic Priority Route, London

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the next traffic priority route to be introduced in London.

Mr. Norris: Early in the new year.

London Underground

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken to improve services and usage of the Barking to Gospel Oak line.

Mr. Watts: The provision of services on the Barking to Gospel Oak line is a matter for North London Railways, one of British Rail's train operating units.

NORTHERN IRELAND

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many general and senior managers were employed by NHS trusts in each year since 1991–2, by region.

Mr. Moss: In Northern Ireland, trusts became operational from 1 April 1993. The information is as follows:

From 1 April 1993 (figures are at September 1993)

Trust	*General manager/chief executives*	*Senior managers*
Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital HSS Trust	1.00	27.00
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	1.00	22.00
Greenpark HSS Trust	1.00	13.00
Ambulance Service HSS Trust	1.00	4.00
Ulster, North Down and Ards HSS Trust	1.00	13.00
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	1.00	11.00

From 1 April 1994 (figures are at September 1994)

Trust	*General manager/ chief executives*	*Senior managers*
Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital HSS Trust	1.00	39.00
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	1.00	22.00
Greenpark HSS Trust	1.00	13.00
Ambulance Service HSS Trust	1.00	5.00
Ulster, North Down and Ards HSS Trust	1.00	14.00
North Down and Ards Community Trust	1.00	30.00
North and West Belfast Community HSS Trust	1.00	30.00
South and East Belfast Community HSS Trust	1.00	31.00
Down and Lisburn HSS Trust	1.00	28.00
Mater Infirmorum Hospital HSS Trust	1.00	6.00
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	1.00	12.00
Craigavon and Banbridge Community HSS Trust	1.00	21.00
Newry and Mourne HSS Trust	1.00	13.00

All figures expressed are WTE (Whole Time Equivalent). Figures from 1 April 1993 are from PIMS (Personnel Information Management System) and figures from 1 April 1994 are extracted from Corporate Monitoring Returns.

Roads

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the annual roads service budget for minor works in each of *(a)* Fermanagh, *(b)* Dungannon, *(c)* Omagh, *(d)* Strabane district council areas and *(e)* Derry city council area.

Mr. Moss: In 1994–95 the estimated minor works expenditure for the district council areas in question is as follows:

District council area	Expenditure in £000s
Derry	587
Dungannon	333
Fermanagh	555
Omagh	521
Strabane	415

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the current major road works schemes being undertaken in the Fermanagh, Dungannon, Omagh and Strabane council areas; and what is their total value

Mr. Moss: Work is currently being undertaken on Omagh through-pass stage 2A and over a period 1994 to 1999 it is planned to undertake major road schemes at Anne street/Thomas street, Dungannon, on the A29 at Carland bridge, on the A5 at Burndennett, Leckpatrick, Magheramason and Garvaghy and on the next stage of the Omagh through-pass. The total estimated cost of these schemes is approximately £9.4 million.

Technical Training Centres

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what factors led to the decision to close the Boucher Road technical training centre in south Belfast and to build a new centre two miles away at Springvale;

(2) if he will list the number of students attending courses at each of the technical training centres in the Greater Belfast area in each of the past three years;

(3) if he will list the locations, student capacity and catchment area of technical training centres in the Greater Belfast area;

(4) what plans he has made to provide technical training for students from south Belfast once the Boucher Road training centre is closed;

(5) what will be the cost of the construction of the new technical training centre at Springvale in west Belfast; and what are the projected annual running cost;

(6) what are the annual running costs of Boucher Road technical centre in south Belfast.

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Julien Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J.S. Crozier to Rev. Martin Smyth dated 28 November 1994:

You have asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland six questions, all of which are concerned with the planned closure of Boucher Road Training Centre in 1996 and the provision of a new facility at Springvale.

The Secretary of State has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, which has responsibility for these matters, to reply. I will deal ;with all of your questions under a number of main headings.

Bouchewr Road

The decision to close Boucher Road was taken in the light of cost, existing capacity and demand, principally the latter. Boucher Road has a target capacity of 240 and currently has 185 trainees, of whom 80 per cent. come from Catholic West Belfast, and some 2 per cent. from South Belfast.

There are already sufficient YTP and adult training places in the catchment area of Boucher Road. The continuation of that centre, together with the arrival of a new Springvale facility, would result in considerable over provision in the West Belfast area.

The total running cost of Boucher Road for the last financial year was £1.25 million for a capacity of 240 places.

Training Centres in Greater Belfast

Details of Training Centre provision in the greater Belfast area are in the attached annex.

South Belfast

Given the low numbers involved there is ample provision in the other Belfast and Lisburn Training Centre for anyone from South Belfast who does not wish to travel to Springvale. However, if at any time in the future we were experiencing significantly increased demand from that area, we would consider how best to meet that demand.

Springvale Training

In 1990 a review of the organisation of training in the Springfield/Lower Falls area of Belfast was carried out by consultants. The main recommendation was that a new training organisation should be established in the area which would embrace both adults and young people, promote complementarity and avoid duplication. In order to develop such a capacity in the heart of that area and to provide a community focus in the re-development of the old Mackies' site at Springfield Road the Agency, along with Making Belfast Work is to provide a new hitech skills training facility.

Springvale, which will be a private non-profit making company, plans to provide enhanced opportunities for individuals from the area to develop their skills in the manufacturing and engineering industries. This in turn is aimed at attracting inward investment to that area.

The project is being funded through the Making Belfast Work Initiative and will cost in total some £4.5 million. Estimated annual running costs for the first 3 years fall within the following ranges for a planned capacity of 350 places:

Year 1: £841,000–£ 917,000
Year 2: £1,029,000–£1,133,000
Year 3: £1,136,000–£1,287,000

I hope that you will find this information helpful.

Technical training centres and catchment area	Capacity	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	Occupancy 1994–95 to date
Boucher Road Largely west Belfast—small minority from north and south Belfast and Lisburn district council areas.	240	152	131	177	159
Dundonald East Belfast and Ards, Castlereagh and North Down district council areas. One course, contractors plant, draws trainees from all over Northern Ireland due to its specialised nature.	240	189	176	222	166

Technical training centres and catchment area	Capacity	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	Occupancy 1994–95 to date
Felden North and west Belfast and Newtonabbey and Carrickfergus district council area. Small minority from Antrim and Larne areas. One course, heavy vehicle repair, draws trainees from all over Northern Ireland due to its specialised nature.	260	162	195	263	251
Lisburn South Belfast and Lisburn district council area. Small minority from Banbridge and Antrim areas. Lisburn has a number of specialised courses, mainly at technician level, and these draw trainees from all over Northern Ireland.	150	117	131	128	108

Commissioner for the Holding Centres

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide *(a)* the annual remuneration paid to the Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres in Northern Ireland and that of the Staff under his supervision, *(b)* the total annual cost to the public purse of the office of the Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres in Northern Ireland and *(c)* a list of any meetings, conferences or functions outside of the United Kingdom which the commissioner has attended in his official capacity since taking up office.

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

*(a)*The annual remuneration paid to the Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres in Northern Ireland is £30,000; that for his Deputy is £10,000. The support staff comprise two civil servants on secondment who also serve the independent assessor of military complaints procedures from the same office premises. The portion of annual remuneration specific to their support work for the independent commissioner totals £24,000.

*(b)*The total annual cost to the public purse of the office of the Commissioner in Northern Ireland is £107,000.

*(c)*Since his appointment in December 1992, the independent commissioner has, to date, made three visits in that capacity outside the United Kingdom.

Health Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of health authorities and trusts as at 30 September.

Mr. Moss: As at 30 September 1994 there were four health and social services boards and 13 health and social services trusts in Northern Ireland.

Council for Voluntary Action

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the nature and scope of the work carried out by Phelim Hamill, during his employment with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: I understand that Mr. Hamill was an information officer with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to what security or other socially sensitive information Phelim Hamill had access during his period of employment with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action; and if he intends to carry out an inquiry.

Mr. Moss: None.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the present chairman of Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action was in office during the period when Phelim Hamill was employed; and what other public appointments the NICVA chairman holds in Northern Ireland or within any other jurisdiction.

Mr. Moss: No. The present chairman is a non-executive director of the Craigavon and Banbridge health and social services trust.

Mr. Maginnis : To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the role of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action; and what are the sources and amount of its funding.

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action is a leading voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland which provides support and training for other voluntary organisations, and which also represents and articulates the views of the wider voluntary sector on matters of common concern. Full details of income are contained in the annual accounts for 1993–94, which are available from the council.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the average period of time taken to process an appeal in respect of an application for disability living allowance;

(2) what is the average period of time taken to process an application for disability living allowance;

(3) how many appeals have been lodged in respect of disability living allowance claims; and, of these, how many are *(a)* successful, *(b)* unsuccessful and *(c)* outstanding.

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for replies to be given.

Letters from Alec Wylie to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 25 November 1994:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the average period of time taken to process an appeal in respect of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) applications.

The average number of days taken to process an appeal from the date of receipt of the letter of appeal until the date the case is sent to the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) is 86 days for the period April 1994 to October 1994. Additional staff have been deployed and overtime is being worked to improve the clearance time. The arrangements for hearing appeals is the responsibility of the President of the ITS and I have passed a copy of your question to him.

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary question about the average period of time taken to process an application for Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

Information on the processing of DLA claims is not available in the "average period" format that you have requested but is available in terms of the percentage of claims cleared within time limits set by the Minister. For the 1994–95 year these time limits/targets are 68 per cent. to be cleared in 30 days and 85 per cent. to be cleared in 53 days.

For the period April 1994 to October 1994, 55 per cent. of claims were cleared within 30 days and 82 per cent. within 53 days. Performance over the last few months has shown a marked improvement as a result of measures taken earlier in the year to deal with some identified problems and in October, 74 per cent. of claims were being cleared within 30 days and 92 per cent. within 53 days.

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary question about the number and outcome of appeals lodged in respect of Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

Since the introduction of DLA in April 1992 to the end of October 1994 there have been 2321 review decisions appealed. Of these, 601 have been successful and 857 have been unsuccessful. There were 608 appeals awaiting preparation of submissions to the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) and around 250 are with the ITS for hearings to be arranged.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to review the operation of the disability living allowance scheme.

Mr. Moss: There are no immediate plans to review policy on the disability living allowance scheme.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for disability living allowance were received in each month since the introduction of this benefit; and if he will give, for each month, details of applications that are *(a)* approved, *(b)* refused, *(c)* withdrawn and *(d)* outstanding.

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alex Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 28 November 1994:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the numbers and outcome of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) applications received since its introduction.

I am sorry that data for the period February 1992 to March 1993 is not readily available in the form you requested. Work has started on extracting the data and I will write to you when this becomes available. I can however supply you with the information for the period April 1993 to October 1994 and this is set out in the table below. I hope you will find this helpful.

Numbers of DLA claims received, allowed, disallowed, withdrawn and outstanding from April 1993 to date.

Month	*Received*	*Allowed*	*Disallowed*	*Withdrawn*	*Outstanding*
April 1993	3,187	2,799	1,769	21	5,316
May	3,878	2,643	1,611	12	4,891
June	4,349	2,788	1,659	24	4,744
July	3,054	2,746	1,852	13	3,150
August	3,026	1,925	1,376	12	2,851
September	3,663	1,809	1,386	18	3,292
October	3,708	1,562	1,660	15	3,750
November	3,591	1,566	1,714	11	4,038
December	2,256	1,006	1,307	17	3,959
January 1994	2,625	1,188	1,422	35	3,933
February	2,986	929	1,333	17	4,618
March	3,629	1,578	1,843	14	4,789
April	2,883	990	1,032	12	5,627
May	3,038	1,769	1,444	12	5,422
June	3,604	2,132	1,843	25	5,001
July	2,467	2,043	1,906	13	3,491
August	2,955	1,562	1,668	11	3,179
September	3,995	1,810	1,690	23	3,609
October	3,779	1,629	1,980	11	3,734

Loans and Grants

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans were received by each office of the Social Security Agency in each month since January 1993; and if he will break down the figures for applications which were (i) approved and (ii) refused.

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given, but as the tabular material is exceptionally lengthy I have arranged for it to be placed in the Library.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 28 November 1994:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question requesting information about the number of applications for Community Care Grants, Budgeting and Crisis Loans.

I am sorry that information is not held in precisely the format you have requested but I have set out the available data in the attached tables. As the Social Fund has been managed on a District basis from April 1991, it is not possible to provide details for each Social Security Office. I am therefore providing information by District but I have also included an annex to show which Social Security Offices make up each District. I should also explain that the number of awards made is the total of all awards made in each month, including those made as a result of a review, and the refusals information is the number of initial decisions to refuse as a percentage of all decisions made in that particular month. While, therefore, there is no direct correlation between the figures in each column in the table,

the information as set out fairly reflects the general position on social fund applications.

Population Statistics

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current population of each ward in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The Northern Ireland census 1991 summary report, published in January 1992, contains at table 4, pages 4 to 13, the population of each District Council ward. Copies of this report are available in the House of Commons library.

If, however, the hon. Gentleman is referring to the current electorate of each ward, this information is contained in the 1994 electoral register, copies of which were forwarded to the main political parties in January 1994 by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.

Deprivation

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the indices of deprivation used by his Department; and if he will list the electoral wards of Northern Ireland in order of the degree of deprivation.

Sir John Wheeler: A general index of relative multiple deprivation was published in September 1994 by the Department of Finance and Personnel in a report entitled "Relative Deprivation in Northern Ireland", policy planning and research unit occasional paper no. 28, a copy of which is in the Library. The report lists the 26 district councils, 566 wards and 3,729 enumeration districts in Northern Ireland ranked in order of their degree of deprivation. Where appropriate, Departments may use this research to target programmes in accordance with their own needs and priorities.

Exchequer Spending

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the total Exchequer expenditure voted for Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and what is the latest estimate of Exchequer spending over the next five years;

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that there is no reduction in the level of Exchequer expenditure, in real terms, in the incoming financial year;

(3) what Exchequer savings are expected to result from the recent end to violence; and what steps will be taken to ensure that such savings are invested in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: The total public expenditure in Northern Ireland in the past five years is given in the table below. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his unified Budget Statement announced the public expenditure totals for Northern Ireland for 1995–96 to 1997–98 and these are also shown. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will shortly be making a statement on the allocation of those totals to individual programmes within Northern Ireland. Estimates for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are not available.

	£ millions
1989–90	5,395
1990–91	5,525
1991–92	6,018
1992–93	6,580
1993–94	7,086
1994–95	7,492
1995–96	7,716
1996–97	[1]7,880
1997–98	[1]8,020

[1] Rounded to the nearest £10 million.

The Northern Ireland total is mainly the result of the application of the comparability principle which automatically adjusts the NI total in line with movements in comparable GB programmes in proportion to relative population. Full account has been taken of Northern Ireland's special needs in setting its overall public expenditure total.

The peace process is still at an early stage and it would not be helpful to speculate on the likely quantum of savings. In setting public expenditure totals for Northern Ireland full account will be taken of Northern Ireland's special needs.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Sir John Wheeler: Of the number of files held centrally in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, 57 are top secret and 4,661 are secret.

Textile Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has concerning interests of the chairman of the Northern Ireland industrial development board in the textile industry; and what assessment he has made of the objectivity of the consideration given by the board to the application by the Hualon Corporation for a grant of £61 million for new textile facilities in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* All members of the Industrial Development Board are required to register interests which could impinge on their work as Board Members. The chairman has registered interests in two Northern Ireland clothing companies, Cooneen Textiles Ltd. and Regatta Fashions Ltd. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has the fullest confidence in the objectivity of the advice given by the board to officials and Ministers on this and all other cases.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been undertaken by his Department to examine the propriety of links between the chairman of the Northern Ireland industrial development board and the Hualon Corporation.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor the chairman of the Industrial Development Board is aware of any links which should be investigated. Mr. McGuckian has met

Hualon on three occasions, supported by officials, in his capacity as chairman, which is the full extent of his contacts with the corporation.

Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to oppose the appointment of Mr. John McGuckian to the chairmanship of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation is entirely a matter for the Irish Government. The chairman is Judge Catherine McGuinness.

Hualon Corporation

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Hualon Corporation has to date honoured all commitments relating to the payment of monies into its Northern Ireland subsidiary in connection with the projects for which the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board has approved the payment of a £61 million grant; if he will specify what those commitments were and the date by which they should have been and were honoured; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Hualon Corporation's commitments to its Northern Ireland project are contained in the agreement with the Industrial Development Board, the details of which are commercially confidential.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will identify every occasion upon which members of the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board *(a)* met, and *(b)* received hospitality from individuals associated with the Hualon group.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 21 November 1994]:* Over the five-year period during which discussions with Hualon have been conducted, the chairman of the Industrial Development Board, has met with executives of the Hualon Corporation on three occasions. On two of these occasions, during visits to a number of locations in Asia, discussions with Hualon executives in Malaysia extended over dinner provided by the company. On the other occasion, in Northern Ireland, IDB hosted a working dinner.

Tourist Board

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during what period Lord O'Neill served as chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board; by whom he was appointed; and what were his given reasons for resigning.

Mr. Ancram: Lord O'Neill was appointed chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board on 1 October 1975 by the Department of Commerce. He served until 30 June 1980, when his term of office expired.

DEFENCE

Canadian Forces Base, Suffield

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom service personnel were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured at the Canadian forces base, Suffield in each year since 1972; what was the cause of death or injury; and whether a board of inquiry was held in each case.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. member.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1972 the safety procedures of the British Army training unit at the Canadian forces base, Suffield have been reviewed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: All aspects of safety at the British Army training unit, Suffield are kept under constant review. The range safety inspection team conducted a review earlier this year, in keeping with this continuous process. In addition, particular attention is paid to any recommendations for the improvement of safety procedures which may arise from inquiries into specific incidents.

Latham Report

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he is having, and with whom, on the possible effects of the Latham report on his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department is a major customer of the construction industry, and we are keen to pursue any initiatives which may improve the efficiency of the industry and deliver better value for money. Accordingly, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has agreed with Cabinet colleagues that officials from our Department should participate in both the efficiency scrutiny, which the Prime Minister recently announced, and the follow-up work to the Latham report which is being co-ordinated by the Department of the Environment.

RAF Scampton

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the joint arms control implementation group, the trade management training school and the Rapier carderisation unit will be moved to if RAF Scampton closes; and what will be the cost of these relocations.

Mr. Soames: Details of these moves and the associated costs may be found in the consultative document on the proposed closure of RAF Scampton which was issued on 17 November. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Indonesia

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence matters were discussed when the Chief and Vice Chief of Defence Staff visited Indonesia last year.

Mr. Soames: Neither the Chief of the Defence Staff nor the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff visited Indonesia in 1993. The Chief of the Defence Staff visited in October 1994 and the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff visited in February 1994. During their visits, they discussed defence and security matters of mutual interest. As is usual, details of their discussions are confidential.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he became aware that talks were taking place

between the Indonesian armed forces commander and the United Kingdom for Scorpion light tanks.

Mr. Freeman: My Department first became aware of Indonesian interest in Scorpion in about August 1992.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all current military contracts for military equipment, vehicles and weapons to Indonesia, including the number of such items involved and monetary amounts.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on 28 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *501*.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training, advice or information have been given to the Indonesian armed forces at any time since 1979.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom has provided training, including developmental and technical courses, for Indonesian students. Details of training, including the numbers involved, are not normally disclosed as they are regarded as confidential between Governments. Ministers and officials have met representatives of the Government of Indonesia to discuss defence and security matters of mutual interest.

Aircraft Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of repair to the aircraft which crashed on landing on the island of Islay on 29 June; what percentage was met from public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The cost of repairs to BAe 146 ZE700 as with all other similar work is commercially confidential. All costs will be met from the Defence budget.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of the repair work undertaken on Chinook ZA717 following its accident in the Falkland Islands in July 1989; on what date the decision was taken not to complete the repair work; and for what purpose the aircraft is currently being used.

Mr. Soames: The damage to the Chinook ZA717 was such that the aircraft was judged, on 4 August 1989, to be beyond economic repair. Since no repairs were initiated, no repair costs were incurred. The aircraft is used at present for battle damage repair instruction.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all accidents to Royal Air Force Tornado aircraft in 1994, indicating the damage category in each case; and if he will make a statement on the accident rate in respect of Tornado aircraft in 1994.

Mr. Soames: There have been six accidents involving RAF Tornados in 1994, as follows:

	Date	Damage category
Tornado F3	7 June	Cat 5
Tornado F3	8 July	Cat 5
Tornado GR1	19 July	Cat 5
Tornado GR1A/GR1	1 August	GR1A–Cat 5; GR1–Cat 3
Tornado GR1A	1 September	Cat 5
Tornado GR1A	19 September	Cat 5

We have had an extremely low loss rate over the Tornado's 19 years of service. The 1994 Tornado accident rate will be published in due course in the 1995 edition of United Kingdom Defence statistics along with annual accident rates of other military aircraft.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those aircraft types in Royal Air Force service which are fitted with an accident data recorder.

Mr. Soames: RAF aircraft fitted with accident data recorders are:

Andover
BAe 146
Harrier GR7
Hawk
Nimrod
Sentry
Tornado GR1
Tornado F3
Tristar
Tucano
VC 10 C1

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total administrative cost of the Defence Export Services Organisation in 1992–93, 1993–94 and projected for 1994–95, both in full and also net of any offsetting administrative arrangements.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *139*.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be the new head of the Defence Export Services Organisation; what is the duration of his contract; and what is his annual salary.

Mr. Freeman: Mr. Charles Masefield took up his appointment as Head of Defence Export Services on 1 September 1994. He joined the Ministry of Defence on secondment from British Aerospace for an initial period of three years, following his selection through an open recruitment competition.

Mr. Masefield's salary in this appointment is £140,000 per annum and be can earn an additional non-pensionable bonus, subject to performance, up to a maximum of £21,674.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed within the Defence Export Services Organisation; what is the breakdown of their posts; and how many staff are employed in London.

Mr. Freeman: The Defence Export Services Organisation staff allocation for 1994–95 is 708. A total of 414 of these staff are located in London. The breakdown is as follows:

Marketing assistance	137
Military advice	119
Export policy and control	47
Disposal Sales Agency	118
Project management	287
Total	708

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of staff of the Defence Export Services Organisation are seconded from industry; and what functions they perform.

Mr. Freeman: Two members of the Defence Export Services Organisation are seconded from industry, one is the head of the organisation, the other is the offset advisor. In addition, the post of international finance adviser is filled by an individual from the private sector on short-term contract with MOD.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the overseas offices of the Defence Export Services Organisations are situated; when each office was established; how many staff are currently employed; and what is the annual running cost of each.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Location	*Staff Numbers*	*Estimated cost 1994–95 £000*	*Established*
Riyadh	2	138	1984
Kuwait	3	102	1988
New Delhi	6	86	1984
Kuala Lumpur	5	197	1986
Seoul	3	110	1988
Canberra	2	88	1989
Jakarta	3	72	1991
Bangkok	3	101	1992
Ankara	2	78	1988

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the functions of the RAF air defence advisory team and the British defence advisory team; and if he will indicate in each case their relationship to the Defence Export Services Organisation, when the team was established and its annual budget in each of the last three years.

Mr. Freeman: The RAF air defence advisory team—ADAT—was established in 1983, within the Defence Export Services Organisation, to provide advice and assistance on air defence systems, equipments, operations and training to friendly overseas Governments, British defence attachés and British industry. The British defence advisory team—BDAT—is not separately established. It is usually headed by the ADAT leader, and comes together for short periods to provide overseas Governments with on-site studies into single or multi-service roles.

The annual budget for ADAT in the last three years is: 1992–93 £0.354 million, 1993–94 £0.346 million. The estimate for the present financial year 1994–95 is £0.411 million. BDAT does not have a separate budget.

VSEL

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to use his VSEL golden share to ensure that no company wishing to take over the company could accumulate more than 15 per cent. shareholding until its takeover offer became unconditional.

Mr. Freeman: Under the articles of association of VSEL plc, it is for the board of the company to ensure compliance with the present 15 per cent. limitation on individual shareholdings. The relevant provisions of the articles of association cannot be amended without the consent of my right hon. and learned Friend as holder of the special share in VSEL. Amendments to these provisions which would be required in order to permit the acquisition of VSEL by either British Aerospace or GEC have been approved at extraordinary general meetings of VSEL, but have not yet received the consent of the special shareholder. My Department previously confirmed to both British Aerospace and GEC that the special shareholder would give his consent to these amendments if they were approved by VSEL shareholders, subject to the relevant regulatory approvals and his being satisfied that his order rights as special shareholder would continue to be protected.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the crews of the Italian Air Force Tornados involved in a breach of the Hill House riding school avoidance area on 22 July 1993 were from the same unit as those involved in a breach of the same avoidance area on 17 June 1993.

Mr. Soames: No.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the minimum authorised altitude for the flight by two German Navy Tornados which infringed the Midland Gliding Club avoidance area on 16 July 1993; and at what height the aircraft were flying at the time of the breach.

Mr. Soames: The aircraft were authorised to operate down to 1,000ft minimum separation distance. The RAF police concluded that it was impossible to establish the exact height of the aircraft as they passed over Long Mynd, but estimated the aircraft to be flying at approximately 900ft above ground level in the complaint area.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the crews of helicopters undertaking low flying below 100ft are required to carry 1:50,000 scale maps of the route.

Mr. Soames: There is no requirement for military helicopter aircrews to carry 1:50,000 scale maps, although such maps are carried whenever aircrews consider it necessary to do so.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the deployment of two United States F-117A aircraft to RAF Lakenheath from 3 to 21 October; how many sorties were flown by the aircraft in the course of their deployment, and how many of these involved use of the United Kingdom low-flying system; how many weapons were dropped by the aircraft, and at which ranges; and how many of the sorties involved use of the Spadeadam range.

Mr. Soames: Between 3 and 21 October 1994, two United States F-117A aircraft deployed to RAF Lakenheath. On 6 October, one of the two F-117As participated in a static display at Soesterberg air base in the Netherlands as part of an official Royal Netherlands Air Force ceremony. In addition, the two F-117As conducted 19 medium-level familiarisation sorties over the United Kingdom. The F-117As did not carry ordnance during these sorties and they did not use either United Kingdom ranges or the United Kingdom low flying system during their deployment.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the RAF Police investigation of the breach of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust avoidance area at Caerlaverock by three Army helicopters on 8 December 1993 established whether any Army helicopters had booked in to low flying area 16 during the period of the incident.

Mr. Soames: The investigation established that Army helicopters were booked into low flying area 16 during the period of the incident; however, the helicopters involved in the breach were not. This was because their crews had not intended to fly at low level; they were forced to do so because of poor weather conditions.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people complained about the seven breaches of the Lockerbie low flying avoidance area during 1993 listed in his Department's evidence to the Defence Select Committee —HC 314 of Session 1993–94 pp. 35–36; and how many other complaints were received during 1993 about low flying within the Lockerbie avoidance area.

Mr. Soames: Seven individuals made a total of 12 complaints about the seven breaches during 1993. A further seven complaints were received during 1993 alleging low flying within the avoidance area, but on investigation, these were not substantiated.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requests have been received from foreign Governments since 1990 requesting permission for foreign military aircraft to fly over the United Kingdom at less than 250 feet.

Mr. Soames: One request has been received since 1990 from the US Government. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 15 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *475.*

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Harriers involved in breaches of the Royal Welsh agricultural show low-flying avoidance area on 19 and 21 July 1993 were flown by pilots from *(a)* the same squadron and *(b)* the same station; and what were the findings of the RAF Police investigation in relation to the availability of information on the avoidance at the bases concerned.

Mr. Soames: The aircraft in question were from both different units and bases. The RAF police found that notification of the temporary avoidance had been received at both bases. At one of these, however, a flaw occurred in their system for presenting details of the notification to aircrew. This has since been rectified.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the minimum authorised altitude for low-level sorties by German Air Force Tornados during its exchange visit to the United States 494 Fighter Squadron at RAF Lakenheath during August.

Mr. Soames: One thousand feet minimum separation distance.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the foreign aircraft involved in low-flying avoidance breaches on 17 June 1993, 9, 16 and 22 July 1993, 23 August 1993, 21 September 1993 and 14 December 1993 were operating in company with Royal Air Force aircraft at the time of the breaches.

Mr. Soames: None. RAF aircraft took part in the sortie on 21 September 1993 but were not in company with the foreign aircraft at the time of the breach.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Royal Air Force Police standing orders governing the conduct of investigations into alleged breaches of low flying regulations require the investigators to interview both members of the air crew in cases where the aircraft involved in the alleged breach is a two-seat type.

Mr. Soames: No.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in investigating the low-level overflight of Hope under Dinmore on 23 February 1993 by a Royal Air Force British Aerospace 146 aircraft, as described in evidence to the Defence Select Committee, HC 314 of Session 1993–94, page 44.

Mr. Soames: No investigation was initiated since there was no evidence to suggest that any breach of flying regulations had occurred.

Subsequent inquiries have confirmed that no military BAe 146 aircraft flew in the vicinity of Hope-under-Dinmore on the day in question.

Murted Air Base

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the deployment of RAF Tornados to Murted air base, Turkey, in April 1994; how many aircraft took part; how many low-level sorties were carried out; and what was the minimum permitted altitude for these sorties.

Mr. Soames: Eight Tornado GR1 aircraft were deployed to Akinci air base, formerly known as Murted Air Base Turkey, from 8 to 21 April 1994, to participate in the NATO exercise Distant Thunder 94.

The Tornado crews flew 92 low-level sorties at 500ft descending to a minimum of 250ft when engaged in target approach runs.

Military Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the minimum separation distances between United Kingdom military separation distances between United Kingdom military aircraft *(a)* in the same formation and *(b)* not in the same formation, on the landing approach at military airfields.

Mr. Soames: The minimum separation distances between United Kingdom military aircraft on landing approach at military airfields vary according to aircraft type classification. Guidance for RAF aircrew on minimum separation approaches are set out in various RAF instructions.

School Fees

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what ranks serving in the United Kingdom armed forces are able to claim for school fees for children who are of school age and living within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: Boarding school allowance is available to all ranks of the armed forces serving in the United Kingdom or overseas providing that they meet the eligibility criteria.

Air Incidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiry was held into the near-miss incident

on 19 August between an Icelandair Boeing 737 and two United States Air Force F15 aircraft off the Humberside coast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Investigation of the air traffic control radar recordings showed that standard separation always existed between the aircraft in question, and that there had been no possibility of them colliding. In accordance with normal procedures, the reporting pilot was informed of this and asked if he still wished to file an airmiss. He subsequently withdrew his airmiss report.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the investigation into a near-miss incident involving a Spanish airliner and two RAF Tornados near Gibraltar on 29 January 1992.

Mr. Soames: Incidents which occur in Spanish airspace are matters for investigation by the Spanish authorities. My Department has not received any report on this occurrence.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the inquiry into the RAF Puma wirestrike incident near Kinlochmoidart on 18 May.

Mr. Soames: The incident referred to occurred during a routine troop deployment exercise. The RAF Puma sustained minor damage to the main rotor blades as a result of a wirestrike. Such minor incidents are investigated by a unit inquiry. It is not my Department's practice to place copies of unit inquiries in the Library of the House.

Flight Authorisations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if an RAF officer was responsible for checking and authorising the flight from RAF Leuchars by three Danish Air Force F-16s on 14 December 1993.

Mr. Soames: No. There was no requirement for RAF officers to check or authorise the flight plans. The Royal Danish Air Force aircrews were, however, provided with comprehensive face-to-face briefing on the United Kingdom low flying system, fighter affiliation and training targets.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds British troops have now been withdrawn from Rwanda; and in what circumstances, relating to the security or humanitarian situation, they will return.

Mr. Soames: The Government agreed to a request from the United Nations for a contingent of specialist troops to provide support for a three-month period to fill the gap until the arrival of the commercial company contracted by the UN to undertake the logistics role in Rwanda.

In the course of their deployment the United Kingdom contingent made a very substantial contribution to the UN operation. Their task has now been completed and they are being withdrawn, apart from a small number of headquarters staff officers. Forces from several African and other states are now firmly established as part of the UN force.

The UN have not sought a further deployment in Rwanda. We would consider any further requests for assistance against our current commitments elsewhere in the world, in the usual way.

Officer Selection

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce the specification requirement of personal integrity for candidates for army officer selection.

Mr. Soames: A high level of personal integrity is expected from all Army officers. Assessment of an individual candidate's personal integrity is already undertaken as part of the normal process of Army officer selection and is carried out by various means including reference to the candidate's application form, initial interviews, headmasters' and tutor's reports, school and university liaison officer's reports, referees' reports and further interviews at the regular commission board. There are no plans to introduce further specific measures.

Arms Sales

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current controls on British arms sales by country and type of weaponry.

Mr. Freeman: The current export controls are set out in part III group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended. These define the equipments requiring an export licence and, where the controls are not of a global application, the countries to which they apply. Each export licence application is assessed on a case-by-case basis taking into account, as appropriate, a range of relevant factors including national security, international obligations and humanitarian concerns.

Conduct after Capture Courses

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his Department's guidelines with regard to service personnel attending conduct after capture courses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Conduct after capture training is made available to those personnel most vulnerable to capture in time of war or other crises.

Equality

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report on equality in the Army prepared by his Department's working party in 1977

Mr. Soames: Although no working party report on equality in the Army was prepared in 1977, a working party considering future employment in the Women's Royal Army Corps reported in November 1976 and then again in 1978. It is not my Department's practice, however, to release internal planning documents such as the ones produced on these occasions.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent by his Department on legal representation in the industrial tribunal cases regarding the dismissal of pregnant service women.

Mr. Soames: About £1,000,000.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Soames: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Bills (Security Service)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his departmental budget includes a contribution for the telephone bills of the Security Service.

Mr. Soames: No.

Study Contracts

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his policy concerning study contracts offered by his Department for risk-reduction work in defence contracts;

(2) when his Department first introduced the policy of study contracts for risk-reduction work in defence contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department's phased approach to procurement projects has been applied since the 1960s and aims at the progressive reduction of risk. This includes the use of risk reduction study contracts where judged necessary. Risk management has been reinforced by the introduction of an initiative in the late 1980s which ensures that the MOD applies explicit risk management techniques to all equipment projects.

Procurement

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes there have been in his Department's procurement policy in the past six months.

Mr. Freeman: My Department's procurement policy is continually being refined to ensure that the needs of the armed forces are met at minimum overall cost to the defence budget. In the past six months, procurement policy and practices were reviewed as part of "Front Line First". The outcome was reported in July in my Department's publication on the Defence costs study.

Royal Dockyards

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the privatisation of the royal dockyards.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) on 23 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *146*. Privatisation on the right terms remains the Government's preferred option.

HEALTH

Commissioning Agencies

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a list of health commissioning agencies, the health authorities they cover and when they came into being.

Mr. Malone: The term "health commissioning agency" has no statutory basis. Details of joint working between district and family health services authorities are determined by local circumstance. By the beginning of October 1994, there were 55 appointments of joint chief executive. There were a further seven sets of joint management arrangements, without a joint chief executive. A list of authorities concerned will be placed in the Library. Information has not been collected centrally about when the arrangements came into being.

Lysergic Acid Diethymide

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were involved and to what extent lysergic acid diethymide was tested on national health service psychiatric patients; and what long-term monitoring of its effects has been carried out.

Mr. Bowis: Lysergic acid diethymide is not currently used in the treatment of national health service psychiatric patients and we have no evidence that it has been used in recent years.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths in each of the last three years were attributable to the overuse or abuse of *(a)* temazepam, *(b)* zopiclone and *(c)* all other benzodiazepines.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the number of deaths in 1990–1992 in which there was a mention of abuse of temazepam, other unspecified benzodiazapines, or zopiclone, with or without other drugs.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Temazepam	12	18	16
Other Unspecified Benzodiazapines	10	17	17
Zopiclone	—	—	—

In 1991 there were, in addition, two drug deaths recorded with mention of both temazepam, diazepam and morphine which are not included in these figures.

Dental Health (Children)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is taking to encourage children to brush their teeth.

Mr. Malone: The Department has published an oral health strategy for England which sets a number of objectives relating to the further reduction in caries in children. Carrying forward dental health education is a matter for health authorities. Copies of the strategy are available in the Library.

The Department has made available £1 million for oral health education for 1994–95. Thirty-six proposals have been approved. A second tranche is currently being considered.

Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much Maggie Aikman received on her resignation as chief executive of Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust.

Mr. Malone: Mrs. Aikman received £135,750 net when her contract with Burnley Health Care National Health Service Trust was terminated on 28 October.

Asthma

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library the cost per head in each family health services authority based on the figures in her answer of 1 November to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), *Official Report*, columns *1076–78* for *(a)* the net ingredient costs of asthma preparations in 1993, *(b)* the net costs of corticosteroids in each year since 1984 and *(c)* the other net ingredient costs in each year since 1989; and if she will also express the figures in table 2 for the number of prescription items for exempt children in 1992 and 1993 as items per head in each family health service authority.

Mr. Malone: The available information has been placed in the Library. The data for exempt children by family health services authorities could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance she is giving to London NHS trusts and district health authorities to help them resolve their debt problems.

Mr. Malone: All national health service bodies are expected to operate within their income. However the two Thames regions are responsible for monitoring the financial performance of health authorities and NHS trusts in London and can provide short-term financial assistance where justified. The London implementation group also provides transitional support to NHS trusts in inner London.

The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Staveley, chairman of North Thames region, and Mr. William Wells, chairman of South Thames region for further information.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to control the re-employment in the NHS or by NHS trusts staff dismissed by previous NHS or NHS trust employers.

Mr. Malone: The responsibility for recruitment and selection of staff is a matter for national health service employers. They are expected to follow good recruitment practices which include interviews, appropriate questioning about previous employment and career gaps, and taking up of references.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what limitations are placed on non-executive directors of NHS trusts obtaining top management posts in the same trust.

Mr. Malone: Under Regulation 11(1)(e) of the National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990, employees of any health service body are disqualified for appointment as chairman or non-executive director of an NHS trust.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the figures for debt or surplus for each London NHS trust and district health authority at the end of the last financial year.

Mr. Sackville: Information on relevant health authorities is shown in the table. The information requested for national health service trusts will be available in December and placed in the Library.

Surplus/Deficit London District Health Authorities 1993–94

	£000
Barnet DHA	756
Hillingdon DHA	(185)
Brent and Harrow DHA	(560)
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow DHA	3,653
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster DHA	(2,331)
Barking and Havering DHA	(1,777)
Redbridge and Waltham Forest DHA	(535)
East London and the City DHA	2,084
New River DHA	1,140
Camden and Islington DHA	1,479
Bexley DHA	5,101
Greenwich DHA	(682)
Bromley DHA	(10)
South East London DHA	15
Croydon Health CA	669
Wandsworth DHA	2,093
Merton and Sutton DHA	(77)
Kingston and Richmond DHA	232

Source:
Health Authority Annual Accounts.
Note:
(i) Figures include Surplus/Deficit of Directly Managed Units and Common Services Agencies.
(ii) Figures are provisional.
(iii) Bracketed figures indicate deficits.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the regulations on payments to NHS staff *(a)* in the case of redundancy *(b)* in the case of health retirements and *(c)* for dismissal; and what controls she plans to exercise over the behaviour of NHS trusts in similar circumstances.

Mr. Malone: Redundancy payments for national health service staff employed on national terms and conditions of service are governed by section 45 of the General Whitley Council handbook, copies of which are available in the Library. For staff employed on NHS trust terms and conditions of service redundancy payments are covered by their contractual terms.

Retirement on grounds of ill-health, for staff who are members of the NHS pension scheme, is governed by the NHS (Superannuation) Regulations.

Any payments for dismissal on grounds other than redundancy would be determined by the courts and industrial tribunals.

Guidance on the making of termination settlements to general and senior managers on short-term rolling contracts was given to health authorities in HSG(94)18 and to trusts in TEL(94)3, copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS trusts are free, under the terms of paragraph 16(1)(d) of schedule 2 to the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, to employ staff on such terms as they think fit.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current market-testing programme agreed with the Prescription Pricing Authority; and, for each of the elements of the programme, what is the point in the process so far achieved and the target date for completion.

Mr. Malone: The current market-testing programme for the Prescription Pricing Authority includes prescription processing; management and maintenance of the authority's estate; mainframe computer support; security, portering, catering and central administrative services; and information division processing support. Market testing of the prescription processing service and information division processing, which together employ 1,500 staff, is well advanced. Contracts will be in place by 1 May 1995. Work on remaining elements of the programme will begin shortly, with completion anticipated by 31 March 1996.

Cardiac Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of people each year in the Waltham Forest area who need *(a)* pacemakers and *(b)* cardiac catheterisation; and if she will make funds specifically available for these operations to be carried out at Whipps Cross Hospital.

Mr. Sackville: It is the responsibility of Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority to assess the level of need for cardiac services and to purchase these as appropriate. The hon. Member may wish to contact Miss Delva Patman, chairman of the authority, for details.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to ensure that community health councils are invited to take up observer status on the board of new providers of ambulance services not normally within their competence; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The Government do not believe that it is necessary to extend the statutory powers of community health councils in this way.

EL(94)4, copies of which are available in the Library, makes it clear that all trusts should agree arrangements for liaison and access with community health councils. This applies equally to ambulance service trusts. Where community health councils are not invited to board meetings, trusts should offer alternative regular liaison opportunities.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to provide information via the Internet; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Use of the Internet as an additional method of disseminating information to the public is under active consideration by the Department in line with the Government's commitment to make more information available to the public and to make innovative use of telecommunications. Officials from the Department and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys are also working with the Central Statistical Office and other Government Departments to see what use can be made of the Internet to disseminate Government statistics.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what comparative studies she has made of survival rates for breast cancer for *(a)* females and *(b)* males between the United Kingdom and other developed countries; if she will facilitate the universal use of best practice protocols for the treatment of this condition; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None. The Chief Medical Officers' of England and Wales consultation document "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services" recommends that all patients should have access to a uniformly high quality of care wherever they live to ensure the maximum possible cure rates and best quality of life. Where professional bodies have produced best practice protocols we support their use in the national health service. Copies of the consultation document are available in the Library.

Appointments, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people were *(a)* considered for appointment as chairman of the Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagn Hospital NHS trust and *(b)* shortlisted; and who selected (i) the shortlist and (ii) the chairman;

(2) on whose advice she decided not to reappoint Mr. Graham Smith as chairman of Doncaster health authority.

Mr. Malone: Recommendations to Ministers for the chairmanships of health authorities and national health service trusts are made by chairmen of regional health authorities. Ministers are responsible for making the final decision. The then Minister of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), appointed Mr. Keith Jones as chairman of Doncaster district health authority. I made the decision to appoint Mr. Raymond Tonkinson as chairman of the Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu Hospital NHS trust. Details of unsuccessful candidates are confidential.

Mrs. Maggie Aikman

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she approved of the pay–off of £250,000 made by the Burnley NHS trust to Mrs. Maggie Aikman.

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not required to approve severance settlements for trust chief executives.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place the Touche Ross report on the Prescription Pricing Authority in the Library.

Mr. Malone: No. As part of the market testing process, a number of reports have been prepared for the Prescription Pricing Authority by Touche Ross and others. Those reports contain information which is commercially sensitive.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health is she will order a public inquiry into the maladministration

of Wessex, West Midlands and Trent regional health authorities.

Mr. Malone: No.

Patients Charter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current patients' charter standard for waiting for attention on an out-patient visit; and how such waiting time standards are measured.

Mr. Malone: The patients charter national standard requires that a patient be given a specific appointment time and be seen within 30 minutes of that time. Monitoring of this standard is done locally using guidance issued by the Department, copies of which will be placed in the Library. The waiting time to be measured is from the time of the appointment to the time the patient is actually seen for the main consultation.

Hip Replacements

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hip replacement operations have been carried out in each year from 1983 to 1993 in England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Sackville: Information for England for the years 1983 to 1991–92, the latest available, is shown in the table. Data for the year 1987–88 are not available. Figures for Scotland and Wales are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Hip replacements and other arthroplasty operations of the hip

Year	*Thousands*
1983	36.2
1984	36.9
1985	36.5
1986	41.0
1988–89	46.5
1989–90	50.8
1990–91	50.7
1991–92	55.6

Source:
Hospital Activity Analysis 1983 to 1986: Health Episode Statistics 1988–89 to date.

Horizontal Management Course

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds NHS funds were used to support managers attending a three-day course in June 1994 at the Hyde Park Hotel on Horizontal Management; what was the cost; and how many managers attended the course.

Mr. Malone: It is a matter for individual national health service trusts and health authorities to determine their training needs. This information is not therefore available centrally.

Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom have cancer; what are the projected figures for 2015; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested. It has been estimated, using data from the general household survey, that the prevalence of cancer in the adult population is of the order of 1 per cent. In 1989, latest available figures, there were 190,590 registrations of newly diagnosed cases of cancer in England, excluding non-melanoma skin cancers. Projections for 2015 are not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

NHS Executive

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will instruct the NHS executive to change its purchasing system so that all patients are treated equally according to clinical need by *(a)* having a separate budget for accident and emergency costs, to ensure that unexpected increases do not have to be absorbed by the district health authority, *(b)* allocating the cost of more expensive and long-term treatments so that general practitioner fundholders pay an appropriate amount, *(c)* investigation the merits of bringing all general practitioners into the purchasing system as equal partners with district health authorities and *(d)* investigating the merits of providing all general practitioners with funds for routine treatments; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The aim of budget setting in the national health service is to give both health authorities and fundholding general practitioners a fair share of NHS resources to meet their patients' needs. In the case of health authorities, this includes funding to secure accident and emergency services for the whole of their local population. EL(94)79 recently announced a significant expansion of fundholding options to enable all GPs to become directly involved in purchasing and managing funds on their patients' behalf.

Copies of EL(94)79, "Developing NHS purchasing and GP fundholding", EL(94)84, "General Practice Fundholding: guidance on setting budgets for 1995–96" and FDL (94)68, "Revenue allocations 1995–96" are available in the Library.

GP Contracts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider making changes to general practitioners' contracts so as to ensure that if a parent chooses to deregister their child for health surveillance with their general practitioner, the money is then transferred to the health authority to provide an alternative community service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: In purchasing community child health surveillance, district health authorities take account of the needs of all children who are not registered for child health surveillance with general practitioners. No transfer of money is required to ensure this.

Patient Advocacy Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will set up a working party to examine and report to the House within the next 12 months on the feasibility of introducing a properly funded and independent advocacy service for all national health service complainants; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will ensure *(a)* that a full range of appropriate independent advocacy services based on existing local interest groups are available to all national health service patients who require such a service with support from joint finance and *(b)* that it is a statutory duty of regional and district health authorities to have strategies supporting independent advocacy initiatives and financially support advocacy services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The Government welcome the initiative of those national health service authorities and trusts which have already set up their own patient advocacy and patient friend schemes to encourage and support patients including those who are not able to represent themselves in pursuing complaints, making suggestions about and seeking NHS services. "Being Heard", copies of which are available in the Library, the report of the Wilson committee on NHS complaints procedures, recognised the importance of providing support to complainants and the role of community health councils in doing so. We are currently considering the responses to the consultation exercise on the report and will make an announcement on our decisions in due course.

Pharmaceutical Regulations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department will undertake a review of the national health services (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992 to take account of patients' needs; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The Department continues to keep under review the operation of the pharmaceutical regulations and the need for any change.

Vegetarians

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surveys her Department has commissioned which indicate that vegetarians tend to be more healthy than meat-eaters; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not commissioned any surveys specifically of the diet, nutritional status and health of vegetarians. A variety of studies have shown that vegetarians as a group tend to be healthier than non-vegetarians, but the many other differences in their diet and in other aspects of their lifestyle may be just as important as the avoidance of meat.

Redundancies and Early Retirements

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total costs of redundancy and early retirement payments to *(a)* midwife teachers, *(b)* nurse teachers and *(c)* senior midwife managers for each of the last three years including 1994 to date.

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Rod Simms

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the circumstances leading up to the dismissal of Mr. Rod Simms, facilities manager, Royal Bethlem hospital trust.

Mr. Sackville : This is a matter for the Royal Bethlem and Maudsley national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Bernard Williams, chairman of the trust, for details.

Computer Centres

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy in respect of marketing testing or selling national health service computer centres; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: A number of regional computer centres serving the national health service have been sold off or contracted out for a number of years. Others, which remain in-house, have been reviewing their options in the light of the planned abolition of the parent regional health authorities in 1996. The aim is to secure best long-term value for money for the NHS and to maximise the use of existing management and financial resources on the core statutory function of improved health care. Options, which are for local determination, include;

Closure without replacement

Market testing to identify a new supplier or suppliers

Transfer to another owner within the NHS at manageable risk

Sale by competition to an owner outside the NHS (which might include a bid from a Management buy-out)

Guidelines to assist health authorities and trusts in their consideration of future arrangements for NHS trading agencies generally will be issued shortly.

Trent Regional Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish in full the district auditor's report relating to Trent regional health authority.

Mr. Sackville: Trent regional health authority received a report from the district auditor at the public meeting of the authority held on 11 July 1994. This related to the transfer of services to the private sector between 1988 and 1992. Copies of the report are available on request from the RHA.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will amend legislation on general practitioner fundholding to require any savings generated by fundholding practices to be paid to the local district health authority to be used for the development of health care against identified needs within a broad and publicly accountable health strategy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: No.

NHS Complaints Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set up an NHS complaints authority on the lines of the Police Complaints Authority.

Mr. Malone: The report of the Wilson committee on national health service complaints procedures recommended that the Government should consider a number of options put forward for reviewing complaints in the NHS, including a national complaints commission. We are currently considering the responses to the consultation exercise on the report and will make an announcement of our decisions in due course.

Trainee Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trainee nurses there were *(a)* in 1988 and *(b)* in 1992; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

In training population—England. Years ended 31 March 1988 and 31 March 1992.

	1988	*1992*
Pre-registration	58,901	51,901
Post-registration	6,485	4,049
Total pre and post registration	65,386	55,950

Source:
English National Board for nursing, midwifery and health visiting.

The level of qualified nursing and midwifery staff in post has remained virtually static over this period, thus reducing the overall demand for newly qualified staff.

"Cashing in on Independence"

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration her Department has given to the research report, commissioned by the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, entitled "Cashing in on Independence".

Mr. Bowis: We have read the report "Cashing in on Independence" with interest.

Disabled People (Cash Payments)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she now expects direct cash payments by local authorities to disabled people to become legally available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made an announcement about direct payments on 24 November and I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on 24 November, *Official Report,* columns *332–33.*

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to ensure full compliance by local authorities with the legal duties imposed by section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970; and if she will make a statement on cases known to her Department of failure to comply with these duties.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities are aware of their duties under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. Most cases of alleged breach of statutory duties are resolved by means of local authority complaints procedures, established for this purpose. The Department, of course, follows up any cases brought to its attention and issues guidance as necessary.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files her Department holds.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health holds approximately 400 top secret or secret files. However, many of these were created several years ago, before the revised protective markings were introduced earlier this year, and are therefore not in active use. Since October 1992, no top secret, and only 13 secret, files have been created.

Exeter Protocol

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she hopes to make a decision on the continued operation of the Exeter protocol.

Mr. Sackville: We understand that the Royal Devon and Exeter trust ceased elective ventilation following receipt of legal advice. The Department has recently issued guidance—HSG(94)41—copies of which are available in the Library, setting out the legal position on ventilation of potential organ donors. Where clinicians believe there may be some benefit, however slight, to the patient, ventilation remains lawful.

Camden and Islington Health Authority

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis she has undertaken of the effectiveness of health care in Camden and Islington and the adequacy of the funding of the Camden and Islington health authority.

Mr. Sackville: It is the responsibility of the Camden and Islington health authority to obtain effective health care using available resources. The hon. member may wish to contact Roland Everington, chairman of Camden and Islington health authority, for further information.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total budget for mobile telephones in the national health service; and how many are held by *(a)* medical staff and *(b)* administrators.

Mr. Sackville: Financial responsibility for mobile telephones rests with individual users or their employers. From a limited expenditure survey of users, as part of a national initiative to minimise expenditure on telecommunications, total expenditure is estimated to be of the order of £24 million per year. Estimates of the number of mobile telephones held by various national health service groups are shown in the table.

Group	*Number*
Clinical Staff	30,000
Other Hospital Staff	[1]9,500
Ambulance Services	500

[1] Includes a variety of technical, clinical and non-clinical staff; administrators were not identified separately. The NHS Executive have recently negotiated substantial discounts with a number of suppliers. These offer individual user savings of between 8 per cent. and 19 per cent. and should provide an overall reduction in the NHS bill of 10 per cent. by 1997.

Respiratory Infections

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital admissions there were for each month in 1991, 1992 and 1993 for *(a)* acute respiratory complaints and *(b)* bronchitis; and if she will provide a breakdown by (i) United Kingdom nation and region and (ii) local health authority or trust.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Tables setting out the number of finished consultant

episodes for respiratory infections including acute bronchitis and bronchiolitis—ICD 460-466—and acute bronchitis—ICD 466—by month of admission, in England, for each national health service region, will be placed in the Library. Information for individual health authorities and NHS trusts is not available. Information relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the turnover of each national health service trust in each year since its inception.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 11 July, *Official Report*, column *419*. The information requested for 1993–94 will become available in December.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 1 December 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department how many are over the advised payments date *(a)* by up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(d)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments, however, are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. The last survey conducted in this Department showed that 89.4 per cent. of bills were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will change the legal aid scheme to provide easier access to alleged victims of domestic violence especially in regard to injunction proceedings.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In urgent cases, an emergency legal aid certificate may be granted over the telephone. Many of those seeking injunctions already benefit from this service. Additionally, solicitors holding franchises are able to grant emergency certificates themselves on the spot.

TRANSPORT

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department of how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

Mr. Norris: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Rail Electrification (North London)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects Railtrack to begin work on enlarging Hampstead tunnel and the electrification of the line between Mitre Bridge junction and Willesden high level junction.

Mr. Watts: The Secretary of State has ihstructed Railtrack to make sure that the necessary infrastructure is completed to allow Eurostar rail services from the regions to begin by the start of 1996. The timing of individual works to achieve this is a matter for Railtrack.

Channel Tunnel Rail Freight

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects Railtrack to begin and to complete its study into the feasibility of using the North Downs route for channel tunnel rail freight traffic; and if he will be making a statement on the findings of the study.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack reported to us in August 1994 that the North Downs route was not an option for channel tunnel freight trains. The scheme proposed would bring no environmental or operational benefit which might justify grant and the works required to upgrade the route would be very expensive. The proposal is therefore not being pursued.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory powers presently given to Railtrack and railway operators he intends to pass on to the private companies who purchase these shadow companies.

Mr. Watts: Our general policy is that all statutory powers transferred to Railtrack and railway operators from British Rail under the provisions of the Railways Act 1993, together with the statutory powers conferred by that Act, should be passed on when Railtrack and other railway operators move into the private sector. This will be reviewed in each case prior to disposal.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current legal status of Railtrack and the railway operating companies.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack is a company limited by shares, incorporated under the Companies Act 1985; all the shares are owned by the Government. Six passenger train operating companies have been formed. One of these—Gatwick Express Ltd.—is a wholly owned subsidiary of the board and is operating as a separate entity. The other five have not yet had the relevant parts of the board's undertaking transferred to them.

In addition, five freight and parcel companies have been formed, but the relevant parts of the board's undertaking have not yet been vested in them.

Rail Safety

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration British Rail gave in 1989 to implementing advice received from Mr. John Childs regarding the introduction for single-section track of two-way radios for train drivers and exit signals at either end of the track; if following the crash at Cowden on 15 October he will take urgent steps to implement it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The comments Mr. Childs expressed will be considered by the inspector in the course of his inquiry into the accident at Cowden on 15 October. The arrangements relating to single lines will be considered carefully in the light of the inspector's report.

London Underground

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what budgetary provision has been made by London Underground Ltd. to maintain the Epping to Ongar section of the Central line over the next three years.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd.

Minibus Seat Belts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the dates of all meetings or correspondence he has had with European officials and representatives in respect of his proposal to introduce regulations for minibus seat belts in advance of European action; and if he will place the minutes of meetings and copies of the correspondence in the Library.

Mr. Norris: The Department has had a number of contacts, both formal and informal, with the European Commission at meetings, in correspondence and by telephone on the proposal to act ahead of the European Union to introduce compulsory fitment of seat belts to all minibuses and coaches used specifically for the transport of children.

School Crossing Patrols

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the national criteria for the provision of school crossing patrols; and what discretion the police or local authorities have over providing patrols

Mr. Norris: The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 specifies that school crossing patrols may be provided at

"places where children cross roads on their way to or from school, or from one part of a school to another, during periods between the hours of 8.00 am in the morning and 5.30 pm in the afternoon when children are so on their way".

Subject to these requirements, the appropriate authority has discretion over providing patrols.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the research projects undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory into school crossing patrols and the criteria for the provision or crossing patrols.

Mr. Norris: The only TRL research project on school crossing patrols was report No. 779, published in 1977. This looked at ways in which school crossing patrol officers instruct children about crossing roads.

Rail Track Defects

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of railway track have speed restrictions imposed as a result of track defects or insufficient maintenance.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack does not keep a central record of track mileage bearing temporary speed restrictions.

Bridges and Viaducts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost of maintaining railway bridges and viaducts in *(a)* north-west England and *(b)* England.

Mr. Watts: The cost of maintaining railway bridges and viaducts in Railtrack's north-west zone, which includes north Wales but excludes the west coast main line, is around £5 million a year. The cost for England and Wales is approximately £50 million. Figures excluding Wales are not available.

Motorway Signs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria are used to justify the addition or the removal of towns and cities from motorway direction signs.

Mr. Watts: The main criteria are traffic importance, the requirement to maintain continuity of signing for long-distance traffic, and the number of destinations that can be read by drivers in the time available. The principles of directional signing are explained in "The Design and Use of Directional Informatory Signs"—Local Transport Note 1/94—published by HMSO.

Trains (Black Boxes)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the black box revealed in respect of the cause of the train crash on the 2 November on the Thames line service at Slough, Berkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is still investigating this accident.

The results of the investigation and any recommendations made will be discussed with British Rail and/or Railtrack.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information sought is as follows:

(a) Political advisers to the Secretary of State for Transport:

Miss E. Buchanan; from September 1987 to November 1990.

Mr. P. J. E. Miller; from January 1991 to March 1992.

Mrs. E. F. Laing; from April 1992 to July 1994.

Mr. M. G. E. Simmonds; from October 1994 to date.

(b) Special advisers with expert knowledge in particular fields:

Professor B. J. Hoskins, special adviser on the global environmental aspects of transport policies, from February 1990 to November 1990.

Sir Christopher Foster, special adviser on British rail privatisation, from June 1992 to November 1993.

Sir Idris Pearce, special adviser on British Rail privatisation property issues, from June 1992 to July 1994.

Mr. R. B. Salmon, special adviser on British Rail privatisation, from January 1993 to November 1993.

Mr. J. Swift, special adviser on British Rail privatisation, from January 1993 to November 1993.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

Ministerial Speeches

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what occasions since 1979 civil servants in his Department have been asked to draft speeches of a constituency nature for use in a Minister's own constituency.

Dr. Mawhinney: None. Civil servants may provide briefing of a factual nature for Ministers on matters relating to their own departments. In addition, Ministers in preparing for a constituency speech can draw on material produced by their Department during the normal course of business.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the Coba 9 framework in respect of the M11 Link Road.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 1 December 1994:

I have been asked to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Question about COBA 9 frameworks prepared for the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road since this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency.

I have had drawn to my attention the letter which Mr. Steven Norris MP wrote to you about COBA for this road scheme on the 1 September 1993. As the Minister explained then, the evidence given at the Public Inquiries showed that the cost benefit analysis for this urban scheme, although based on COBA methodology and values, was a complex one-off exercise. The last full assessment was prepared for the 1987 Public Inquiry. It consists of several volumes which are being copied especially to meet your request. I have therefore asked our office in Bedford to send the material direct to you at the House of Commons as soon as it is available.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr. Kenneth Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the effect on *(a)* the number of passengers using the various airports and *(b)* the revenue raised of increasing the air passenger duty by £5 at Heathrow and Gatwick, and reducing it by £5 at the regional airports and at Stansted; and how much additional revenue would be raised.

Mr. Mawhinney: There are no detailed estimates available, and air passengers duty is not an airport charge. However, work done for the RUCATSE working group suggests that if applied to the whole of 1995 the effect of increasing airport charges by £5 at Heathrow and Gatwick, and reducing it by £5 at the regional airports and Stansted, would be to leave passenger numbers at Heathrow unaltered, slightly reduced at Gatwick and at Stansted, and the regional airports for traffic to increase by some 2.5 per cent. It is not possible easily to assess the revenue effects.

Mr. David Hernandez-Purnell

Mr. Austin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the contents of his press statement of 29 April 1994, concerning a constituent of the hon. Member for Woolwich on abiding by the statute strictly and his subsequent statement on the options open to his Department;

(2) if he will make a statement on the case of Mr. David Hernandez-Purnell.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. John Austin-Walker dated 1 December 1994:

The Minister promised that I would write to you about the matter you raised in your two Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State concerning Mr. David Hernandez-Purnell.

This has proved to be a difficult case but it does appear that we are now very close to reaching an agreement with Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez- Purnell on the level of compensation for the property and its development value. That would leave claims under the heading of disturbance to be agreed, or failing agreement to be referred to the Lands Tribunal. The Treasury Solicitor has now written to Mr. Hernandez-Purnell on our behalf offering to settle at a price Mr. Hernandez-Purnell has already suggested subject only to Mr. Hernandez-Purnell agreement to legally completing the sale to the Secretary of State. I understand Mr. Hernandez-Purnell is prepared to proceed on this basis.

You referred to a press statement by the Secretary of State. I am not aware of any press statement by the Secretary of State on 29 April or any other date in connection with Mr. Hernandez-Purnell's case. Mr. Hernandez- Purnell has invited comment on a statement he quotes in his letter of 13 November addressed to the Treasury Solicitor and which he has, I understand, copied to you. That statement is part of a fuller briefing note which was supplied on or around 29 April to a member of the press at her request by the Highways Agency. I enclose a copy of the full note from which you will see that we are dealing with the question of Mr. Hernandez-Purnell's mortgages. The strict legal position is that the Highways Agency on making an advance payment of compensation to Mr. Hernandez-Purnell (or any one else for that matter) did not, nor does not, have to discharge any existing mortgage before completion. However, in order to facilitate a practical and sensible resolution to that part of the dispute between Mr. Hernandez-Purnell and the Highways Agency, we were prepared to redeem Mr. Hernandez-Purnell's mortgages in this exceptional case. The use of the word "illegal" in briefing already referred to is unfortunate, when what was meant of course was extra statutory.

National Road Programme

Mr. Roy Hughes : To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the parliamentary constituency or

constituencies in which each scheme in the national road programme lies.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Roy Hughes, dated 1 December 1994:

The Minister for Roads and Rail has passed to me your request for a list of parliamentary constituency or constituents for each scheme in the national programme. This is an operational matter for which the Highways Agency is responsible.

The enclosed list includes all schemes in the Agency's preparation programme as listed in Trunk Roads in England 1994 Review.

TREASURY

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Nelson: The following have been employed as special advisers in the Treasury during the last five years:

Name	*Joined*	*Left*
A. Ross Goobey	1 April 1986	10 April 1991
W. M. Lightfoot	1 September 1989	10 April 1992
P. W. Robinson	11 April 1992	27 May 1993
D. W. D. Cameron	11 May 1992	21 June 1993
R. Darwell	8 February 1993	27 May 1993
Mrs. A. T. Keswick	28 May 1993 to date	
D. L. Ruffley	28 May 1993 to date	

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Sports Clubs

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount of VAT illegally charged by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on sports clubs subscriptions since 1 January 1990 which has been *(a)* claimed back to date by sports clubs, *(b)* paid back to date by sports clubs and *(c)* estimated in total as due back to sports clubs; and if he will provide details for (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Scotland.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Customs and Excise estimated that repayment of VAT on sporting services in respect of the period 1 January 1990 to 31 March 1994 would amount to some £42.5 million. Between 1 April 1994 and 30 September 1994, £42 million VAT plus £5 million interest was repaid to non-profit-making organisations supplying sporting services.

To apportion this information between England, Wales and Scotland would involve disproportionate time and expense. The extent to which clubs have passed any of the repayment to their members is not a matter for the Government.

Building Society Merger

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the proposed merger between the Halifax building society and the Leeds building society; if he proposes to refer the merger to the Director General of the Office of Fair Trading for inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I have discussed the proposed merger with representatives of the Halifax building society and the Building Societies Commission, in my capacity as Minister responsible for the building society sector. The decision on whether to refer the proposal to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973 is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in the light of advice from the Director General of Fair Trading, who is currently considering the matter.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Banqueting Rooms

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what was the operating surplus or deficit of the banqueting rooms for the last full 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: A net profit of some £230,000 was made from the use of private dining facilities in 1993–94.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee (1) if he will publish the names of organisations that used the banqueting rooms in the most recent 12 months for which figures are available indicating the numbers who are perceived to be *(a)* political, *(b)* commercial, *(c)* charitable and *(d)* others;

(2) if he will list the political affiliations of all hon. Members who booked the banqueting rooms in the months of October and November.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: It has not hitherto been the practice to publish information of this nature. The matter is currently being reviewed by the Catering Committee.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Listed Hospitals

Mr. Cohen : To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made by the task force on listed hospitals formed by his Department and the Department of Health.

Mr. Dorrell: The working group on historic hospitals was established by the Department of Health and by English Heritage in Autumn 1992 to provide a forum to identify and assist in resolving problems concerning historic buildings and conservation matters in the NHS. It has commissioned the preparation of good practice guidance for NHS managers in respect of both listed hospitals that will continue in use, and those that will close; this guidance is due for publication at the end of 1994. A study to review the listing of NHS institutions has been commissioned from English Heritage.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer given to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *110*.

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will announce the television licence fees which will take effect from 1 April 1995.

Mr. Dorrell: Following a study by Touche Ross, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) announced on 4 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *309–10*, that the Government had decided to link increases in the television licence fee with the retail prices index for the remaining three years of the BBC's current royal charter.

Licence fee increases are based on the annual RPI figure as at the previous September, in the same way as pensions and other state benefits. Application of this year's RPI figure of 2.2 per cent. for the year to September 1994 to the current unrounded figures produces new rounded totals of £86.50 for a colour licence and £28.50 for a black and white licence. The necessary regulations to bring these fees into force will be laid before the House in due course.

County Hall

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when officials from English Heritage last inspected the riverside building in the County hall complex; and what were their findings on the condition of the building.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* The riverside building at County hall was last visited by English Heritage staff on 15 November 1994. They found the building to be in good condition.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department how many are over the advised payment date *(a)* by up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments, however, are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993–94, the Department of National Heritage paid over 85 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Disabled Access

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for amendments to the Cinema Act 1910 in relation to access to cinemas for people with disabilities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have been asked to reply.

The Cinematograph (Safety) Regulations 1955 make detailed provisions for securing safety in cinemas. My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People announced on 24 November a package of measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people, including a right of access to goods and services.

PRIME MINISTER

Top Salaries

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking, other than exhortation, to make it easier for shareholders to influence the size of the salaries and perks of those at the top of British industry.

The Prime Minister: Shareholders already have the ability to exercise influence—for example, by raising questions at the annual general meeting or, in the case of institutional holdings, by exerting pressure behind the scenes.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Standards of Public Life Committee

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now publish the remuneration of the board members and chairman of the Standing Committee into Standards of Public Life.

The Prime Minister: The chairman will receive no remuneration from public funds for his work on the committee. Three members are already in receipt of a salary from public funds and will therefore not receive any further remuneration for their work on the committee. The other six members of the committee will receive an honorarium of £1,000 per month until the first report has been published, and a per diem attendance rate of £155 after that. Their travel and subsistence expenses will be met.

The administrative and support resources for the Nolan committee will be drawn from the Office of Public Service and Science Vote (19 Vote 1).

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further amendments to the Electricity (Class Exemptions from the Requirement for a Licence) Order 1990 are presently proposed.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Under this order, a number of companies which generated or supplied electricity before the electricity industry was vested are exempt from the requirement for a licence to generate or supply electricity for a transitional period, which ends on 31 March 1995.

Following consultation with the electricity industry and others, I have now decided that these transitional exemptions should be extended until 31 March 1998. These exemptions would continue, as now, to be limited to the generating capacity or customer base supplied before vesting. This should not, however, be read as meaning that these companies will necessarily continue to be exempt after 1998. That will be considered in the period leading up to 1998, when the market in electricity supply will become fully competitive.

I will lay an order bringing this amendment into effect early next year. My officials are presently considering a number of other possible amendments to the order. I shall announce our decision on these in due course.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for the future of electricity supply from foreign sources.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The position in relation to the French interconnector—the only present source of foreign electricity supplies—was set out in the White Paper "The Prospects for Coal" (Cm 2235). Proposals for further interconnectors are a commercial matter for the electricity companies, subject to their obtaining any necessary consents.

Interreg 2

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give a breakdown of projected annual expenditure under Interreg 2 *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Gwynedd, *(c)* Dyfed and *(d)* Kent for each year in which the programme is to run.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Allocations for the period from 1994 to 1999 are as follows, in mecu at 1994 prices:

	Mecu
Northern Ireland	66.9
Gwynedd and Dyfed	13.5
Kent and East Sussex	28.3

Qualifying expenditure may extend until 2001. Annual allocations have not yet been settled.

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many occasions in the last year he has received a report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and *(a)* agreed its recommendations and *(b)* deferred a decision.

Mr. Eggar: Since 1 November 1993, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has received 14 reports, including one not yet published, from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Where adverse reports have been published, he has accepted the MMC's findings. In one case during this period—*The Daily Mail* and General Trust plc/T. Bailey Forman Ltd.—the MMC report has been published and the final decision deferred pending further consideration of possible remedies. Before that period, there have been other examples of consultation on possible remedies after publication, notably on the MMC reports on the supply of gas, and on the distribution of newspapers.

Nuclear Power

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to announce the result of his review into the future of nuclear power generation.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 19 October, *Official Report*, column *239*.

Fossil Fuel Levy

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what share of the fossil fuel levy is received by *(a)* renewable sources of energy, *(b)* Nuclear Electric and *(c)* Scottish Nuclear.

Mr. Charles Wardle: For details of payments from the fossil fuel levy to renewable generators and Nuclear Electric, I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy gave to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) on 12 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *518*. Scottish Nuclear does not receive payments from the levy.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the purpose of the fossil fuel levy as paid to Nuclear Electric.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The fossil fuel levy finances the premium element of the price paid by the regional electricity companies for the electricity that they are required to purchase under the non-fossil fuel obligation. In Nuclear Electric's case, the levy payments cover the above-market costs of generating nuclear power. Together with revenues from sales of electricity at market prices, levy payments enable Nuclear Electric to cover the full costs of generating electricity from its stations, including operating costs, depreciation and provisions for the so-called "back end" liabilities.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of Nuclear Electric using the fossil fuel levy to help with its cash flow.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The existing arrangements to enable the full cost of nuclear power in the United Kingdom to be met, including the fossil fuel levy, are being assessed as part of the Government's review of the future prospects for nuclear power.

Electricity Interconnector

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the purpose of the electricity interconnector with France.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The interconnector was built for mutual system support, and to trade electricity when one country could supply it more cheaply than the other.

Riot Control Equipment

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* the date and *(b)* the countries involved in the instances during the last 10 years when export licences have been granted for (i) riot shields, (ii) CS gas, (iii) batons and (iv) other riot control equipment.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This question could be answered in respect of controlled goods only at disproportionate cost.

Building Society Merger

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to refer the proposed merger between the Halifax and the Leeds Permanent building societies to the Office of Fair Trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading at the Office of Fair Trading is currently investigating this proposed merger and he will advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in due course. A decision on whether it should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission will be taken once that advice is received.

Regional Assistance, North-West

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, column *208*, if he will list those development and intermediate areas in the North-West where applications for regional selective assistance have been refused.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is listed in the following table:

Travel to work area	*Number rejected (1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994*
Accrington and Rossendale	4
Barrow-in-Furness	4
Blackburn	2
Bolton and Bury	5
Liverpool	23
Manchester	28
Oldham	3
Rochdale	3
Widnes and Runcorn	5
Wigan and St. Helens	19
Wirral and Chester	12
Workington	5
Project location undecided	10
Total	123

Motor Vehicle Industry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support or advice was given to the manufacturers of the Robin Reliant prior to the company going into receivership.

Mr. Eggar: My Department was advised, in confidence, of the decision to place Reliant in the hands of the receiver. My officials are in close contact with the receiver about the prospects for the business.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those United Kingdom-owned car manufacturers in 1987 and at the current date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: At the beginning of 1987, there were 12 United Kingdom-owned manufacturers producing cars. These were: Aston Martin Lagonda, Bristol, Caterham, Ginetta, Jaguar, Marcos, Morgan, Reliant, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, Rover Group, TVR Engineering and Westfield.

Since then, Aston Martin Lagonda and Jaguar have been acquired by Ford and Rover by BMW. The others remain in the United Kingdom ownership.

Coal Industry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many tonnes of coal were imported by the nationalised electricity power generators in each year between 1980 and denationalisation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The amount of coal imported by the Central Electricity Generating Board and South of Scotland Electricity Board is shown below. The Department has no records of coal imported by the power producers before 1983 or of any imports by the North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board and the Northern Ireland Electricity Service.

Year	*Thousand tonnes*
1983[1]	1,020
1984[1]	52
1985[1]	2,656
1986[1]	1,186
1987[1]	1,358
1988[2]	1,973
1989[2, 3]	1,963

[1] Central Electricity Generating Board only.
[2] Central Electricity Generating Board and South of Scotland Electricity Board.
[3] 1989 was the last full year before denationalisation.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the future of British Coal Enterprise following the privatisation of British Coal.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The Government and British Coal are currently exploring options for the services provided by British Coal Enterprise. No final decisions have yet been taken about its future.

Life Assurance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ask the Office of Fair Trading to institute an inquiry into the practices of insurance companies in respect of life assurance premiums for *(a)* heterosexuals and *(b)* people who have had a negative test for HIV.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Association of British Insurers has recommended to its members that they do not ask questions about negative HIV tests on life and health insurance proposal forms. I have placed a copy of the association's press release in the Library of the House.

Japanese-owned Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantities of Japanese-owned plutonium exists in *(a)* unreprocessed nuclear fuel awaiting reprocessing

and *(b)* in store after reprocessing, under safeguards at Sellafield.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The stocks of civil plutonium held by British Nuclear Fuels plc at its Sellafield site were published in the annual plutonium figures for 1993–94, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House. Further details of the ownership of the stocks are an operational matter for BNFL.

Post Office

Ms Hoey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to give more commercial freedom to the publicly owned Post Office.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) on 23 November, *Official Report*, column *579*.

Floating Production Systems

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement in connection with his proposals of July 1994 to establish a working group on floating production systems for use in oil fields in the North sea and the Atlantic; if he will list the names and positions of those appointed to the working group of floating production systems; what estimate he has made of the development costs of the Foinaven and Schiehallion oil fields to the west of Shetland; and what percentage of this work he assesses will be allocated to domestically based support services.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* The working group on floating production systems has been set up and will report to Ministers by the end of the year. The industry members are listed below.

The operator responsible—BP—for the development of the Foinaven and Schiehallion oil fields to the west of Shetland has estimated development costs for Foinaven to be £550 million and has estimated that around 70 per cent. of this expenditure will be allocated to the United Kingdom. Schiehallion is not yet far enough advanced to estimate development costs.

Floating production systems working group industry membership

Name	
Mr. Mike Baugh	Hamilton
Mr. Martin Fielding	Amerada Hess
Mr. Chris Grey	Conoco
Mr. Alan Hunt	Shell
Mr. John Hutton	Texaco
Dr. Rob Kenison	BP
Dr. Reg Potter	Marathon

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many contracts have so far been allocated to United Kingdom-based companies in connection with research into, and development of, floating production systems.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* A large number of R and D projects have been sponsored by oil companies and the Government, associated with floating production systems. However, many of these projects are not unique to floating production systems. They also apply to other aspects of offshore technology so it is not possible to assign numbers in the way that hon. Lady requested.

Konver Programme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those local authorities and private and voluntary organisations currently in receipt of grant aid from the Konver programme.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 30 November 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Minister for Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) on 10 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *426*. The lists of grant awards under the Knover I programme available in the Library of the House show the main sponsor for each project only. I shall write to the hon. Member with a full list of project sponsors.

Overseas Debt

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy on support for exports to countries which have rescheduled their debts and have re-established their creditworthiness.

Mr. Needham: Following a review of its risk assessment systems for those markets, the Export Credits Guarantee Department will now be adopting normal underwriting criteria to assess applications for support from United Kingdom exporters, the principal criterion being the ability of the overseas buyer or borrower to meet it debts on time. The main consequence of applying normal criteria will be to broaden the range of exports eligible for support, and significant reductions in premium rates on a number of markets. The Government will also be pursuing an initiative in international forums to ensure that the prime focus of export credit and other financial support in such markets will be upon goods and services which will foster and sustain their economic rehabilitation.

WALES

Welsh Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he plans to publish the district auditor's report on the Welsh Health Promotion Authority.

Mr. Richards: This report was published by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales on 8 August 1994. Copies can be obtained from the authority.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments, however, are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993–94, the Welsh Office paid 87 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Staff Commission for Wales and the local authority associations in relation to the carrying over of existing staff to the new authorities on 1 April 1996.

Mr. Redwood: The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) held an annual review meeting with the staff commission on 14 November: staff transfer arrangements were among the matters discussed. My officials maintain close contact with the Staff Commission and local authority associations, and are discussing with them how best to give effect to the guidance which I issued to the commission in August.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for funding the new residuary body for Wales by *(a)* precept and *(b)* other means.

Mr. Redwood: I have decided that the residuary body should be funded by means of borrowing under a supplementary credit approval in 1994–95 and 1995–96. It would be funded by levies on local authorities in 1996–97 and any subsequent years. It would not have any power to issue a precept. I wrote to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 2 November informing him of my decision. This letter was copied to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile).

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other organisations in relation to the responsibilities for examining health and safety standards in houses in multiple occupation with respect to (i) self-regulation and independent regulation and (ii) duties of environmental health officers and fire officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received representations from the all-Wales chief environmental health officers panel, the Wales house in multiple occupation network, the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, South Wales, Cardiff city council and Llanelli borough council about these issues as part of the interdepartmental review on fire safety legislation and enforcement. The responses are currently being considered.

Incentive Prescribing Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those general practices approved to take part in an incentive prescribing scheme, which have *(a)* commenced and *(b)* not commenced their participation.

Mr. Redwood: Prescribing incentive schemes have now been approved in seven family health services authorities. Participation in schemes is a matter for local agreement and details of the numbers of participating practices are not held centrally.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the application of value-added school league tables to grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Redwood: I am committed to the principle that a readily understood measure of added value should be included in secondary school performance tables covering LEA-maintained, grant-maintained and independent schools. Work is in hand to develop such measures.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the head teachers and chairs of governors of grant-maintained schools concerning the supply of information to local authorities for the purpose of drawing up value added school league tables.

Mr. Redwood: None. I look to all concerned to collaborate on the important issue of how to show the extent to which schools add value to pupil performance.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation and the chairman of the court of governors at the National Museum of Wales, concerning *(a)* the expansion and relocation of the Wales Industrial and Maritime Museum, inclusive of an Imax cinema and *(b)* the funding of a private sector free-standing Imax cinema; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have had no discussions with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation regarding proposals to develop the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum; in May the chairman did briefly explain to me the aims of the Imax venture and how it might be associated with educational or museum institutions in the Cardiff bay area.

In June, my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) received a presentation from the National Museum of Wales on its corporate plan, including proposals to develop the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum and an Imax theatre.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Redwood: Details of special advisers employed by my Department in the last five years are as follows:

Name	*Date joined*	*Date left*
Mr. R. Richards	5 November 1990	14 December 1990
Mr. M. McManus	11 November 1992	27 May 1993
Mr. H. Williams	18 October 1993	(still in post)

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. The salary spine of 34 points ranges from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Police Authority Revenue

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his proposals for police authority revenue spending in 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood: I propose to make £300.7 million available from total standard spending in Wales to fund police services in 1995–96. This sum comprises £153.7 million in cash-limited police grant to be paid by the Home Secretary and £147.0 million in standard spending assessments. It represents an overall increase of 6 per cent. on police revenue budgets for 1994–95. The sums for each police authority are set out in the following table:

	Police grant £ millions	*SSA £ millions*	*Total £ millions*
Dyfed-Powys	22.5	21.7	44.2
Gwent	24.1	23.3	47.4
North Wales	32.2	30.6	62.8
South Wales	74.8	71.4	146.2

The Welsh Office is today writing to each of the police authorities in Wales to consult them on their provisional standard spending assessment for 1995–96.

It is essential that police authorities budget wisely and do not impose an unreasonable burden on council taxpayers. I therefore propose provisional capping principles to inform their budget decisions.

I will make my final decisions on capping principles in the light of budgets set by police authorities.

I am still considering my capping proposals for county and district councils in Wales and propose to announce provisional capping principles for these authorities in mid-December, when provisional county and district SSAs are announced.

Copies of the consultation letter will be place in the Library of the House.

Quangos

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how members of quangos to which he is responsible for appointing members currently serve as councillors representing *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer Friday 25 November]:* The information requested is as follows:

At 1 September 1994, 31 members of public bodies appointed by me were serving district or county councillors. These represented:

Conservative: 3

Labour: 17

Liberal Democrat: 0

Independent: 11

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Construction Projects

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the construction projects funded by Overseas Development Administration aid and awarded in whole or in part to United Kingdom construction companies in 1992–93 and 1993–94, and in each case stating the name of the United Kingdom construction company, the value of the contracts awarded to that company and the location, by country, of the project.

Mr. Baldry: There is no central historical record of aid-funded construction projects. Contracts for such projects are normally negotiated and let by the recipient Governments. A new reporting mechanism is now being established, but at present the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The CCTA Government information service was launched at the consultative meeting on information super-highways on 21 November. The service is designed to help Departments to make United Kingdom Government public information available electronically via the Internet, using the world wide web—WWW—hypertext information servers.

The aims of the service are to support the objectives of the citizens charter and open government; publish Government information; and provide a means by which Government Departments can gain experience of publishing information on Internet.

The Office of Public Service and Science has been at the forefront in exploiting the service. The hon. Member can access, via Internet, information on the citizens charter unit, the open government code of practice, a directory of Government Ministers and Whips, and HMSO's information technology catalogue. CCTA, the Government Centre for Information Systems, is talking to other parts of the Cabinet Office, and further information will become available in due course.

CCTA's booklet for Internet users, "CCTA Government Information Service: How to access information", is available in the House of Commons Library.

Disabled People

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will invite Departments and agencies to advise Ministers if they intend to use buildings inaccessible to disabled staff or members of the public.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: As I informed the House on 21 November, I have already asked my officials to conduct a review of my Department's buildings, so that we know which buildings are accessible and which are not.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is not generally available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments, however, are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. Based on a sample survey carried out during 1993–94, the Cabinet Office paid 78 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days. HMSO achieved 80 per cent., and COI 83 per cent.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the Cabinet Office can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United Nations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what legal basis the United Nations protects the civilian population in the safe areas in cases where their inhabitants have attacked other territory.

Mr. David Davis: The mandate of the United Nations Protection Force—UNPROFOR—under Security Council resolution 836 enables it to deter attacks against the safe areas referred to in Security Council resolution 824. In doing so, UNPROFOR is authorised by resolution 836, acting in self-defence, to take the necessary measures, including the use of force, in reply to bombardments against the safe areas or to armed incursion into them.

These provisions apply, even, where offensive action has been undertaken from within the safe areas.

Sudan

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures he proposes to show her Majesty's Government's disapproval of the human rights record of the Sudanese regime; and if he will further reduce the British diplomatic presence in Sudan.

Mr. David Davis: Monitoring human right abuses and raising concerns about these with the Sudanese authorities will remain one of the principal tasks of Her Majesty's embassy in Khartoum. We have no plans to reduce the number of staff there.

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Sudanese regime about the continued restrictions on the liberty of the former Prime Minister, Sadiq Al Mahdi.

Mr. David Davis: Her Majesty's embassy in Khartoum made representations to the Sudanese authorities during Sadiq Al Mahdi's detention for three weeks earlier this year. Sadiq Al Mahdi was released on 3 July. The embassy will continue to monitor his treatment by the authorities.

Arms Exports

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries in Central and Latin America have been the subject of arms exports licence refusals in 1993 on the grounds of internal oppression or regional security.

Mr. Davis: The only country in central and Latin America to which applications for arms export licences were refused in 1993 on the grounds of internal oppression or regional security is Argentina, to which we maintain an embargo on military sales in the light of the events of 1982 and the Argentine claim to the Falkland Islands.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. Goodlad: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, Departments are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993–94, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, diplomatic wing paid 95 per cent. and the Overseas Development Administration 88 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Kashmir

Mrs Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has had regarding the torture and execution of human rights activists in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have had no reports of the torture or execution of human rights activists in Kashmir.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has had of Kashmiris suffering human rights abuses at the hands of Indian troops; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We are concerned by reports from international human rights groups of human rights abuses committed by the Indian security forces in Kashmir. We have regularly raised these concerns with the Indian Government.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will call for *(a)* international investigations of human rights violations in Kashmir, *(b)* international humanitarian agencies to be allowed direct and independent access to the region, *(c)* the prosecution and punishment of those responsible for murdering and torturing Kashmiri people and *(d)* the right to self-determination for Kashmiris as promised by the United Nations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have consistently urged the Indian Government to allow independent human rights groups access to Kashmir. We are encouraged that they have allowed a number of such groups to visit Kashmir this year. We have also urged them to ensure that security force members are subject to the rule of law. We shall continue to support efforts to bring about a peaceful settlement in Kashmir.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Goodlad: The special advisers to this Department are Mr. Maurice Fraser and Mr. Michael Maclay.

On 1 March 1989, Mr. Maurice Fraser joined the Department and is still employed here. On 1 November 1989, the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) joined the Department; he left on 15 December 1990. On 7 January 1991, Mr. Edward Bickham joined the Department; he left on 9 July 1993. On 19 July 1993, Mr Michael Maclay joined the Department and is still employed here.

With regard to salary, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 25 November, *Official Report*, column *413*.

Overseas Students

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many overseas students are now studying in the United Kingdom in the higher and further education sectors; what the numbers were before the introduction of full cost fees in 1980; how many students are currently receiving Government scholarships; and how the United Kingdom's record on receiving overseas students compares to that of its competitors.

Mr. Baldry: The numbers of overseas students studying in the United Kingdom in both the higher and further education sectors in 1979–80 was some 83,000. The number in 1992–93 was 99,700, an all-time high. In 1993–94 21,000 students from overseas studying in the United Kingdom were benefiting from official support under a variety of British Government scholarship and award programmes. These included 3,043 students holding British Chevening scholarships funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

According to available figures, the United Kingdom is fourth in the global league table of countries receiving overseas students with 92,000, against the United States, 420,000, France, 136,000 and Germany, 100,000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cross-border Barriers

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in dismantling the barriers to free movement across the border.

Sir John Wheeler: All closure orders have been rescinded. More than 40 previously closed crossing points are presently open to traffic. The great majority should be reopened within a matter of months.

Tourism

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the potential for tourism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: Tourism in Northern Ireland clearly has the potential to contribute significantly to the local economy. The Northern Ireland tourist board is working closely with the tourism industry to ensure that this potential is turned into reality.

The announcement last week of a £6.8 million joint marketing initiative by the tourism authorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, together with the private sector, will do much to capitalise on new opportunities.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to improve cross-border co-operation in tourism.

Mr. Ancram: The Northern Ireland tourist board works closely with its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, Bord Failte, jointly to market the island of Ireland as a quality tourist destination. Both Governments announced last week that this co-operation will be further developed and expanded.

Social Policy

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his Department's social policy strategy.

Mr. Ancram: The Government remain committed to addressing the social needs of the people of Northern Ireland, in particular through targeting social need initiative, which is aimed at directing resources to the most disadvantaged areas and people.

Peace Process

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent developments concerning the Downing street declaration.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had about furthering the peace process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest position over the ceasefire.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process in Ulster.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Members to the oral answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) earlier today.

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement as to what initiatives the Government took to effect the extradition of Brendan Smyth following the serving on the Gardai of extradition warrants by the RUC in April 1993.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General on 21 November, *Official Report*, columns *37–38*.

Hualon Project

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current position and future of the Hualon project in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: All necessary approvals for the project are in place and further progress and the release of the first tranche of IDB money depends on Hualon fulfilling certain obligations contained in the agreement with the Industrial Development Board.

The British Apparel and Textile Confederation lodged an appeal on 30 November with the European Court of Justice.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will now review his decision to proceed with grant payments to the Hualon Corporation.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. and learned Friend has recently reviewed and confirmed his decision, the implementation of which will depend upon the fulfilment by Hualon of certain preconditions.

We have no plans for a further review.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives of the Hualon Corporation.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: On 9 June 1994.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding aid to the Hualon Corporation.

Mr. Ancram: The Hualon project, which will make a major reduction in unemployment, was the subject of a lengthy and detailed appraisal before the decision to offer assistance was taken.

The advice of independent consultants was obtained and the project has received all the necessary approvals from HMG and the EC. To date no assistance has been paid, and none will be until certain pre-conditions are satisfied.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further consideration he has given to the formation of an environmental protection agency for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: All the functions of the Department of Environment environment service are currently the subject of a prior options study. The Government will decide whether or not any proposals for change in the implementation of environmental policy in Northern Ireland should be made when the results of the study are known. The outcome of the study is likely to be announced early in 1995.

Unemployment

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the change in numbers of unemployed since December 1992.

Mr. Ancram: The latest available seasonally adjusted figures, for October 1994, show that the number of unemployed claimants has fallen by 11,500 since December 1992.

Paramilitaries

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the moves that have been made by the IRA and loyalist paramilitaries to withdraw the threat of military action against people whom they have forced into exile and who are still unable to return to their homes.

Sir John Wheeler: Such actions are incompatible with the disavowal of the use of violence for political purposes.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to meet members of the former loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have no plans to do so.

Examination Results

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the reasons for the relative success of children living in Northern Ireland in GCSE and A-level exams in comparison with other parts of the Untied Kingdom.

Mr. Ancram: In Northern Ireland pupils entered for GCSE and A-levels have a good record of success. I believe that the motivation of pupils, parental support and the fact that we have highly professional and dedicated teaching staff are the key elements which have contributed to those high standards.

I have made no assessment of the reasons for differences with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were

paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

Sir John Wheeler: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments, however, are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993–94 the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments paid 95 per cent. of their bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Mr. Jonathan Caine was appointed special adviser by my predecessor in December 1991. He resigned in March 1992 and I re-appointed him as my special adviser in June 1992.

No other special advisers have joined or left the Northern Ireland Office in the last five years.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement concerning the cost to public funds of employing ministerial special advisers in his Department.

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* My Department employs one special adviser.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who is the chairman of the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board; when he was appointed to that position; when he is expected to retire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Mr. John B. McGuckian was appointed chairman of the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board on 1 January 1992, having served a period of 15 months as a member of the board. His term of office as chairman is due to expire on 31 December 1994.

Public Appointments

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy not to appoint to public office individuals described in statements resulting from hearings by the Lord Chief Justice and other Lords of Appeal as being disingenuous in their dealings with the Inland Revenue; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: In relation to public appointments, the prime consideration for Ministers and Departments are an individual's ability or potential to contribute to the work of a particular body and the need for each public body to have the range of experience and skills necessary to carry out its functions.

An individual's background and overall conduct are factors taken in to account before an appointment is made.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement setting out the background to the case presented in the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal by lawyers representing the Inland Revenue in the case relating to Mr. John McGuckian; what sums of money were involved in this case; what was the outcome; what plans he has to review recent decisions relating to the Hualon Corporation taken by Mr. McGuckian as chairman of the Northern Ireland Industrial Development Fund as a result of this case; what previous cases, and involving what sums, have been brought against Mr. McGuckian for non-payment of taxes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* Mr. McGuckian's personal tax affairs are not matters for my right hon. and learned Friend. Nor do they have anything to do with decisions relating to the Hualon Corporation.

HEALTH

North-West Hospitals

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of employees, plus the number of volunteers currently assisting, at each hospital in the north-west; and what percentage the latter forms of the former.

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of employees is collected by management unit—that is, by national health service trust or directly managed unit—rather than by hospital; and information on volunteers is not available centrally.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the net ingredient cost of *(a)* temazepam, *(b)* zopiclone and *(c)* all other benzodiazepines in the United Kingdom and each NHS region and family health service authority area for 1993–94; and if he will express the net ingredient cost figure as expenditure per head of population in each such area.

Mr. Malone: The available information will be placed in the Library.

NHS Estates

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the NHS Estates moved into accommodation off Boar lane, Leeds; what consideration was given to moving

into Quarry house, Leeds; what was the cost of the move; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The initial relocation plan was that NHS Estates would relocate to Quarry house with the national health service executive. Because of design and other changes during the construction of Quarry house, there was not enough room to accommodate all the posts concerned, and separate accommodation was taken for the agency in Trevelyan square, Boar lane, Leeds. The transitional costs of the move and the costs of fitting out Trevelyan square were £1.93 million.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of the review of the NHS Estates; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The first review of NHS Estates Agency has recently been completed. I have today placed a summary of the review's findings in the Library.

Professional Misconduct

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that medical practitioners found guilty by the General Medical Council of serious professional misconduct be suspended with immediate effect; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: It is a matter for the professional conduct committee of the General Medical Council to decide whether a doctor is fit to continue practising after he has been found guilty of serious professional misconduct.

Confidentiality

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will institute an inquiry into medical confidentiality in respect of members of the medical profession whose medical or psychiatric condition might result in damage to patients; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: No.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice she gives to health authorities and NHS trusts on equal opportunities policy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: National health service authorities and trusts are expected to comply with the aims and goals of the NHS executive's "Opportunity 2000" programme, and of "Ethnic minority staff in the NHS: a programme of action". Copies of those programmes are available in the Library. In addition, the General Whitley Council has made agreements promoting equal opportunities which apply to all staff employed on national terms and conditions of service.

NHS Managers Conference

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who was responsible for inviting the NHS managers to attend a meeting at the Belfry on 5 to 7 December; what is the projected cost of the exercise; and from which vote the expenditure will be drawn.

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive intended to hold a working conference at the Belfry on 6 to 7 December. The event was cancelled in August.

Community Care

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals were used for the care of mentally ill people before the introduction of care in the community; how many of these properties have been sold; what have been the total sums raised through the sale of such property and land; how much of this has been re-invested into care in the community; how many sales are still pending; what is the estimated value of such sales when realised; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Care in the community of mentally ill people has been steadily introduced since the 1960s. The information requested is not available centrally.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when her Department expects to have concluded its consideration of the second report of the National Audit Office on the implementation of community care.

Mr. Bowis: I understand that the Audit Commission, which monitors the implementation of community care by local authorities, plans to publish its second bulletin on progress with community care shortly.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she proposes to make an announcement on the future of the Government's community care policy.

Mr. Bowis: We have today announced the Government's plan to bring the total extra resources for community care to more than £2.5 billion by 1997–98.

I am also today publishing indicative allocations showing each English social services authority's share of the special transitional grant for community care in 1995–96. As last year, the whole of the STG is being distributed on the basis of personal social services standard spending assessments. Authorities have until 13 January 1995 to make representations about their proposed allocations. Copies of the circular are being placed in the Library. The total STG for 1995–96 will, as previously announced, be £647.6 million.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she intends to retain the 85 per cent. condition associated with the special transitional grant for community care.

Mr. Bowis: The Government remain fully committed to a flourishing independent sector able to offer diversity, choice and value for money. We will therefore retain the condition on the special transitional grant for community care in 1995–96 whereby authorities must spend 85 per cent. of the social security transfer element—some £440 million in all—on community care services in the independent sector. The condition will be framed in a way that such independent sector spending in 1995–96 must be in addition to previous such spending in 1994–95 and 1993–94 plus one half of such spending in 1992–93.

Rosemary Storrs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who authorised the ex-gratia payment to Rosemary Storrs, the former information director of Wessex regional health authority in October 1992.

Mr. Sackville: Although the payment was approved by the Wessex regional health authority, appropriate authorisation was not sought from my Department, and the payment was therefore ultra vires.

Such payments are in principle recoverable and the authority must consider, in the light of legal advice, whether recovery action is feasible or cost effective.

Toxoplasmosis

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to reduce the incidence of toxoplasmosis; what is her policy towards the testing of pregnant women for toxoplasmosis; and what studies into toxoplasmosis are currently supported with public funding.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health produces a leaflet entitled "While you are Pregnant - safe eating and how to avoid infection from food and animals" which contains information on avoiding toxoplasmosis. Copies of the leaflet will be placed in the Library. The Health Education Authority produces its pregnancy book which also contains information on toxoplasmosis and which is provided to women when they attend hospital antenatal clinics; copies of this book are available in the Library. Additionally, the Department provides core funding to the Toxoplasmosis trust under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968.

The decision to test a pregnant woman who may have been exposed to toxoplasmosis for evidence of infection must be made on a case-by-case basis. In the light of current scientific knowledge, a routine screening programme cannot be justified. Screening for toxoplasmosis in pregnancy is not a standard procedure in the United Kingdom. The significance of the test, the natural history of the disease and the efficacy of the treatment are all surrounded by uncertainty. As for any screening programme, the benefits conferred by screening must clearly outweigh the risks.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC is currently funding research into "Seriodiagnosis of reactivating toxoplasmosis: use of cyst antigens" at St. George's Hospital medical school, London, and "Protection against toxoplasmosis: an alternative target for vaccination" at the university of Strathclyde. Universities and medical schools which are supported by public funding may also be funding research into toxoplasmosis.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for health what response she is making to toxoplasmosis week.

Mr. Sackville: We welcome this initiative, which we hope will raise awareness about toxoplasmosis and how to avoid catching it, particularly in pregnant women, reinforcing advice given as part of antenatal care.

Community Clinics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that *(a)* purchasing authorities retain and, where necessary, develop community clinics and *(b)* provider units provide a service which complements that provided by general practitioners; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It is for general practitioners and purchasing authorities to assess local health needs and to secure the most appropriate services to meet those needs.

Financial Information Project Ltd.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the transfer of £300,000 to Financial Information Project Ltd. has been repaid.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for West Midlands regional health authority, which is taking action to recover the loan. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Bryan Baker, regional chairman for details.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by her Department and Government agencies answerable to her Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 25 November 1994, c. 408–09]:* I regret that my previous reply should have read: "Disaggregrated information of this nature is not available. Any such costs which may arise are covered by the hospitality expenditure of the Department which is included in the running costs sum published in the annual report, copies of which are available in the Library."

South Birmingham Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will order an inquiry into the payments made to the director of finance of South Birmingham health authority and his subsequent employment as a consultant to the national health service executive at Chipping Norton; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: No. The Public Accounts Committee in its 36th report fully considered the affairs of South Birmingham health authority and the position of the former director of finance. Copies of the report and the Government's response are available in the Library.

Midwives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions she gave for midwives to meet out-patients in reception areas to comply with patient charter standards.

Mr. Malone: None. The way in which women are received in out-patients clinics is a matter for local arrangement. The patients charter standard on the named midwife is that each pregnant woman shall have a named qualified midwife allocated to her.

Seriously Incapacitated Patients

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide guidelines to health authorities on their responsibilities to provide continuing care for seriously incapacitated patients, in the light of the findings by the health service commissioner—case Number 1 E 62/93–94—and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Draft guidance on "NHS responsibilities for meeting long-term health care needs", copies of which are available in the Library, was issued for consultation on 12 August.

Consultation Exercises

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what (1) guidelines are issued by her Department regarding the procedure of consultation exercises on the future of hospital services; to which authorities these guidelines are issued; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will list the amount of time allocated for each consultation exercise on the future of hospital services that have taken place in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement;

(3) how many consultation exercises have been held on the future of hospital services in the last year for which figures are available; if she will list the regional health authorities involved; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Guidance (EL(90)185) to health authorities in September 1990 reminded them of the need to consult potential users of services as an integral part of the management process. District health authorities are required by the Community Health Council Regulations 1985, as amended, to consult the relevant community health council on proposals which would result in substantial changes to services. Changes may be made without consultation if the authority has expressly decided that, in the interest of the health service, a decision has to be taken without allowing time for consultation. Except in such cases, sufficient time should be allowed for views to be taken and advice given. Consultations are a matter for local health authorities; information on numbers and duration is not available centrally. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Employment Practices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to prevent the re-employment as consultants by the NHS of NHS trust directors who have left or been terminated for unacceptable professional standards;

(2) what action she has taken, or plans to take to ensure, that directors and managers of regional health authorities and NHS trusts who have been involved in improper, dishonest or incompetent practices, cannot be further employed either directly or as consultants to other health authorities or NHS trusts.

Mr. Malone: None. It is for the individual employer to use its normal recruitment procedures, which will involve references from previous employers, to ensure that prospective consultants and staff are suitable for the job concerned. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 29 November, *Official Report,* column *590,* on the employment of consultants.

Paramedical Training

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to disallow NHS trusts from charging existing or potential staff for training in paramedical skills.

Mr. Sackville: Funding arrangements for paramedic training are a matter for local trusts to determine in conjunction with their purchasing health authorities.

Financial Interests

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to require all members of health authorities and trusts to publish in public registers any relevant financial interests.

Mr. Malone: The "Code of Conduct and Accountability" requires chairmen and board members to declare any private interests that might be material and relevant to national health service business. Such information should then be recorded in board minutes and entered into a register which is available to the public. Copies of the code of conduct are available in the Library.

Cornwall Healthcare Trust

Mr. Remond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has made a decision on the payment of libel lawsuit fees in the Cornwall Healthcare trust case; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: No. The matter is still under consideration.

John Gunn

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when John Gunn was first appointed to a health authority/trust; and if she will list his subsequent appointments or reappointments.

Mr. Malone: We have no record of a John Gunn holding any non-executive appointment with a national health service authority or trust.

Expenditure

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the level of spending per head of population on national health service provision in each health district in England and Wales.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply the then Minister of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 26 May, 1994, *Official Report* column *305.* Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Hepetitis C

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemophiliac patients are known to have contracted hepatitis C as a consequence of contaminated blood; how many are known to have died; what representations she has received from relatives; how she has replied; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Figures are not available centrally for haemophilia patients who have contracted hepatitis C through contaminated blood, or for those who have died. I understand from the United Kingdom haemophilia directors that, of 126 haemophilia patients known to have died in 1993, 12 showed the cause of death as liver disease, of which hepatitis C may have been the cause. Some representations have been received seeking payments to haemophilia patients who may have been infected with hepatitis C. We have responded that the Government have no plans to make such payments.

Consultants

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she plans to reduce the disparity in the number of consultants per head of population between regions, with particular reference to Trent regional health authority.

Mr. Malone: There are no central plans for modifying the number of consultants between regions. It is a matter for each employing body to determine the number of consultants needed in each specialty in the light of local needs and competing priorities.

Limited Drug List

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated total saving for each stage in respect of the introduction of the limited drug list.

Mr. Sackville: It is not possible to produce estimates which separate the impact of the selected list scheme from other factors which influence the size of the drugs bill.

NHS Employees' Complaints

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidance to allow national health service employees to bring to the attention of community health councils their concerns about services and patient care without the threat of disciplinary action being taken against them; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive's "Guidance to staff on relations with the public and the media: EL(93)51" clearly sets out the rights and duties of staff when raising issues of concern about health care matters and shows how employers may ensure these rights and duties are met. The guidance makes it plain that employees who raise their concerns in accordance with the guidance are not to be penalised in any way for doing so. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

NHS and NHS Trust Directors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce legislation to render NHS and NHS trust directors liable to surcharge.

Mr. Malone: No.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give, by ambulance authority in England, the number of patients who died in 1993 following ambulance delays outside patients charter limits.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available.

Patients (Failed Appointments)

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the approximate percentage of patients failing to show up, without giving notice, for appointments with *(a)* consultants and *(b)* other hospital doctors in (i) each general hospital in the South Thames region, (ii) West Middlesex University hospital and (iii) teaching hospitals in London north of the River Thames.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is in "Outpatients and Ward Attenders, England, Financial Year 1993–94" copies of which are available in the Library.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in her Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by her Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments, however, are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993, the Department of Health paid 87.1 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the special advisers employed by her Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left her Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Sackville: The special advisers employed by the Department over the last five years are:

Name	
Mrs. T Keswick	January 1989 to November 1990
Mrs. L Campey	December 1990 to April 1992
Mrs. K Ramsay	December 1990 to April 1992
Mr. R Marsh	June 1991 to April 1992 and from April 1992 to the present day

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are however normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

Kidney Donor Register

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she proposes to take to publicise the new kidney donor register; and what budgetary provision she has made for this.

Mr. Sackville: We are presently considering the next phase of publicity in support of the national health service organ donor register.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific grants and capital resources she is making available to local authorities for the personal social services for 1995–96.

Mr. Bowis: Specific grants will again be available in 1995–96 for mental illness services—£47.3 million—HIV and AIDS—£13.4 million—alcohol and drugs misuse—£2.5 million—guardian ad litem and reporting officers—£6.2 million—and social services training—£34.6 million. The mental illness grant will increase by £11.3 million which will be targeted on people with severe mental illness. Each grant will continue to support a maximum of 70 per cent. of total expenditure.

Annual capital guidelines of £124.3 million will be distributed to local authorities. Supplementary credit approvals will again be available for information technology for community care—£12.2 million—mental illness—£11.4 million—and AIDS and HIV services—£3.1 million. The capital grant for secure accommodation for children will continue in 1995–96. The level of grant will be announced later.

SCOTLAND

Farmer's Allowances

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total cost of *(a)* hill livestock compensatory allowance and *(b)* sheep annual premium for each year since 1985; and what the percentage change was in each case on the previous year.

Sir Hector Monro: The information is set out in the following table.

Hill livestock compensatory allowances and sheep annual premium expenditure 1985–1993

Year	HLCA £ million	Percentage change on previous year	SAP £ million	Percentage change on previous year
1985	37.9	—	27.2	—
1986	42.9	+13.2	19.4	–28.7
1987	42.8	–0.2	23.9	+23.2
1988	43.5	+1.6	24.4	+2.1
1989	45.1	+3.7	28.5	+16.8
1990	48.1	+6.7	40.3	+41.4
1991	56.1	+17.7	65.3	+62.0
1992	57.0	+1.6	96.2	+47.3
1993	50.7	–11.1	99.1	+3.0

Highland Area Supplement

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will produce figures for the value of the special highland area supplement for the years 1992 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The value of the HLCA supplements paid in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area are unchanged since 1992. For sheep the supplement is 64p on top of the rate paid to hardy breed sheep in the severely disadvantaged areas. For cows in the severely disadvantaged areas the supplement varies according to the grading of the farm. For grade A farms, the supplement is £3.05 per cow, for grade B, £11.59 per cow and for grade C, £15.86 per cow.

Less-favoured Areas

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total subsidies to the less-favoured areas for each year since 1985, inclusive; and if he will indicate what the change was between successive years.

Sir Hector Monro: Agricultural livestock subsidies paid exclusively to the less-favoured areas are the hill livestock compensatory allowances and the sheep annual premium supplement. Expenditure for both is set out in the following table:

Year	HLCA Exp £ million	Percentage change on previous year	SAP LFA supplement £ million	Percentage change on previous year
1985	37.9		—	—
1986	42.9	+13.2	—	—
1987	42.8	–0.2	—	—
1988	43.5	+1.6	—	—
1989	45.1	+3.7	—	—
1990	48.1	+6.7	—	—
1991	56.1	+17.7	12.0	—
1992	57.0	+1.6	25.0	+108.3
1993	50.7	–11.1	19.2	–23.2

Winter Feed Costs

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the value of winter feed costs for hill farmers for each year since 1990; and what was the increase or decrease on the previous years.

Sir Hector Monro: It is not possible to identify winter feed costs but the value of total feed costs for livestock farmers in the Scottish less-favoured areas is set out in the following table:

	Total Feed Cost (£ per farm)	Change from previous year Total (£ per farm)	Percentage
1990–91	9,472	–52	– 1 per cent.
1991–92	9,788	+487	+5 per cent.
1992–93	10,883	+1,106	+11 per cent.
1993–94 (forecast)	11,775	+892	+8 per cent.

Source:
Scottish farm accounts scheme.

The sample of farms in the Scottish farm accounts scheme varies slightly from year to year. The total cost figures relate to the sample employed in the year in question. The change figures reflect the change from the previous year for an identical sample of farms.

Cow Subsidies

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the current value of *(a)* hill cow subsidy and *(b)* suckler cow subsidy in (i) total and (ii) per head figures; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The current main rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances for cows in the severely disadvantaged areas is £47.50 and £23.75 in the disadvantaged areas. Expenditure on cows under the 1993 HLCA scheme was £30.2 million. The current suckler cow premium is £87.49 with a further £27.63 per cow payable to producers who qualify for an extensification premium. Expenditure under the 1993 suckler cow premium scheme was £43.5 million.

Health Authorities and Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of health authorities and trusts as at 30 September.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 30 September 1994 there were 15 health boards and 39 NHS trusts in Scotland.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give, for each health board and trust, the number of houses on their property which are privately owned.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners in Scottish prisons are serving discretionary life sentences; and how many are still in prison after serving more than 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of 24 individuals are serving discretionary life sentences in Scottish prisons, seven of whom have spent more than 10 years in custody.

Saughton Prison

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the membership of the preliminary review committee of Saughton prison in Edinburgh; and what overlap there is in the membership of that committee with those taking day to day responsibility for prisoners.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No individual prison has a preliminary review committee. The preliminary review committee for life sentence prisoners is chaired by a senior Scottish Office official and its membership comprises a High Court judge, the chairman and a psychiatrist member of the Parole Board for Scotland and the deputy chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service. None of these is involved in day-to-day management of prisoners.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners in Saughton prison, Edinburgh, were not told of their right to make written representations to the preliminary review committee.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not available.

Prisoners

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners in Scottish prisons have served more than 12 years of their current sentence.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 1 December 1994:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of prisoners who have served more than 12 years of their current sentence.

There are currently 131 life sentence prisoners who have spent 12 years or more in custody. This information is not collected centrally in respect of determinate prisoners. However, with the introduction of the Scottish Prison Information Network (SPIN) next year, this type of information will be available.

Waiting Times

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list waiting times for patients of Aberdeen Royal Hospital NHS trust for each of the main medical specialities for the current year, for 1993 and 1992.

Mr. Lang: Information on waiting times for first out-patient appointments at trust level was not held centrally until 1994. The table shows the waiting times for patients treated as in-patients or day cases in selected specialties at the trust in 1992, 1993 and 1994 and the waiting times for first out-patient appointments in 1994. All 1994 figures are from 1 January to 30 September and are provisional.

	Waiting times (Number of days) for first attendance at consultant out-patient clinic		Waiting times (Number of days) for patients admitted from in-patient or day case waiting lists			
			In-patients	Day cases		
Specialty	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
1992						
Cardiology	—	—	33	27	26	21
Dermatology	—	—	21	6	[1]—	[1]—

Specialty	Waiting times (Number of days) for first attendance at consultant out-patient clinic		Waiting times (Number of days) for patients admitted from in-patient or day case waiting lists			
			In-patients		Day cases	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
ENT Surgery	—	—	83	65	63	50
General Medicine	—	—	26	15	16	10
General Surgery	—	—	60	27	46	31
Gynaecology	—	—	42	28	26	7
Medical						
Paediatrics	—	—	20	14	20	21
Nephrology	—	—	27	14	9	9
Neurosurgery	—	—	36	36	41	37
Ophthalmology	—	—	55	44	45	34
Oral Surgery and Oral Medicine	—	—	64	41	10	8
Orthopaedic Surgery	—	—	22	14	16	13
Plastic Surgery	—	—	135	56	159	79
Radiotherapy (Consultative)	—	—	10	6	11	5
Respiratory Medicine	—	—	8	5	13	9
Surgical Paediatrics	—	—	45	31	42	29
Thoracic Surgery	—	—	83	27	30	11
Urology	—	—	47	32	23	19
1993						
Cardiology	—	—	32	25	35	27
Dermatology	—	—	19	11	119	119
ENT Surgery	—		77	63	60	49
General Medicine	—	—	26	14	21	13
General Surgery	—	—	51	29	55	35
Gynaecology	—	—	43	37	20	6
Medical Paediatrics			27	18	26	21
Nephrology	—	—	16	8	11	7
Neurosurgery	—	—	39	31	32	25
Ophthalmology	—	—	55	46	38	35
Oral Surgery and Oral Medicine	—	—	74	45	45	26
Orthopaedic Surgery	—	—	35	22	28	9
Plastic Surgery	—	—	158	68	151	78
Radiotherapy (Consultative)	—	—	12	7	9	8
Respiratory Medicine	—	—	8	5	13	9
Surgical Paediatrics	—	—	31	23	28	25
Thoracic Surgery	—	—	57	29	21	11
Urology	—	—	48	34	31	26
1994						
Cardiology	51	45	34	26	39	33
Dermatology	77	77	25	15	—	—
ENT Surgery	54	49	80	66	70	57
General Medicine	55	58	25	15	19	14
General Surgery	42	37	60	28	70	43
Gynaecology	46	44	43	35	21	7
Medical Paediatrics	57	56	24	13	14	10
Nephrology	24	18	16	8	6	7
Neurosurgery	31	31	31	28	26	16
Ophthalmology	58	60	47	39	34	30
Oral Surgery and Oral Medicine	124	112	72	29	87	84
Orthopaedic Surgery	91	92	38	29	27	24
Plastic Surgery	125	77	175	67	213	86
Radiotherapy (Consultative)	20	15	10	6	4	4
Respiratory Medicine	16	14	6	5	10	7

Specialty	Waiting times (Number of days) for first attendance at consultant out-patient clinic		Waiting times (Number of days) for patients admitted from in-patient or day case waiting lists			
			In-patients		Day cases	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Surgical						
Paediatrics	29	24	45	38	40	36
Thoracic Surgery	34	34	61	35	6	6
Urology	81	71	60	51	34	28

[1] —No service.

Note:

Median—the number of days within which 50 per cent. of patients had waited for treatment.

Beef Exports

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has met European Commission officials to discuss amendments to Decision 94/474; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* On 12 October the Scientific Veterinary Committee reviewed the six-year rule applying to the export of meat from young cattle and agreed that it should be removed. We are now pressing the Commission to bring forward a decision on this quickly.

Medical Staff

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the medical staff complements in each of the main specialities, the numbers in post, the vacancies and the length of time that vacancies have been unfilled.

Mr. Lang: The only grade of hospital doctor for which a central establishment is set is senior registrar. The establishment for the main specialities for 1994 and the numbers of posts filled at 30 September 1993, the latest date for which the information is available, are as follows:

Main specialties	Establishment		Number in post
All specialties	473	(455)	424
Accident and emergency	11	(10)	7
Anaesthetics	55	(50)	51
Clinical laboratory specialties	54	(60)	59
Medical specialties	125	(117)	108
Obstetrics and gynaecology	24	(24)	23
Occupational health	2	(2)	1
Psychiatric specialties	71	(68)	61
Radiology	31	(30)	28
Surgical specialties	99	(93)	86
Other specialties	1	(1)	0

The 1993 establishment of hospital medical posts is given in brackets.

The establishment of public health medicine which covers both the senior registrar and the registrar grades is 33 posts. At 30 September 1993, there were 34 doctors in the two grades.

No senior registrar posts were reported as having been vacant for six months or more in the year ended 30 September 1993. Information is not collected centrally on posts vacant for less than six months.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 10 May 1994 at column *94*, which provides information about payment performance.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Lang: My Department has employed two full-time special advisers over the last five years, although only one, Mr. Gregor Mackay, is in post at present.

Of the previous special advisers to my Department, Mr. Graeme Carter was appointed on 7 August 1987 and re-appointed on 28 November 1990. He resigned on 31 December 1990. Mr Alan Young was first appointed on 22 December 1989 and was subsequently re-appointed twice—on 29 November 1989 and 8 May 1992. He resigned on 2 November 1994.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special adviser's salary spine of 34 points, which starts at £19,503. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to institute a new strategy to combat domestic violence; and what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education and the Lord Chancellor on this subject.

Mr. Maclean: In their reply to the 1993 Home Affairs Select Committee report on domestic violence, the Government made it clear that domestic violence must be tackled vigorously. Action is being taken to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice; that victims and their children receive the necessary practical and emotional support and that preventive strategies to help reduce violence and suffering are identified and promoted. The aim of the Government's public awareness campaign on domestic violence, which was launched on 24 October, is to send a clear message that domestic violence is a crime and no one should stand for it.

The Department for Education and the Lord Chancellor's Department are represented on the ministerial group on domestic violence.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of domestic violence were recorded in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 26 October, *Official Report*, columns *638–39*.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from the receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, Departments are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. In its 1995 annual report, the Home Office expects to report payment performance in excess of 90 per cent. in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Byers : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost of the research project carried out by the Policy Studies Institute into persistent juvenile offenders; what definition they used; what areas of the United Kingdom were covered by the study; what conclusions and recommendations were made; and what response his Department has made to the study.

Mr. Maclean: The scope and nature of the research, and the findings, are set out in the published report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The research cost approximately £68,000. The report has helped to inform Government policy on juvenile crime.

Stop and Search Statistics

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were stopped and searched in each police authority in each quarter since 1990; for what reasons these searches were carried out; in how many cases an arrest was made; and if he will provide an ethnic breakdown of those stopped and searched.

Mr. Maclean: The readily available information is published in Home Office statistical bulletin "Operation of certain police powers under PACE, England and Wales 1993"—issue 15/94—table 1, a copy of which can be found in the Library. The bulletin references for earlier years are 14/91, 15/92, and 21/93.

Quarterly data in the form requested would be available only at disproportionate cost.

The available statistics on ethnic breakdown of those stopped and searched relate to the fiscal year 1993–94 and are given in the table. The data should be treated with caution. This is the first time that this information has been collected. Two forces could not provide the data and a further five forces had to provide an estimate.

Searches of persons under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 by ethnic group

	Searches made:	
Police force area	*of white persons*	*of ethnic minority persons*
Avon and Somerset	3,657	282
Bedfordshire	1,381	324
Cambridgeshire	2,480	179
Cheshire	502	5
Cleveland	2,240	31
Cumbria	3,954	30
Derbyshire	3,313	149
Devon and Cornwall	947	11
Dorset	1,640	—
Durham	1,430	14
[1]Essex	4,182	136
Gloucestershire	[2]—	[2]—
Greater Manchester	38,376	4,134
Hampshire	2,515	53
Hertfordshire	3,807	351
[1]Humberside	1,,063	26
Kent	3,550	103
[1]Lancashire	6,432	462
Leicestershire	10,378	1,414
Lincolnshire	2,280	18
London, City of	1,611	500
Merseyside	15,075	662

Searches of persons under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 by ethnic group

Police force area	*Searches made: of white persons*	*of ethnic minority persons*
Metropolitan Police District	132,565	95,751
Norfolk	6,410	53
Northamptonshire	2,840	137
Northumbria	8,064	70
North Yorkshire	2,253	25
Nottinghamshire	1,817	175
South Yorkshire	5,054	404
Staffordshire	1,567	106
Suffolk	2,016	91
Surrey	12,544	870
[1]Sussex	4,118	213
Thames Valley	3,817	615
Warwickshire	3,138	219
West Mercia	7,500	366
[1]West Midlands	4,098	1,927
West Yorkshire	2,636	386
Wiltshire	1,534	71
Dyfed-Powys	7,720	37
Gwent	2,087	110
North Wales	8,792	12
South Wales	[2]—	[2]—

[1] = estimated
[2] = not available

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if information relating to stop and search incidents where no arrest is made is stored on police computers.

Mr. Maclean: A written record must be made of all stop and searches by police officers whether or not an arrest is made. The method of retention of such records is a matter for the chief officer of the force concerned.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Howard: The information is as follows:

Year	Names	
1990	Mr. M. Simmonds	23 October 1989—July 1990
	Mr. J. Taylor	19 February 1990—November 1990
	Mr. A. Kerpel	1 December 1990—10 April 1992
1991	Mr. A. Kerpel	(see above)
	Mr. C. Grantham	18 February 1991—10 April 1992
	Mr. A. Kerpel	(see above)
1992	Mr. C. Grantham	(see above)
	Mrs. A. Keswick	11 April 1992—28 May 1993
	Mr. D. Ruffley	11 April 1992—28 May 1993
1993	Mrs. A. Keswick	(see above)
	Mr. D. Ruffley	(see above)
	Mr. P. Rock	28 May 1993—to date
	Mr. D. Cameron	21 June 1993—31 August 1994
1994	Mr. P. Rock	(see above)
	Mr. D. Cameron	(see above)
	Miss R. Whetstone	5 September 1994—to date

I regret that, in the reply I gave on 20 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *274–75*, to an earlier question from the hon. Member, I said that only one special adviser joined the Department in 1990.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, currently ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Police Authorities (Funding)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce the allocations of police grant for individual police authorities in 1995–96; and what are the implications of this for the overall funding of police authorities in that year.

Mr. Howard: I have today put a copy of my proposals for the allocation of police grant for 1995–96 in the Library.

Proposals are also being announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for police standard spending assessments and special grants in England and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales for police standard spending assessments in Wales.

The table below shows by police force area the total effect of all these proposals for 1995–96.

Police Force Area	*1995–96 Funding £ million*
English Forces	
Avon and Somerset	146.67
Bedfordshire	55.28
Cambridgeshire	62.24
Cheshire	93.49
Cleveland	70.17
Cu mbria	54.33
Derbyshire	87.71
Devon and Cornwall	145.14
Dorset	62.24
Durham	68.09
Essex	146.27
Gloucestershire	55.93
Hampshire	168 17
Hertfordshire	87.24
Humberside	92.27
Kent	157.89
Lancashire	157.62
Leicestershire	89.34
Lincolnshire	57.08
Norfolk	70.36
North Yorkshire	66.71
Northamptonshire	55.80
Nottinghamshire	109.51
Staffordshire	100.51
Suffolk	57.95
Surrey	85.06
Sussex	144.78
Thames Valley	192.72
Warwickshire	47.67
West Mercia	97.22

Police Force Area	1995–96 Funding £ million
Wiltshire	58.67
English Shires Total	2,949.13
English Metropolitan Forces	
Greater Manchester	324.38
Merseyside	214.73
Northumbria	177.97
South Yorkshire	146.22
West Midlands	326.90
West Yorkshire	249.30
English Metropolitan Total	1,439.50
Metropolitan Police	1,628.56
City of London	57.27
English Total	6,074.46
Welsh Forces	
Dyfed-Powys	44.22
Gwent	47.40
North Wales	62.85
South Wales	146.24
Welsh Total	300.71
Total	6,375.17

(1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest £10,000.

Police Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women from an ethnic minority background are police officers in England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: As of 31 August 1994, the latest date for which this information is readily available, there were 1,590 men and 438 women from an ethnic minority background serving as police officers in England and Wales.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to contract out operational support services of the Metropolitan police; and what conditions are being placed on the contractors concerning their employees.

Mr. Maclean: Police forces do not contract out operational police duties. Support functions, however, may be suitable for contracting out. The Commissioner informs me that the Metropolitan police contracted out catering, cleaning, security guarding, building maintenance, vehicle repair and other support services to the value of more than £100 million in 1993–94.

The Metropolitan police has an extensive programme of market testing. Work valued at more than £110 million a year is being examined to see if greater value for money could be achieved if all or part of this work were undertaken by the private sector.

In certain cases, contractors are required to meet special security conditions.

Remand

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of people on remand *(a)* untried, *(b)* convicted unsentenced and *(c)* in total at the end of each month in 1994.

Mr. Maclean: Information on remand data for 1994 will not be available until autumn 1995.

Remands data include estimates for a number of police forces where data are of a questionable quality. It is not appropriate, for this reason, to give a monthly breakdown of remand figures.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost of custody per inmate per month for those on remand in custody.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 1 December 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average monthly cost of custody for prisoners on remand.

In 1993–94 the average monthly cost per prisoner place was £1,893. This excludes exceptional items—the costs of holding prisoners in police cells and compensation for abandonment of plans to relocate the Prison Service headquarters to Derby.

It is not possible to distinguish the cost of keeping different types of offenders in custody.

Truncheons

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in full the results of tests made to assess the alternatives to the traditional truncheon for use by the police in London.

Mr. Maclean: A report of the scientific evaluation of the alternative batons which have been approved for the Metropolitan police has been sent to the Association of Chief Police Officers, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Policing Costs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the cost to police authorities in England of dealing with demands of *(a)* the Crown Prosecution Service, *(b)* the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and *(c)* traffic management schemes.

Mr. Maclean: There has been no central assessment of the overall cost to police authorities of dealing with any of these areas.

Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoner nights have been spent in police cells in each month of 1994 to date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 1 December 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoner nights spent in police cells in each month of 1994 to date.

The latest information, up to and including 27 November, is given below:

	Number
January	16
February	4,439
March	12,178
April	9,178
May	4,795
June	2,100
July	1,890
August	4,512
September	4,255
October	4,418
November (to 27)	2,910
Total	51,252

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to his Department of keeping prisoners in police cells, broken down by police authority in 1994 to date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewes to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 1 December 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of keeping prisoners in police cells, broken down by police authority.

The following table gives police cell costs for each police authority for 1 January 1994–30 November 1994.

Police Authority	*Amount £*
Cumbria	13,385.44
Greater Manchester	7,937,323.17
Humberside	202,700.87
Lancashire	696,288.29
Merseyside	1,032,697.68
Northamptonshire	9,190.90
Northumbria	218,916.32
South Yorkshire	270,742.53
West Yorkshire	346,807.06
Total	10,728,052.26

The above amounts exclude invoices not yet submitted.

Police Houses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police houses there are in each police authority; and how many are empty.

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table.

Stock of police houses at 31 March 1994

Police authorities	*Total stock*	*Vacant*
Avon and Somerset	346	32
Bedfordshire	107	3
Cambridgeshire	154	5
Cheshire	142	30
City of London	65	5
Cleveland	7	1
Cumbria	239	64
Derbyshire	119	59
Devon and Cornwall	139	63
Dorset	159	21
Durham	53	5
Dyfed-Powys	187	27
Essex	353	41
Gloucestershire	165	22
Greater Manchester	340	41
Gwent	52	8
Hampshire	314	22
Hertfordshire	433	44
Humberside	125	15
Kent	479	25
Lancashire	256	27
Leicestershire	72	7
Lincolnshire	109	25
Merseyside	86	1
Norfolk	81	10
Northamptonshire	135	12
Northumbria	288	27
North Wales	276	145
North Yorkshire	286	52
Nottinghamshire	74	9
South Wales	197	35
South Yorkshire	78	10
Staffordshire	120	14
Suffolk	122	37
Surrey	455	17
Sussex	510	10
Thames valley	611	84
Warwickshire	135	19
West Mercia	182	34
West Midlands	403	23
West Yorkshire	126	29
Wiltshire	123	27
Metropolitan Police	2,181	156
Total	10,884	1,343

Immigration Applicants

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last year the immigration service has failed to meet its target that no applicant for entry into the United Kingdom should spend more than 24 hours in a police cell; what was the length of time individuals were so incarcerated in such cases; and when he expects the target to be met.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information about periods of detention in police cells is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Plans to provide additional immigration detention accommodation over the next 18 months should assist in reducing the time spent in police cells.

Spitalfields Market Constabulary

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the authority for the operation of Spitalfields Market constabulary; who controls them; what is their relationship with *(a)* the Metropolitan police and *(b)* the City of London police; what is the involvement of the Home Office in their work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Responsibility for Spitalfields Market constabulary rests with the Corporation of the City of London.

Police Car Maintenance Units

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a summary of the financial findings from the study his Department conducted in 1988 into the proposed privatisation of police car maintenance units.

Mr. Maclean: No such study has ever been undertaken by the Home Office. The Audit Commission published a study in May 1989, however, entitled "Improving Vehicle Fleet Management in the Police Service"—police papers number 3—which made a number of recommendations aimed at reducing the repair and maintenance costs of police vehicles. It did not consider the question of privatisation.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: My Department's press notices are passed to the Central Office of Information, through which they are made generally available to users of Internet. We are considering using Internet to provide other public information.

Mr. Stephen Smith

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to date over the allegations made by Mr. Stephen Smith that he suffered medical negligence while an inmate at Doncaster prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 1 December 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the case of Stephen Smith.

Mr. Smith received medical attention at Doncaster prison and was subsequently referred to Doncaster Royal Infirmary for further treatment. Whilst receiving treatment for his condition in Doncaster it is recorded that he refused to follow medical advice.

Private Security Companies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* by month for the last 48 months, the private security companies that his Department has employed that are not registered with either of the industry's watchdog bodies and *(b)* those companies currently employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: During the period specified, the Home Office has let contracts to the following private security companies which are not registered with either the British Security Industry Association or the International Professional Trade Association:

Contractor	*Contract duration*
COEX Limited	February 1991–September 1992
Grundig International Limited	July 1992–December 1992
Johnson Control Systems Limited	February 1992–March 1994
Knogo UK Limited	December 1991–June 1992
3 DIS (Europe)	March 1994–March 1994

The Home Office currently employs the following private security companies which are not registered with either the British Security Industry Association or the International Professional Trade Association:

Contractor

Airline Security Consultants Limited

Aviation Defence International

Defence Security Services

Insight Consulting

Security Wales Limited

A number of factors are considered when awarding contracts, which may include certification of compliance with relevant British standards and membership of an established trade association.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were serving a prison sentence have escaped and are still at large; and on what dates and in what circumstances they absconded.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewes to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 1 December 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of sentenced prisoners who have escaped and who are still at large.

Of the sentenced population, 67 male and two female prisoners are still at large. A table showing the dated and circumstance of

each escape is enclosed, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Many of the escapes have been through a breach of the perimeter of category C prison. We are part way through a major programme to upgrade the perimeter fences of such prisons which will make escape significantly more difficult.

A substantial proportion of escapes in the past have also been from escort. As a result of a range of initiatives, the number of escapes from escort is falling. If current trends continue, such escapes will be over 50 per cent. lower in 1994–95 than in 1992–93.

Date	Male or Female	Circumstances of Escape
3 November 1988	F	From Crown Court (escort)
10 February 1989	M	Through the fence at HMP Aldington
31 October 1989	M	Through the fence at HMP Northeye
17 November 1989	M	Through the fence at HMYOI and RC Feltham
7 December 1989	M	Over the fence at HMP Oxford
1 April 1990	M	Through the fence at HMP Send
4 August 1990	M	Through the fence at HMP Littlehey
20 February 1991	M	Over the fence at HMP Aldington
15 May 1991	M	From outside hospital (escort)
14 June 1991	M	Over the fence at HMP Aldington
23 June 1991	M	Through the fence at HMP Aldington
29 June 1991	M	Through the fence at HMP Norwich
6 August 1991	M	Through the fence at HMP The Mount
6 August 1991	M	Through the fence at HMP The Mount
22 September 1991	M	Over the fence at HMP Bedford
24 October 1991	M	Through the fence at HMP Wayland
2 February 1992	M	Over the fence at HMP Downview
11 February 1992	M	Over the fence at HMP Channings Wood
11 February 1992	M	Over the fence at HMP Channings Wood
17 February 1992	M	From Crown Court (escort)
21 March 1992	M	Through the fence at HMP Wellingborough
24 April 1992	M	Through the fence at HMP Featherstone
25 May 1992	M	Over the fence at HMP Blantyre House
6 June 1992	M	Over the fence at HMP Highpoint
1 July 1992	F	From outside hospital (escort)
3 August 1992	M	Hidden in laundry van at HMP Elmley
3 August 1992	M	Hidden in laundry van at HMP Elmley
11 September 1992	M	From family visit (escort)
26 September 1992	M	Through the fence at HMP Highpoint
26 September 1992	M	Through the fence at HMP Highpoint
4 October 1992	M	Through the fence at HMP Highpoint
4 October 1992	M	Through the fence at HMP Highpoint
8 November 1992	M	Through the fence at HMP Downview
12 November 1992	M	From outside hospital (escort)
30 November 1992	M	From outside hospital (escort)
1 April 1993	M	From coach on route to prison (escort)
7 April 1993	M	Through fence at HMP Wellingborough
2 June 1993	M	Escape from HMP Channings Wood—method unknown
25 June 1993	M	From outside hospital (escort)
2 August 1993	M	Escape from HMP Blantyre House—method unknown
4 September 1993	M	Over the fence at HMP Downview
13 October 1993	M	Escape from HMP Ranby—method unknown
23 October 1993	M	Escape from HMYOI and RC Feltham—method unknown
29 November 1993	M	Through fence at HMP Featherstone
16 December 1993	M	From family visit (escort)
20 December 1993	M	Through the fence at HMP Wellingborough
20 December 1993	M	Through the fence at HMP Wellingborough
10 February 1994	M	From coach en route to prison (escort)
23 March 1994	M	From outside hospital (escort)
11 April 1994	M	From family visit (escort)
22 May 1994	M	Through the fence at HMP Wellingborough
12 June 1994	M	From outside hospital (escort)
21 June 1994	M	Through the fence at HMP Lindholme
21 June 1994	M	Through the fence at HMP Lindholme
8 July 1994	M	Through the fence at HMP Wellingborough
24 July 1994	M	Through the fence at HMYOI Wetherby
24 July 1994	M	Through the fence at HMYOI Wetherby
28 July 1994	M	Escape from HMP Littlehey—method unknown
30 July 1994	M	From visits at HMP Swaleside
3 August 1994	M	Through the fence at HMP Downview
22 August 1994	M	Through the fence at HMP Send
25 August 1994	M	Through the fence at HMP Lindholme
30 August 1994	M	Over the wall HMP Featherstone
18 September 1994	M	Over the fence at HMP Camp Hill
22 October 1994	M	Over the fence at HMP Blantyre House
15 November 1994	M	From outside hospital (escort)
15 November 1994	M	Escape from HMP Blantyre House—method unknown
16 November 1994	M	Over the fence at HMP The Mount
16 November 1994	M	Over the fence at HMP The Mount

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the policy of his Department as to the transfer of prison inmates from

prisons in England and Wales to prisons in other areas of the United Kingdom and overseas; and when this policy was last reviewed.

Mr. Howard: The Criminal Justice Act 1961 provides for prisoners, on request, to be transferred between United Kingdom jurisdictions and the Channel Islands, either permanently or temporarily. Requests are considered on an individual basis under criteria announced to Parliament on 23 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *481–82*.

The Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984 enables the United Kingdom to enter into international agreements for the repatriation of prisoners. Along with 27 other countries, the United Kingdom has ratified the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons. In addition, we have been joined in the Commonwealth repatriation scheme by five countries and bi-lateral agreement has been concluded with Thailand.

These arrangements are kept under constant review.

Home Leave

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners who were granted home leave were still at large having failed to return at the latest date for which figures are available;

(2) how many prisoners *(a)* applied for home leave and *(b)* were granted home leave in each of the first six months of 1994;

(3) how many prisoners who were granted home leave during *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* the first six months of 1994 were subsequently (i) charged and (ii) convicted of an offence while on home leave;

(4) how many prisoners who had been refused parole during the last 12 months were granted home leave within the next 56 days.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answers 21 November 1994]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewes to Mr. George Howarth, dated 1 December 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about home leave for prisoners.

I regret that the statistical information you have requested is either not collated centrally or is not held within the Prison Service and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Following the review of home leave and temporary release we are establishing a system to monitor release on temporary licence and the impact of the new arrangements. The system will provide a more comprehensive picture than is currently available, although it will not be capable of answering all of your questions.

Ethnic Minority Funding

Mr. MacShane: To ask he Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that the assistance provided currently under section 11 grant posts to Rotherham ethnic minority children who need help with English will be maintained under the single regeneration budget process.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The single regeneration budget has a range of objectives, including enhancing the employment prospects, education and skills of local people, particularly the young and those at a disadvantage, and promoting equality of opportunity. It is also intended to promote initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities. In line with these objectives, on-going commitments under section 11, part of which has been absorbed within the SRB from 1 April 1994, will continue to be honoured. In addition, the SRB will be able to provide support for new education and other projects aimed at ethnic minority communities through the bidding arrangements introduced for 1995–96 and later years.

Rotherham is also eligible to bid for section 11 resources under the terms of a circular issued by the Home Office on 7 September. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced on 22 November that section 11 funding for the current bidding round is to be doubled from £15 million to £30 million, and that the deadline for applications for funding is to be extended to 30 December 1994.

Private Security Services

Mr. William O' Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met representatives from private security services to discuss their role in respect of policing of streets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: No Home Office Ministers have ever met the private security industry specifically to discuss street patrolling. Policing of our streets is a matter for the police service.

EDUCATION

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list all grant-maintained schools, with their DFE reference numbers by local education authority area, in separate lists for primary, secondary and special schools, with voluntary schools separately identified by denomination; if she will give for each school (i) the actual expenditure for the year 1993–94 and (ii) the allocations made for the year 1994–95 together with, in each case, the number of pupils used for calculations, the transitional grant awarded, the direct annual maintenance grant, the AMG central costs allocation, the AMG meal subsidies, the AMG carry-forward from the previous financial year, the special-purpose grant for curriculum and staff-development grant, the special-purpose grant for VAT and rate-relief grant, the special-purpose grant for premises insurance grant, the special-purpose grant for staff-restructuring grant, the capital grant for formula allocation, the capital grant for named projects, other grants from public funds, the total of above grants for each school (1) excluding and (2) including capital grants for named projects, the total of the above for each school excluding capital grants expressed per head of school population, the total of the above for each school including capital grants expressed per head of school population, and the total for each of primary, secondary and special grant-maintained schools; and if, in respect of each school, she will list its standard 'A' number multiplied by number of year groups and capacity according to open enrolment calculation.

Mr. Robin Squire: Matters concerning the determination and payment of grant to grant-maintained schools are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency

for Schools. It also holds grant information relating to last year. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

The remaining information requested is being collated. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as it is ready.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many of the bills paid by her Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in her Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. Forth: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department will be providing details of its annual payment performance in its departmental report. For the invoices submitted to central accounts in October, 94.7 per cent. had been paid within one month of receipt, 99.0 per cent. within two months, 99.7 per cent. within three months and 99.8 per cent within six months.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what amounts have been requested by way of capital spending in 1995–96 by each local education authority; and what has been the total amount requested in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Capital bids for LEAs in England for 1995–96 (per thousand)

LEA	*Total bids*
Barking	7,389
Barnet	8,616
Bexley	4,648
Brent	4,044
Bromley	8,068
Croydon	11,134
Ealing	38,064
Enfield	16,103
Haringey	15,138
Harrow	12,442
Havering	9,955
Hillingdon	9,563
Hounslow	14,373
Kingston	6,427
Merton	9,155
Newham	16,459
Redbridge	5,997
Richmond	5,820
Sutton	6,179
Waltham	12,379
City	—
Camden	5,516
Westminster	769
Greenwich	11,250
Hackney	8,672
Hammersmith	3,047
Islington	8,711
Kensington	3,248
Lambeth	12,293
Lewisham	22,953
Southwark	5,983
Wandsworth	10,349
Tower Hamlets	22,132
Birmingham	40,926
Coventry	5,726
Dudley	6,278
Sandwell	9,249
Solihull	5,115
Walsall	7,743
Wolverham	11,515
Knowsley	14,793
Liverpool	18,676
St. Helens	6,195
Sefton	4,439
Wirral	7,343
Bolton	5,769
Bury	3,141
Manchester	57,840
Oldham	9,119
Rochdale	8,645
Salford	21,263
Stockport	3,608
Tameside	4,498
Trafford	7,392
Wigan	9,043
Barnsley	5,371
Doncaster	9,347
Rotherham	4,380
Sheffield	43,690
Bradford	41,166
Calderdale	6,003
Kirklees	9,762
Leeds	28,958
Wakefield	27,740
Gateshead	6,206
Newcastle	26,189
North Tyneside	8,028
South Tyneside	5,708
Sunderland	10,113
Isle of Scilly	37
Avon	24,893
Bedfordshire	11,126
Berkshire	15,538
Bucks	25,345
Cambridge	26,329
Cheshire	31,409
Cleveland	10,639
Cornwall	15,975
Cumbria	25,244
Derbyshire	36,975
Devon	34,680
Dorset	24,149
Durham	53,984
East Sussex	34,916
Essex	76,527
Gloucester	45,828
Hampshire	33,718
Hereford and West	15,718
Hertford	16,872
Humberside	19,679
Isle of Wight	10,225
Kent	67,632
Lancashire	40,337
Leicester	9,611
Lincoln	16,197
Norfolk	17,677
North Yorkshire	32,232
Northampton	17,345

Capital bids for LEAs in England for 1995–96 (per thousand)

LEA	Total bids
Northumber	5,178
Nottingshire	18,680
Oxfordshire	30,531
Shropshire	9,928
Somerset	11,959
Staffordshire	26,649
Suffolk	20,132
Surrey	22,842
Warwick	17,307
West Sussex	18,539
Wiltshire	7,732
Total	1,818,167

Admission Appeals

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will state in total and for each local education authority for 1992–93 and 1993–94 the number of parents who made admission appeals which were *(a)* withdrawn before appeal committee stage, *(b)* settled to the mutual satisfaction of both parties before appeal committee stage, *(c)* heard by appeal committee and rejected and *(d)* heard and decided in the parents' favour.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on appeals lodged by parents against the non-admission of their children to the maintained school of their choice for each local education authority area for 1992–93 is given in the table. Information for 1993–94 is not yet available.

Appeals by parents against non-admission of their children to maintained (including Grant Maintained) primary and secondary schools in each local education authority area in England—Academic year 1992–93

Local Education Authority Area	Total appeals lodged	Appeals Committee outcome: Withdrawn before reaching Appeals Committee	Settled to mutual satisfaction	Decided in parents favour	Rejected
Corporation of London	1	0	1	0	0
Camden	378	24	46	61	247
Greenwich	393	73	50	140	129
Hackney	371	26	103	101	141
Hammersmith and Fulham	231	13	6	25	187
Islington	392	0	93	81	218
Kensington and Chelsea	58	5	7	18	28
Lambeth	380	68	89	64	159
Lewisham	784	61	154	125	444
Southwark	352	16	83	79	174
Tower Hamlets	596	13	150	72	361
Wandsworth	154	35	19	48	52
Westminster	227	34	20	23	150
Barking and Dagenham	174	0	60	55	59
Barnet	918	189	156	189	381
Bexley	434	46	91	208	89
Brent	145	9	66	18	52
Bromley	879	221	134	138	386
Croydon	831	83	95	250	402
Ealing	288	6	15	90	169
Enfield	710	111	131	169	299
Haringey	340	5	119	55	161
Harrow	372	66	47	80	179
Havering	388	8	43	92	245
Hillingdon	314	16	64	31	203
Hounslow	318	40	10	93	175
Kingston-upon-Thames'	125	4	11	30	79
Merton	233	78	79	23	53
Newham	39	3	12	10	14
Redbridge	503	0	0	100	403
Richmond-upon-Thames	227	24	1	80	122
Sutton	572	16	129	111	314
Waltham Forest	511	26	20	263	202
Birmingham	1,957	157	240	539	1,021
Coventry	437	92	1	164	180
Dudley	193	17	77	21	78
Sandwell	161	58	31	59	13
Solihull	258	23	89	27	119
Walsall	39	13	4	9	13
Wolverhampton	75	16	1	22	36
Knowsley	34	0	0	15	19
Liverpool	897	0	128	340	429
St. Helens	134	12	18	59	45
Sefton	123	11	50	38	24
Wirral	438	0	136	70	232
Bolton	233	1	22	113	97
Bury	619	46	303	138	130
Manchester	1,263	86	91	561	525
Oldham	378	6	204	46	122
Rochdale	262	18	69	69	106

Appeals by parents against non-admission of their children to maintained (including Grant Maintained) primary and secondary schools in each local education authority area in England—Academic year 1992–93

Local Education Authority Area	Total appeals lodged	Withdrawn before reaching Appeals Committee	Appeals Committee outcome: Settled to mutual satisfaction	Appeals Committee outcome: Decided in parents favour	Appeals Committee outcome: Rejected
Salford	134	0	64	34	36
Stockport	92	0	0	40	52
Tameside	173	12	3	97	61
Trafford	237	12	45	46	134
Wigan	158	6	59	39	54
Barnsley	0	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	55	4	8	10	33
Rotherham	140	10	18	43	69
Sheffield	595	135	306	99	55
Bradford	1,457	91	463	339	564
Calderdale	[1]138	52	24	13	48
Kirklees	221	18	90	61	52
Leeds	2,360	47	1,496	444	373
Wakefield	[1]93	2	28	30	33
Gateshead	29	1	12	3	13
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	136	3	58	58	17
North Tyneside	16	1	4	1	10
South Tyneside	45	3	16	10	16
Sunderland	73	4	0	28	41
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0
Avon	1,115	149	94	462	410
Bedfordshire	92	0	11	[1]39	42
Berkshire	625	34	20	202	369
Buckinghamshire[2]	580	24	10	161	385
Cambridge	315	12	58	121	124
Cheshire	147	38	2	20	87
Cleveland	80	10	10	14	46
Cornwall	51	2	8	19	22
Cumbria	99	11	29	34	25
Derbyshire	485	27	65	175	218
Devon	541	51	119	99	272
Dorset	340	6	35	136	163
Durham	392	19	117	142	114
East Sussex	298	16	45	85	151
Essex	440	32	128	102	178
Gloucestershire	279	17	63	87	112
Hampshire	148	55	6	28	59
Hereford and Worcester	273	18	48	62	145
Hertfordshire	1,071	127	86	275	583
Humberside	457	42	49	180	186
Isle of Wight	37	3	8	13	13
Kent[2]	975	203	355	142	275
Lancashire	2,400	425	63	1,132	780
Leicestershire	373	22	31	78	242
Lincolnshire	240	33	20	113	74
Norfolk	183	19	46	43	75
North Yorkshire	533	32	0	311	190
Northamptonshire	103	4	29	27	43
Northumberland	51	0	0	30	21
Nottinghamshire	322	84	11	91	136
Oxfordshire	374	9	6	202	157
Shropshire	360	5	23	297	35
Somerset	379	5	144	120	110
Staffordshire	190	18	6	72	94
Suffolk	150	17	40	60	33
Surrey	640	75	160	180	225
Warwickshire	160	13	49	60	38
West Sussex	187	29	14	39	105
Wiltshire	151	43	25	20	63
England Total[3]	41,927	4,005	8,295	12,080	17,527

Notes:

[1] One appeal was withdrawn after being heard by the appeals committee but before the outcome was decided.

[2] LEAs which did not submit a complete return.

[3] The total number of appeals lodged includes 19 appeals which were heard by the outcome of which had not been decided when the information was collected.

Higher Education Funding Council

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what percentage of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's teaching allocations was set aside in 1993–94 to compensate for the change in the balance between core and tuition fees; and what was the total sum allocated for compensation and the total funds allocated for research;

(2) how many institutions received marginal funding for teaching above £300,000 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 1993–94 and 1994–95; and what was the amount of money allocated in each case;

(3) what proportion of Higher Education Funding Council for England research funds in 1993–94 and 1994–95 was employed in the category of development research, supporting technical development of new forms of teaching and learning; which of the old universities received allocations in this category and what was the maximum and minimum allocation made to any institution in this category;

(4) in which separate categories of the allocations itemised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 1993–94 and 1994–95 the sums distributed by the council amounted to less than 1 per cent. of the total;

(5) if she will list the amounts allocated for research to the 10 institutions receiving least in research funds from the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 1993–94 and 1994–95;

(6) how many institutions received research funds from the Higher Education Funding Council for England *(a)* above £20 million, *(b)* less than £20 million but above £1 million, *(c)* less than £1 million but greater than zero or *(d)* zero research funds for 1993–94 and 1994–95;

(7) what was the maximum total research allocation by the Higher Education Funding Council for England to any single institution in 1993–94 and 1994–95.

(8) if she will list separately the funds provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for England for teaching and for research for *(a)* the Open University, *(b)* the old universities, *(c)* the former polytechnics and *(d)* colleges for 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: The figures requested are published in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's circulars 35/93 and 31/94, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what mechanisms the Higher Education Funding Council for England uses to identify best practice in teaching; and what financial incentives are used to encourage it.

Mr. Boswell: The Higher Education Funding Council for England recruits appropriate academics to undertake quality assessments of teaching and learning in specific subjects at higher education institutions. An unsatisfactory assessment risks the withdrawal of funds unless corrected during a specified period. Reports of individual assessments are published and, as the assessments for each subject area are completed, an overview report for the whole subject area is published. This peer review identifies best practice and reports on it in the detailed assessment and overview reports.

The HEFCE, jointly with the other funding councils and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, also supports a teaching and learning technology programme which aims to promote best practice, flexibility and efficiency in teaching within higher education through the greater use of new technology.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether she has carried out a review into the effectiveness of the funding methodology applied by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in achieving the objectives given to the council by the Government; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The effectiveness of funding policy, including the funding methodology of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, in achieving the Government's objectives for higher education is kept under constant review.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the maximum and minimum full-time undergraduate average unit of Higher Education Funding Council for England funding by academic subject category for 1993–94 and 1994–95; and which institutions received these figures in each case.

Mr. Boswell: Details of the average units of council funding for 1993–94 are published in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's report 1/94, a copy of which is available in the Library. Details for 1994–95 are not yet available.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what evidence she has received on trends in teaching costs in higher education institutions; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The higher education sector has achieved significant reductions in unit costs in recent years. Up to 1993–94, the scale of the productivity gains in terms of unit public funding exceeded those planned by the Government as a result of institutions' decisions to recruit at above the level of the Government's plans.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what mechanisms exist to ensure that funds allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England for research are not used for other purposes;

(2) what measures are in place to ensure that the expenditure in institutions funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England reflects the allocations made by the Higher Education Funding Council for England relating to research and teaching.

Mr. Boswell: The majority of recurrent funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England is provided in the form of a block grant. Higher education institutions, being autonomous, are free to deploy the grant to meet their own needs and priorities, subject to the terms of their financial memoranda with the HEFCE.

The HEFCE has asked institutions to account annually for their allocation of research funds to individual departments, though not to account for how those funds are spent. This will enable higher education institutions to plan their research better and provide improved public accountability.

League Tables

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has for the supply of information to local authorities by grant-maintained schools for the purpose of drawing up value-added school league tables.

Mr. Forth: The report of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority on the development of value added by schools will be published shortly. The implications for the collection and aggregation of data to permit the inclusion of value-added measures in school performance tables will need to be considered against the various options for comparing pupils' actual achievements at different ages. Whatever approach is adopted will need to produce measures which are straightforward to calculate and intelligible to parents.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the special advisers employed by her Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Forth: Five special advisers have been employed by the Department in the last five years: Eleanor Laing, Tessa Keswick, David Ruffley, Clifford Grantham, and, most recently, Dr. Elizabeth Cottrell.

Information on special advisers is not retained in the Department once they leave, and dates of joining and leaving are not therefore available.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Students (Financial Support)

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will give details of the support that will be available to students through mandatory awards and student loans in the academic year 1995–96.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have today laid before Parliament the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1994 and, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1994.

These regulations provide for new rates of grant and loan for the academic year 1995–96 and for the various changes I announced on 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *675–80*. The total level of support available to students through the main rates of grant and loan together in 1995–96 will be 2.5 per cent. higher than for 1994–95 in line with forecast price increases. I am placing a memorandum in the Library giving full details of the new rates.

Specialist Institutions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in what circumstances it is the responsibility *(a)* of local education authorities to buy placements at independent specialist institutions for young people aged 16 to 19 years who have a statement and *(b)* of the Further Education Funding Council for buying placements if there is not a statement and if the college is educationally appropriate; if Doncaster college for the deaf is classed as educationally appropriate; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Under the Education Act 1993, LEAs have a duty, in consultation with the parents, to determine the special education provision required for young people for whom they are responsible. Where an LEA maintains a statement, it must also arrange for the special educational provision specified in the statement. LEAs have a statutory duty to pay for the provision at an independent institution specified in a statement when it is further education provided at a school catering for under-16s as well as over-16s.

In circumstances where there is no LEA duty to fund provision, it falls upon the Further Education Funding Council to do so in respect of students over compulsory school age and under 25 years of age who have learning difficulties and disabilities. Where the council has satisfied itself that suitable provision is not available in the further and higher education sectors and judges that it is in the students' best interests to do so, it has a duty to buy provision outside these sectors.

The Further Education Funding Council has confirmed that it will continue to fund places for students with learning difficulties and disabilities at Doncaster college for the deaf in cases which meet the council's published criteria for such placements.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by her Department and Government agencies answerable to her Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and official residences.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This information is not available as it is not possible to disaggregate costs of this nature from the Department's running cost expenditure, details of which are published in the annual departmental report [CM 2510].

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many official Christmas cards she and her Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if she will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card she intends to send this year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My Ministers and I intend to send about 950 official Christmas cards in 1994. They will cost some £800 to purchase and £180 to post. Information on the cost in staff time to address cards and place them in envelopes is not available. When my cards are available, I will place copies in the Libraries of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 November,

Official Report, column *266*, if he will provide a regional breakdown of the spring 1994 labour force survey figure to identify separately the numbers of employed and self-employed people in part-time work who could not find full-time work, by percentage, gender and age.

Mr. Oppenheim: The following tables give the information available from the spring 1994 labour force survey. The same size used in the survey is not large enough to provide reliable estimates for self-employed people, nor for an age analysis by region.

Part-time employees who could not find a full-time job by region and gender—Spring 1994 (not seasonally adjusted)

Region of residence	Thousands			As a percentage of all part-time employees		
	All Persons	Men	Women	All Persons	Men	Women
Great Britain	706	194	512	13	26	11
England	590	167	423	13	26	10
South East	201	57	144	13	23	11
—Greater London	83	26	57	16	28	14
—ROSE	118	31	87	11	21	9
East Anglia	31	[1]—	21	14	[1]—	11
South West	67	20	47	13	26	11
West Midlands	66	18	47	13	29	10
East Midlands	41	12	29	10	25	8
Yorks and Humberside	62	17	45	12	25	10
North West	77	23	54	13	28	10
North	45	11	34	15	37	13
Wales	43	11	32	17	42	14
Scotland	73	15	57	16	29	14

[1] Estimates below 10,000 and so not shown.

Part-time employees who could not find a full-time job by gender and age—Spring 1994 (not seasonally adjusted)

	Thousands			As a percentage of all part-time employees		
	All persons	Men	Women	All persons	Men	Women
Great Britain						
All 16+	706	194	512	13	26	11
16–19	57	17	41	10	6	13
20–24	106	40	66	29	37	26
25–34	154	45	109	14	60	10
35–49	223	41	182	12	54	10
50–59/64	140	47	93	14	37	11
60/65+	26	[1]—	21	6	[1]—	7

Note:
[1] Estimates below 10,000 and so not shown.
Source:
Labour force survey.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 November, *Official Report*, column *266*, if he will provide a breakdown by region and gender of *(a)* the 587,000 employees in temporary jobs because they could not find permanent employment and *(b)* the total number of employees in temporary jobs.

Mr. Oppenheim: The following tables give the information available from the spring 1994 labour force survey:

(a) Employees in temporary jobs because they could not find full-time work by sex and region of residence Spring 1994 (not seasonally adjusted)

Thousands

Region of residence	All persons	Sex	
		Men	Women
Great Britain	587	303	284
North	41	26	15
Yorkshire and Humberside	54	31	22
East Midlands	33	16	17
East Anglia	25	13	11
South East	191	94	96
—Greater London	77	34	43
—Rest of South East	113	60	53
South West	42	18	24
West Midlands	44	22	22
North West	63	33	30
Wales	32	17	15
Scotland	63	32	31

Source:
Labour force survey.

(b) Employees in temporary jobs by sex and region of residence Spring 1994 (not seasonally adjusted)

Thousands

Region of residence	All persons	Sex: Men	Sex: Women
Great Britain	1,373	607	765
North	84	43	42
Yorkshire and Humberside	118	56	62
East Midlands	90	35	55
East Anglia	56	23	33
South East	480	205	275
—Greater London	184	79	105
—Rest of South East	296	126	170
South West	101	42	59
West Midlands	112	48	65
North West	140	67	73
Wales	66	28	38
Scotland	125	62	63

Source:
Labour force survey.

Part-time Workers

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide the latest estimate of the number of employees who are in temporary part-time work because they have been unable to find full-time permanent employment, broken down by region, gender and age.

Mr. Oppenheim: The following table gives the information available from the spring 1994 labour force survey. The sample size used for the survey is not large enough to provide reliable estimates for regions.

Employees in temporary part-time jobs because they could not find full-time permanent work.

Age	Spring 1994 (not seasonally adjusted) thousands Great Britain: Men	Women
16–24	19	14
25–34	11	20
35–49	12	27
50 and over	[1]—	13
Total	49	74

Note:
[1] Under 10,000 and so not shown.
Source:
Labour force survey.

Merchant Seafarers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the provisions of current employment legislation which do not apply to United Kingdom merchant seafarers.

Mr. Oppenheim: Provisions which exclude seafarers of various descriptions in some circumstances from certain of the provisions of general employment legislation include:

Section 10 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975;

Sections 8 and 9 of the Race Relations Act 1976;

Sections 141 and 144 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978;

Section 30 of the Wages Act 1986;

Sections 284 and 285 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

Training

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much training was provided by each training and enterprise council in Greater London in respect of *(a)* employment training, *(b)* youth training and *(c)* other programmes in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will show the proportions of each that were provided by further education colleges.

Mr. Paice: Training figures information by training and enterprise councils in Greater London is set out in the following table. Information on training provided by further education colleges is not available in the form requested.

London TECs—1993–94 Starts, Average Participants and Training Weeks Delivered

Youth Training (Excluding Credits)	Starts	Average Participants[1]	Training weeks delivered
Aztec	1,581	1,267	64,937
Centec	2,336	1,898	96,912
Cilntec	3,079	2,234	114,316
Letec	4,538	4,484	232,527
NLtec	1,730	1,323	72,343
NWtec	1,193	832	49,638
Solotec	4	256	18,253
Sttec	51	1,605	80,686
Wltec	2,140	2,351	122,360
Region	16,652	16,250	851,972

Source:
TEC Annex J Management Information (Actuals).
Note:
The figure for average participants is the average of the participants on the scheme at the end of each four-weekly period in 1993–94. (For LFW the average of the participants at the end of the seven periods when scheme was run).

Youth Credits	Starts	Average Participants[1]	Training weeks delivered
Aztec	0	0	0
Centec	0	0	0
Cilntec	0	0	0
Letec	0	0	0
NLtec	0	0	0
NWtec	0	0	0
Solotec	2,629	2,063	101,394
Sttec	3,896	1,236	57,594
Wltec	0	0	0
Region	6,525	3,299	158,988

Source:
TEC Annex J Management Information (Actuals).

Note:
[1] The figure for average participants is the average of the participants on the scheme at the end of each four-weekly period in 1993–94. (For LFW the average of the participants at the end of the seven periods when scheme was run).

Youth training and credits	Starts	Average participants[1]
Aztec	1,581	1,267
Centec	2,336	1,898
Cilntec	3,079	2,234
Letec	4,538	4,484
NLtec	1,730	1,323
NWtec	1,193	832

Youth training and credits	Starts	Average participants[1]
Solotec	2,633	2,318
Sttec	3,947	2,841
WLtec	2,140	2,351
Region	23,177	19,549

Source:
TEC Annex J Management Information (Actuals).

Note:
[1] The figure for average participants is the average of the participants on the scheme at the end of each four-weekly period in 1993–94. (For LFW the average participants at the end of seven periods when scheme was run).

Training for Work	Starts	Average Participants[1]	Training weeks delivered
Aztec	3,214	1,234	60,388
Centec	6,265	2,471	125,093
Cilntec	4,609	2,156	112,555
Letec	7,460	3,492	176,820
NLtec	5,506	2,224	118,267
NWtec	3,518	1,219	61,494
Solotec	3,587	1,469	78,852
Sttec	8,436	3,762	188,696
Wltec	3,149	1,200	62,138
Region	45,744	19,228	984,303

Source:
TEC Annex J Management Information (Actuals).

Note:
[1] The figure for average participants is the average of the participants on the scheme at the end of each four-weekly period in 1993–94. (For LFW average of the participants at the end of the seven periods when scheme was run).

Business Start up Scheme[2]	Starts	Average Participants[1]
Aztec	371	487
Centec	366	178
Cilntec	387	337
Letec	363	341
NLtec	549	272
NWtec	242	227
Solotec	567	513
Sttec	516	502
WLtec	425	516
Region	3,786	3,374

Source:
TEC Annex J Management Information (Actuals).

Notes:
[1] The figure for average participants is the average of the participants on the scheme at the end of each four-weekly period in 1993–94. (For LFW the average participants at the end of seven periods when scheme was run).
[2] Anex J figures are not collected for BSUS and LFW training weeks delivered.

Learning for Work[2]	Starts	Average Participants[1]
Aztec	230	194
Centec	267	120
Cilntec	235	92
Letec	331	202
NLtec	212	147
NWtec	51	39
Solotec	138	87
Sttec	421	234
WLtec	158	64
Region	2,043	1,178

Source:
TEC Annex J Management Information (Actuals).

Notes:
[1] The figure for average participants is the average of the participants on the scheme at the end of each four-weekly period in 1993–94. (For LFW the average participants at the end of the seven periods when scheme was run).
[2] Anex J figures are not collected for BSUS and LFW training weeks delivered.

Training Schemes (Wales)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those referred to employment training in Wales by his Department did not arrive; and what percentage of those in Wales who started a scheme completed their training in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: I have been asked to reply.

Some 53.5 per cent. of those referred by the Employment Service to employment training in Wales did not arrive for their training in 1993–94. The ET national follow-up survey show that from April 1992 to March 1993, 58 per cent. of those on employment training completed agreed training.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, Departments are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. Recent figures for 1994 indicate that the Employment Department, the Employment Service and the Health and Safety Executive paid, respectively, 96.3, 83.4 and 90.3 per cent. of their bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual condition existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Miss Widdecombe: The following special advisers have been employed by the Employment Department, in the last five years:

Alison Broom: from 21 July 1994 to date

Michael McManus: from 28 May 1993 to 20 July 1994

Dr. Elizabeth Cottrell: from 14 April 1992 to 27 May 1993

Iain Wilton: from 13 January 1992 to 13 March 1992

Tim Collins: from 1 February 1990 to 10 January 1992

Warwick Lightfoot: from 2 November 1987 to 31 August 1989.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are however, normally paid on a special advisers salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19.503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Jobseekers

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the cost to the Benefits Agency of the jobseeker's agreement per individual with whom it is negotiated.

Miss Widdecombe: This matter is still under consideration.

ENVIRONMENT

Business Start-up

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his policy that support for business start-up in Rotherham and similar schemes will be maintained in the single regeneration budget process.

Mr. Curry: The single regeneration budget has a range of objectives, including the encouragement of sustainable economic growth and wealth creation by improving the competitiveness of the local economy, including business support. On-going commitments under the business start-up scheme, which has been absorbed within the SRB from 1 April 1994, will continue to be honoured. In addition, the SRB will be able to provide support for new and existing businesses through the bidding arrangements introduced for 1995–96 and later years.

Pit Data

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to make provision for the recording by experts of all relevant data in respect of the workings of *(a)* shafts, *(b)* drainage channels and *(c)* other elements of industrial archaeology which are found at pits being turned into opencast workings; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: No; PPG16 "Archaeology and Planning" already gives general guidance on the handling of archaeological remains and discoveries under the development plan and control systems, including the steps that should be taken for their preservation or recording. In addition, MPG12 requires local planning authorities to identify, where possible, the location of mine entries and openings in surveys of their areas.

Quarrying

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received, and what assessment his Department has made, of the impact of the proposed new planning guidelines on quarrying for aggregates upon environmentally important and sensitive sites.

Sir Paul Beresford: In drawing up the new planning guidelines contained in minerals planning guidance "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England", MPG6, the department consulted a wide range of interested bodies including those concerned about the impact of quarrying in environmentally important and sensitive areas. The responses from those bodies were taken into account and we have had no specific representations since the guidelines were published in April this year.

The guidelines are designed to ensure that the construction industry receives an adequate and steady supply of material at the best balance of social, environmental and economic cost. The environmental impacts of particular proposals are given due consideration during the processing of the planning application.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average and the median time his Department has taken to pay suppliers in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of bills took more than six weeks to pay.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, Departments are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993, my Department paid 90 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the effect on rate bills in the northern region of the 1995 property revaluation on each category of property divided between small and large, assuming no change in real terms rate poundage and *(a)* with and *(b)* without the effect of transitional relief, on the basis of his answer of 1 November to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), *Official Report*, columns *1003–6*.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information about properties in the northern region is contained in the table below and takes account of the most recent information available. The effects of the 1995 revaluation taking account of the transitional arrangements are calculated on the basis of the limits on increases and decreases in rate bills announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in his answer of 29 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr.

Garnier), *Official Report*, columns *649–50*. The effects, taking no account of transitional relief, are shown in parentheses.

Percentage changes in rate bills for the northern region following the 1995 revaluation.

Northern Region: percentage change

	Small properties[1]	*Large properties*	*Total*
Shops	+8 (+40)	+11 (+37)	+10 (+37)
Offices	+9 (+52)	+12 (+55)	+11 (+54)
Factories	+9 (+48)	+8 (+48)	+8 (+48)
Warehouses	+9 (+47)	+12 (+28)	+11 (+30)
Other	+7 (+36)	+7 (+19)	+7 (+21)
Total	+8(+42)	+8 (+29)	+8 (+31)

[1] Small properties have a 1 April 1995 rateable value of less than £10,000.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the landfill sites in the counties of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Cleveland and Durham where the controlled burial of low-level nuclear waste is licensed; and, in each case, what is the ceiling on the amounts involved.

Mr. Atkins: The following four sites, High Urpeth, Kibblesworth, Ryton and Cowpen Bewley, have in the past received low-level radioactive waste for disposal by controlled burial. The first three mentioned are now closed, leaving Cowpen Bewley as the only site which may receive such waste.

This site may receive waste from a small number of locally based organisations. Authority to make controlled burials is granted only after an assessment of the waste producer's application and of the site it proposes to use. The certificates of authorisation issued to those organisations, which now use Cowpen Bewley, contain detailed limits on both volume and activity of waste which may be disposed of, and on the disposal conditions. These authorisations permit the disposal of no more than 200 MBq of radium and thorium and of 2 GBq of other radionuclides, which are not alpha emitters, each month at Cowpen Bewley.

County Archives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to prevent the deterioration of written records in county archives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: All principal local authorities have a duty under the Local Government Act 1972 to make proper arrangements for any documents in their custody. Responsibility for the care of county archives therefore lies with the county councils and any successor authorities. A working group has, however, been established for the purpose of drawing up and promulgating central guidance for the future of archive collections, with particular reference to the needs of any new authorities established as a consequence of local government reorganisation. Its members are drawn from the Public Record Office, the Society of Archivists, the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts and the Association of County Archivists as well as representatives of my Department and the Department of National Heritage. It is intended to have the guidance in place early next year.

CITES

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the ninth conference of the parties of CITES.

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Environment and Countryside to the hon. Members for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) and for Newham North-West (Mr. Banks) on 24 November, *Official Report*, columns *241–42*.

Rural Challenge Competition

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will set out the basic features of the successful bids to the Rural Development Commission which enabled them to win the rural challenge competition.

Mr. Atkins: I launched rural challenge on 14 February 1994. Detailed bidding guidance was issued on 29 March. In judging the 17 finalists, the panel gave particular priority to bids which involved partnerships drawn from the private, public and voluntary sectors and the local community; demonstrated innovative approaches which could be replicated more widely; respected and enhanced the environment and promoted good design; levered in a high proportion of private sector investment; and offered good value for money. The six winners which Lord Shuttleworth and I announced on 24 November clearly demonstrated those features.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if a homeless family in a temporary tenancy and who are on the local authority housing list will have to accept any property of a suitable size for which they would be eligible under the proposals contained in the statement on access to local authority housing.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Any applicant for local authority or housing association housing could decline to take up a tenancy offered to him through the housing waiting list. As now, it would be for local authorities to decide whether refusal of such an offer would affect the applicant's eligibility for further offers.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to bring forward legislation based on the statement on access to local authority housing.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *479*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the position of a homeless family granted a temporary tenancy who became eligible for a permanent local authority tenancy while they were temporary tenants following implementation of the proposals contained in his statement on access to local authority housing.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As the then Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Action (Sir G. Young) said

in his statement to the House on 18 July, *Official Report*, columns 21–23, in most parts of the country a 12-month period on the housing waiting list will be long enough for someone with real housing needs to obtain a local authority or housing association tenancy.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, Departments are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993, my Department paid 90 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Waste Shipments

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's policy concerning trans-border shipment of toxic and hazardous waste from *(a)* developed and *(b)* other countries.

Mr. Atkins: I welcome this opportunity to reiterate the Government's policy, outlined earlier this year, when a new control regime on waste shipments was introduced.

The EC waste shipments regulation and the United Kingdom's associated Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 1994 came into effect on 6 May. This legislation enabled the United Kingdom to fulfil its obligations under the Basel convention, to which the United Kingdom became a party on 8 May.

These obligations are based on the principle of national self-sufficiency in waste disposal. This principle is the means by which countries can be encouraged to take responsibility for disposing of the wastes they generate. Thereby they are encouraged to minimise wastes—especially hazardous wastes—and to reuse and recycle, and to pursue policies of sustainable development.

We must also have regard for other environmental responsibilities arising from our membership of the European Union and the global community. In implementing the Basel convention, we should not lose sight of these wider considerations.

As a developed country, with ample disposal facilities to meet our waste arisings, we will have no need to export wastes for final disposal in other countries. The EC regulation prohibits such exports to countries outside the EC and EFTA. We shall go further by proposing a complete prohibition on such exports to all countries.

There is no equivalent case for a general ban on exports of wastes for recovery, but special considerations apply to the export of hazardous wastes for recovery in developing countries and countries in transition. At the second conference of the Basel convention in March, it was recognised that there is a high risk that such exports will not be managed in environmentally sound ways in the country of receipt. It was decided that, except in exceptional circumstances, trans-boundary movement of hazardous wastes from OECD to non-OECD states for the purposes of recovery should be prohibited. In the Government's opinion this decision has now taken effect.

Our policy towards imports is based on similar principles. In future, the presumption will be that wastes should not be imported for final disposal in this country. This applies both to landfill, either directly and indirectly, and to incineration without energy recovery, and also to disposal under the guise of recovery—so called "sham recovery". However, imports for genuine recovery operations will continue to be allowed.

For most other wastes, all other countries should now develop final disposal facilities and there seems no reason to delay a prohibition on imports. There may, however, be special circumstances where imports for specialist disposal processes—and in particular for high temperature incineration—might be justified on wider environmental grounds for very limited periods and quantities. This would apply on a transitional and reducing basis where a country had not yet completed specialist disposal capacity or was dealing with a backlog inherited from a former communist regime in eastern Europe. We propose to develop strict criteria which would regulate any such continued imports. Our criteria would take account of the technical and environmental characteristics of the waste stream, and the circumstances of the exporting country. Except for small quantities particularly from developing countries, we would propose that the transitional period should not exceed three years at most.

We do not contemplate importing from countries in a position to develop their own disposal facilities, but taking no action to do so. That would be quite contrary to our policy towards self-sufficiency. Nor would we allow imports which could not be safely handled and managed within the existing disposal capacity in the United Kingdom.

We shall be making more detailed proposals on exports and imports in the form of a draft waste management plan, which will incorporate technical guidance designed to assist competent authorities in making decisions. There will be a full opportunity for consultation on the draft plan, and I hope this will proceed soon.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is as follows:

Mrs. Katherine Ramsay

Political Adviser; joined in 1986, left in November 1989.

Mr. Patrick Rock

Political Adviser; joined on 13 July 1987, left on 28 November 1990; joined on 1 May 1992, left on 27 May 1993.

Mr. Tim Collins

Political Adviser; joined on 28 September 1989, left on 29 January 1990.

Professor David Pearce

Expert Adviser on Economic Environmental Matters; joined on 26 July 1989, left on 10 April 1992.

Mr. Richard Marsh

Political Adviser; joined on 29 January 1990, left on 3 June 1991.

Dr. Alan Kemp

Political Adviser; joined on 28 January 1991, left on 10 April 1992.

Sir Peter Levene

Expert Adviser on commercial and financial affairs; joined in February 1991, left on 10 April 1992.

Lady Eileen Strathnaver

Political Adviser; joined on 4 February 1991, left on 10 April 1992.

Professor Peter Hall

Expert Adviser on Planning; joined in March 1991, left on 31 January 1994.

Mr. Tom Burke

Expert Adviser on the Environment; joined on 18 March 1991. Still with the Department.

Miss Alison Broom

Political Adviser; joined on 17 June 1991, left on 10 April 1992.

Mr. James Gray

Political Adviser; joined on 3 June 1992. Still with the Department.

Mr. Keith Adams

Political Adviser; joined on 28 May 1993. Still with the Department.

Mr. Liam O Connor

Expert Adviser on Architecture; joined on 14 March 1994. Still with the Department.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special adviser's salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary reflects this.

Direct Services Organisation, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has now received a report from the district auditor into the losses by Liverpool city council's direct services organisation during its handling of the city's cable television contract; what action will be taken against those responsible for these losses; whether he will publish the report and his response; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has not yet received the district auditor's report. We will consider very carefully all the facts informing the district auditor's conclusions before making a decision on statutory action. Publication of the report is not a matter for my right hon. Friend.

Green List Wastes

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the quantity of green list wastes exported to non-OECD countries since 6 May 1994 and the companies to which this waste was exported in the receiving countries.

Mr. Atkins: This information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Waste Exports

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the United Kingdom has entered into any bilateral agreements with non-OECD countries for the export of hazardous waste for recovery and recycling; and if the European Commission has begun any negotiations on such bilateral agreements on the United Kingdom's behalf.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom has not entered into any bilateral agreements with non-OECD countries for the export of hazardous waste for recovery and recycling. The European Commission is considering requests from certain non-OECD countries for such agreements.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will detail the procedure used since 6 May 1994 to ensure that exports of hazardous waste for recycling or recovery are processed in an environmentally sound manner in the destination country.

Mr. Atkins: The Government's advice on the procedures to be followed is given in part 3 of Department of Environment circular 13/94, copies of which are in the Library. Day-to-day control over trans-frontier shipments of waste is a matter for waste regulation authorities.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the commodity code number, *(b)* the destination countries, *(c)* the month of export, *(d)* the United Kingdom port of exit, *(e)* the importing companies and *(f)* the tonnages of hazardous waste exported for recycling or recovery to non-OECD countries since 6 May 1994.

Mr. Atkins: This information is not available centrally.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the standard spending assessment methodology handbook.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I hope that it will be possible to publish it in January.

Fire Services, Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received relating to the standard spending assessment for fire services for the Isle of Wight; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received a number of representations on the standard spending assessment from the relevant authorities on the Isle of Wight and my hon. Friend, most recently in a meeting with the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration on 25 October.

We have listened to the arguments that my hon. Friend and others have put forward and we propose a change to the fire formula to recognise that coastal authorities cannot draw on reinforcements as easily as those inland.

Local Authority Services

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals for bringing competition to bear on local authorities' corporate and administrative services.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Corporate and administrative work comprises a number of distinct administrative support services as diverse as printing and reprographics, and building facilities management. These are provided to all parts of the authority. Local authorities' increasing recognition of the importance of gaining value for money for these services has meant that much of this work is already being exposed to market pressures. Most local authorities will re-charge in-house users for administrative support services. Those users, particularly where they themselves are exposed to CCT, will be keen to keep overhead costs down and will exert pressure for cost-effective and efficient support services.

Customers for administrative support increasingly have the freedom to go elsewhere if in the in-house service is inadequate. A significant proportion of administrative support services are already provided by external contractors, and some authorities have dispensed entirely with in-house support staff for much of the work.

The Government's discussions with local authority representatives have led me and my colleagues in Government to conclude that our objective of increasing competition in corporate and administrative support services is already being met though these means, and that extension of CCT to take this work would not bring sufficient additional benefits. We have, therefore, decided not to proceed with proposals to introduce CCT for local authority corporate and administrative services.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will explain the basis of his calculations of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates for 1995–96.

Mr. Curry: The distributable amount of non-domestic rates in England for 1995–96 will be £11,354 million. This is based on a non-domestic rate multiplier of 0.432 and includes an allowance of £505 million for an Exchequer payment to the non-domestic rates pool to compensate for the shortfall which would otherwise occur as a result of regulations to be made under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 which will phase in the effects of the 1995 revaluation on rate bills.

The calculation for 1995–96, and the prior-year figures on which this is based, are set out in the following table:

National non-domestic rate—calculation of distributable amounts

£ millions

	1990–91 Outturn	*1991–92 Outturn*	*1992–93 Outturn*	*1993–94 Provisional outturn*	*1994–95 in-year contribution*	*1995–96 estimated in-year contribution*
(1) Income from local lists						
Multiplier	0.348	0.386	0.402	0.416	0.423	0.423
Gross Rate Yield	10,301	12,033	12,270	12,357	12,491	12,908
(i) Reliefs						
(a) Net Transitional Relief	–182	–142	–395	–480	–548	–477
(b) Empty properties	–710	–964	–1,162	–1,174	–1,214	–1,303
(c) Charitable	–240	–305	–318	–352	–402	–435
(d) Discretionary	–12	–16	–20	–21	–19	–20
Net Yield after reliefs	9,157	10,607	10,374	10,329	10,308	10,673
(ii) Collection Costs/Reductions to Contributions						
(a) Costs of collection	–43	–46	–67	–68	–69	–75
(b) Losses on collection	–121	–203	–200	–192	–170	–190
(c) City of London offset	–29	–30	–31	–25	–7	–7
Total contribution in respect of year	8,964	10,329	10,075	10,045	10,063	10,401
(iii) Adjustments						
(a) Repayments/interest/ Late rating adjustments	—	27	–254	–957	–888	–349
(b) Revisions to contributions at outturn (1994–95 only)	—	—	—	—	–211	—
Total adjustments	—	27	–254	–957	–1,100	–349
Net Local Yield	8,964	10,355	9,821	9,088	8,963	10,052
(2) Income from Central List						
Net Central List Yield	1,016	1,100	1,098	1,095	1,118	1,151
(3) Income from Crown Contributions in Aid						
Net Crown Yield	610	463	462	445	507	540
Total NDR Yield	10,590	11,918	11,381	10,627	10,588	11,743
(4) Exchequer Contributions						
(a) Local List Transition	—	—	271	591	435	477
(b) Central List/ Crown	—	—	27	42	20	28
Total Exchequer contributions	—	—	298	633	455	505
Total NNDR pool payments (1+2+3+4)	10,590	11,918	11,679	11,261	11,043	12,248

National non-domestic rate—calculation of distributable amounts

£ millions

	1990–91 Outturn	*1991–92 Outturn*	*1992–93 Outturn*	*1993–94 Provisional outturn*	*1994–95 in-year contribution*	*1995–96 estimated in-year contribution*
(5) Adjustments						
Surplus brought forward	—	162	–328	–954	–1,253	–894
Combined total	10,590	12,080	11,352	10,306	9,790	11,354
Distributable amount	10,429	12,048	12,306	11,559	10,685	11,354
Surplus carried forward	162	–328	–954	–1,253	–894	—

Notes:

(1) Item 1: The gross calculated rate yield represents the average value of non-domestic hereditaments on local rating lists times the multiplier. For 1990–91 to 1993–94 the yield is the amount recorded in the post-end year (NNDR3) returns. For 1994–95 it is the amount underlying authorities' provisional contributions to the non-domestic rating pool including the prescribed amount for Enterprise Zones.

(2) Item 1(i)(a): The Transitional decrease adjustment includes the estimated amount of rates that will not be recouped locally due to the revised transitional arrangements under the provisions of the Non-Domestic Rating Acts 1992, 1993 and 1994.

(3) Item 1(i)(b): The empty property relief adjustments include voids and partially occupied hereditaments. Figures up to 1994–95 are as reported by authorities. The 1995–96 figure includes allowances for the increase in the gross rates yield and for economic recovery.

(4) Item 1(i)(c): Charitable rate relief for 1995–96 includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rates yield.

(5) Item 1(i)(d): Discretionary relief granted to charities non-profit making organisations and for other reasons, for 1995–96 includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rates yield.

(6) Item 1(ii)(a) and (b): The allowances for the costs and losses incurred by local authorities in collecting non-domestic rates from ratepayers, including the latest estimates of additional billing and software costs arising from the Non-Domestic Rating Acts.

(7) Item 1(ii)(c): City Offset—a preliminary estimate for 1995–96 (£6.5 million) of the amount which the City of London will not be required to pay into the non-domestic rating pool on account of the local rate in the City. It is the amount which will be retained by the authority to meet its own expenditure.

(8) Item 1(iii)(a): Net adjustment in respect of appeals and other amendments to the rating list affecting liability for previous year's rates settled in that year.

(9) Item 1(iii)(b): The revisions to contributions line applies only to estimated outturn revisions to the provisional contributions for 1994–95. For earlier years all figures are already based upon the outturn contributions.

(10) Item 2: The rateable value of non-domestic hereditaments on the central rating list times the multiplier, and adjusted for appeals and other changes in respect of previous years. The 1995–96 figure is calculated as the estimated Rateable Value of £2,803 million times the multiplier, less the effect of the transitional arrangements.

(11) Item 3: The 1995–96 figure for crown properties includes and allowance for the effect of transition.

(12) Item 4(a) and (b): The contribution from central government to offset the amount of the Secretary of State's estimate of income forgone arising from the provisions of the Non-Domestic Rating Acts 1992, 1993 and 1994.

(13) Where figures have been rounded there may be a small discrepancy between totals and the sum of constituent items.

Support Services

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for establishing an accounting framework for local authority support service costs, as proposed in the White Paper, "Competing for Quality: Competition in the Provision of Local Authority Services."

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today tabled regulations under the Local Government Finance Act 1982 which will require local authorities to publish annually a statement of support service costs. This will illustrate the full costs of the professional support services to which the Government are extending compulsory competitive tendering, and will show the costs of these services to authorities' front-line service departments.

The proposals for SSSCs have been developed in close and productive consultation with the local authority associations, the Audit Commission, the Accounts Commission for Scotland, and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. A consultation draft of the regulations was issued by my Department on 22 February 1994. Comments were received from 194 local authorities and other interested parties.

In the light of those comments, I have decided that the first SSSCs will be required for 1995-96, rather than 1994-95 as proposed in February, to ensure that authorities have good time to prepare. The regulations also incorporate other technical improvements responding to comments and suggestions received.

Five support services are to become subject to CCT—legal services, construction and property services, IT, finance and personnel services. Parliament has already approved orders under section 2(3) of the Local Government Act 1988 making legal services and construction property services "defined activities", for the purposes of CCT. The SSSC regulations which I have tabled today relate to these services, designating them as "specified activities" to be covered in SSSCs. The Government will, over the next few months, place before Parliament CCT orders for the other three support services. Subject to Parliament's approval of the orders, the Government will table further SSSC regulations bringing them also into the scope of SSSCs.

London boroughs, metropolitan authorities, and joint committees of these authorities are required to produce an SSSC from 1995–96 onwards. Shire authorities, and joint committees of shire authorities, will be required to produce a SSSC from 1996–97, or the second financial year after the coming into being of an authority newly established or reorganised following local government review, should that be later. SSSCs will also be produced by unitary authorities in Wales and by new police authorities established under the Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994 in due course. SSSCs will be introduced in Scotland under separate legislative procedures.

Local authorities' support services cost more than £4 billion a year. SSSCs will make available authoritative information on these costs, and will be of value to local

taxpayers, local authority members, and those responsible for the front-line local authority services, who are the customers for support services and bear the costs. The information will enable informed discussion of support service costs, and promote efficiency and value for money.

I have placed a list of responses to the consultation proposals in the Library, through which copies of individual responses may be obtained.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Data Cross-matching

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings he expects from the scheme involving the cross-matching of council tax and housing benefits data obtained from London local authorities with data held by his Department; and what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* records to be matched, *(b)* the likely number of mismatches and *(c)* withdrawn applications for benefits; and if he will place in the Library the background reports on the implementation of the scheme.

Mr. Arbuthnot: A pilot exercise is currently taking place involving 24 London boroughs. The savings from the pilot are expected significantly to outweigh the costs. Around 800,000 records have been received and matched against departmental records. Three per cent. of the records have been classified as containing inconsistent data and have been referred for further consideration prior to any investigation. No estimate has been made of the numbers of applications withdrawn as a result of the pilot. A full evaluation will take place before a decision is taken on future developments. A copy of the feasibility report will be placed in the Library.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social security applicants have been refused benefits under the habitual residence test since it came into operation; and how many of these were born in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Roger Evans: Provisional figures from the Benefits Agency indicate that 6,388 applicants failed to satisfy the habitual residence test. Approximately 2,300 of these were asylum seekers and were entitled to income support under the urgent cases provisions. The other information is not available because the place of birth is not recorded when benefit is claimed.

Social Fund

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund applicants for *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans have been turned down in each region in each year since the social fund came into operation.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information that is readily available is set out in the tables.

The figures are for the number of applications that have been refused; some applicants will have made more than one application in any given year.

Social fund applications—refusals
Southern Territory

Year	Application	Number of nil awards
1990–91	Grants	95,104
	Loans	121,362
1991–92	Grants	207,478
	Loans	168,874
1992–93	Grants	265,458
	Loans	204,929
1993–94	Grants	283,003
	Loans	215,964
1994 to October	Grants	170,103
	Loans	134,979

Wales and Central Territory

Year	Application	Number of nil awards
1990–91	Grants	133,568
	Loans	164,674
1991–92	Grants	270,366
	Loans	214,148
1992–93	Grants	316,298
	Loans	247,881
1993–94	Grants	337,620
	Loans	260,557
1994 to October	Grants	211,637
	Loans	163,287

Scotland and Northern Territory

Year	Application	Number of nil awards
1990–91	Grants	140,711
	Loans	174,961
1991–92	Grants	257,970
	Loans	231,969
1992–93	Grants	283,006
	Loans	257,510
1993–94	Grants	302,330
	Loans	276,582
1994 to October	Grants	178,716
	Loans	171,425

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund applications in each region in each year since the fund was established were turned down even though the applicant fulfilled qualifying criteria due to local budgeting restriction for *(a)* community care grants and *(b)* social fund loans.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not readily available prior to 1990–91. Such information as is available is set out in the tables. It is for Benefits Agency territories.

Social Fund applications—refusals on grounds of insufficient priority

Southern Territory

Year	Application	Reason for refusal insufficient priority
1990–91	Grants	13,527
	Loans	31,867
1991–92	Grants	21,352
	Loans	42,353
1992–93	Grants	24,971
	Loans	61,478

Wales and Central Territory

Year	Application	Reason for refusal insufficient priority
1990–91	Grants	15,942
	Loans	50,605
1991–92	Grants	28,813
	Loans	62,579
1992–93	Grants	32,401
	Loans	89,139

Scotland and Northern Territory

Year	Application	Reason for refusal insufficient priority
1990–91	Grants	16,449
	Loans	57,486
1991–92	Grants	29,437
	Loans	81,056
1992–93	Grants	27,021
	Loans	98,969

Notes:

(1) Figures for 1993–94 have not been provided. This is because information at the level requested could only be derived from a mixture of refusal data by application held under the old computer system and item level data reported by the new system. National refusal statistics by item are provided in the Secretary of State's Annual Report on the Social Fund 1993–94, a copy of which is available in the library.

(2) Statistics on reasons for refusal for the current year are only available by individual item refused. The national figures for April to October 1994 are:

Grants: 211,770

Loans: 1,096,649

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for social fund assistance have been made in each regional office area in each year since the social fund came into operation in terms of *(a)* community care grants and *(b)* social fund loans.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 30 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about applications to the Social Fund (SF) for grants and loans by regional office for each year since the SF began.

Since the formation of the Benefits Agency (BA) in April 1991, BA offices are grouped into Districts and these Districts are grouped into Area Directorates within three Territorial Directorates. Prior to April 1991 Departmental local offices were organised into seven regional areas.

Information for the years 1988–89 and 1989–90 is not available by regional area. Details of the number of applications for grants and loans by regional area for the period April 1990 to March 1991 are provided at Annex A. Details of the number of applications for grants and loans by Area Directorate from April 1991 to March 1994 are provided at Annex B.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Number of applications received by each regional area 1990–91—Annex A

Region name	Grants	Loans
London north	74,430	194,169
London south	58,947	178,050
Midlands	90,970	231,065
North east	111,314	303,822
North west	100,896	272,924
Scotland	122,830	308,619
Wales and south-west	69,928	199,776

Number of applications received by each area directorate (AD) 1991 to 1994 financial years—Annex B

Territory	Area	Type	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Southern	AD1 Anglia	Loans	76,567	88,760	91,757
		Grants	41,876	55,820	51,964
	AD2 Chilterns	Loans	75,065	93,266	101,752
		Grants	39,681	48,105	50,312
	AD3 South London and West Sussex	Loans	93,657	108,796	111,128
		Grants	40,899	48,912	53,612
	AD4 West Country	Loans	109,242	127,886	135,631
		Grants	50,442	60,894	64,150
	AD5 East London and Essex	Loans	85,554	99,496	109,885
		Grants	46,837	58,933	62,690
	AD6 South East	Loans	88,306	110,935	121,672
		Grants	41,401	50,228	56,883
	AD7 Wessex	Loans	81,167	95,204	101,384
		Grants	36,461	44,668	46,173

Number of applications received by each area directorate 1991 to 1994 financial years

Territory	Area	Type	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Wales and Central	AD1 East Midlands	Loans	86,209	100,383	104,915
		Grants	45,886	53,895	57,532

Number of applications received by each area directorate 1991 to 1994 financial years

Territory	Area	Type	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
	AD2 Midlands South West	Loans	91,453	99,525	95,142
		Grants	52,312	59,072	59,604
	AD3 West Mercia	Loans	100,381	118,941	118,822
		Grants	52,486	62,353	63,983
	AD4 Wales	Loans	123,634	139,730	141,972
		Grants	64,247	75,638	81,996
	AD5 Merseyside	Loans	139,001	150,964	156,066
		Grants	62,143	68,081	72,964
	AD6 Greater Manchester	Loans	111,396	128,973	135,130
		Grants	54,445	61,649	64,386
	AD7 Lancashire and Cumbria	Loans	89,175	102,281	106,323
		Grants	46,099	53,800	55,932

Number of applications received by each area directorate 1991 to 1994 financial years

Territory	Area	Type	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Scotland and Northern	AD1 Tyne Tees	Loans	147,134	153,145	160,140
		Grants	76,849	83,435	87,584
	AD2 South Yorkshire	Loans	120,638	133,953	135,633
		Grants	59,813	65,935	66,562
	AD3 North and West Yorkshire	Loans	99,605	111,045	117,657
		Grants	48,621	58,335	62,877
	AD4 Glasgow and Paisley	Loans	146,928	151,623	154,914
		Grants	66,716	68,317	74,739
	AD5 North, Central and West Scotland	Loans	114,691	120,823	125,576
		Grants	57,533	60,878	63,185
	AD6 East Scotland	Loans	90,524	99,574	104,136
		Grants	42,637	46,294	46,741

Hostel Accommodation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many residents for whom social security hostel accommodation payments are made are currently housed in sheds, garages and tents at such hostels.

Mr. Roger Evans: I am not aware of any case for which housing benefit is in payment in such circumstances.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the number of current invalidity benefit claimants with post codes of *(a)* G72, *(b)* G73 and *(c)* the Toryglen residents of G42.

Mr. Hague: The administration of invalidity benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Thomas McAvoy, dated 30 November 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Invalidity Benefit (IVB) recipients in certain Glasgow postal areas.

Information is not available in the exact format requested. This is because Benefits Agency District areas do not correspond with postcode boundaries.

Residents within Glasgow postcode areas G72 and G73 are dealt with by the Agency's East Kilbride Benefit Office. Residents within the G42 postcode area are dealt with by the Glasgow Laurieston District Office.

Prior to 14 November 1994, Rutherglen Benefit Office dealt with postcode areas G45, G72 and G73. With effect from 14 November 1994, IVB cases formerly dealt with by the Rutherglen office were transferred to either Laurieston District Office for residents of postal area G45 or East Kilbride Benefit Office for residents of postal areas G72 and G73.

The latest available figures, at 31 October 1994, are prior to that change and I have therefore provided at Annex A a table giving the number of IVB customers at the Laurieston, East Kilbride and Rutherglen offices on that date.

The offices in question have responsibility for a far wider geographical area covering other postcode areas. Figures could be obtained relating specifically to those areas you require only at a disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Number of IVB customers at offices within Glasgow (Laurieston) District at 31 October 1994—Annex A

Laurieston	7,395
East Kilbride	3,735
Rutherglen	4,281

Child Support Agency

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost so far to the Child Support Agency of its legal advice.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 30 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the cost of legal advice to the Child Support Agency.

The Agency incurs no legal costs as legal advice and other legal services are absorbed by the Department of Social Security central budgets.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints the Child Support Agency has received from people and their representatives about the working operations of the agency.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 30 November 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of complaints received by the Child Support Agency.

From 5 April 1993 to 31 March 1994 the Agency recorded 10,886 complaints. Latest figures available show that the Agency has received a further 9,700 complaints since April 1994. The Agency does not distinguish between complaints against the operations of the Agency and those concerning child support legislation.

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents with care in receipt of family credit at each child support agency reporting centre have received any maintenance *(a)* direct from the non-custodial parent and *(b)* via the Child Support Agency;

(2) how many parents with care not in receipt of benefit at each reporting centre have received any maintenance *(a)* direct from the non-custodial parent and *(b)* via the Child Support Agency;

(3) how many parents with care in receipt of income support at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have received any maintenance *(a)* direct from the non-custodial parents and *(b)* via the Child Support Agency;

(4) how many parents with care in receipt of disability working allowance at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have received any maintenance *(a)* direct from the non-custodial parent and *(b)* via the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not a business requirement of the agency and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents with care at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have been taken off income support after receiving maintenance payments;

(2) how many parents with care at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have been taken off income support and are now in receipt of family credit after receiving maintenance payments.

Mr. Burt: The information the hon. Gentleman requires could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to implement the recommendations contained in the fifth report of the Social Security Committee of Session 1993–94, HC 470, on the operation of the Child Support Act.

Mr. Burt: We are still evaluating the contents of the Select Committee's report and we will respond in due course with proposals for change. No final decisions have yet been taken.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what level the £35 limit above which occupational pensions are deducted from unemployment benefit could be raised without the cost exceeding the estimated saving from extending such deductions to people aged under 55 years.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 29 November, *Official Report*, column *631*.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

Name	*Joining date*	*Leaving date*
Melinda Libby	3 May 1988	24 July 1989
Charles Hendry	25 July 1989	15 December 1989
Ian Stewart	16 August 1990	10 April 1992
Jeremy Mayhew	27 April 1992	12 April 1993
Peter Barnes	4 May 1993	

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, currently ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments are, however, required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993–94, the Department of Social Security paid 94 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quarantine Regulations

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to alter the quarantine regulations for dogs entering the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Browning: The Agriculture Select Committee has recently published a report recommending changes to the rabies quarantine regulations.

The Government share the concern of the committee that it would never support a change which would increase the likelihood of rabies entering the United Kingdom. The question of whether any other arrangements can offer the same or better protection than quarantine is essentially a technical one which the Government will need to consider carefully. The onus is one those recommending change to demonstrate that it offers at least as good a protection as quarantine.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how a dog or cat has to comply with the new import regulations for traded animals as far as vaccination and identification are concerned.

Mrs. Browning: The regulations require that a dog or cat must have been vaccinated against rabies using an inactivated vaccine after the age of three months and at least six months before dispatch to the United Kingdom. In addition, at least one month after vaccination a blood sample must be taken and tested to confirm that the vaccine has been effective. The only approved method of identification for such imports is by an implanted microchip transponder.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether all registered animals entering the country since the introduction of the traded animal legislation last summer have complied with the requirements of the new importation rules.

Mrs. Browning: Of the two dogs and one cat imported under the new arrangements set out in article 10(3) of EC directive 92/65 one dog has been put into quarantine, because the necessary microchip identification was absent.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: MAFF has placed selected statistical information on Internet, as part of its participation in the pilot CCTA Government information service launched on 10 November. As a result, up to 20 years of agriculture and food statistics are now accessible on Internet. A range of background information about the Department's work and publications is also available, and the MAFF helpline has enhanced its service by introducing an E-mail address for communicating with Internet users.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what prosecutions have resulted in each of the last five years from fraud against the CAP; how much has been recovered; what fines have been imposed; and what equivalent information he has in respect of *(a)* Italy, *(b)* Greece and *(c)* Spain.

Mr. Jack: The information for the United Kingdom for the four years 1990 to 1993 is as follows. Information for earlier years is not readily available.

Year	*Numbers of prosecutions*	*Amounts recovered* £	*Fines* £
1990	26	3,136	23,100
1991	20	70,349	223,650
1992	31	301,601	557,170
1993	31	14,955	309,795

We have no equivalent data available relating to other member states.

Rabies

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will estimate the results of the oral vaccination of foxes in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1993 and the first half of 1994; and if he will give the number of cases of rabies in both domestic animals and wild animals in Germany during the same period.

(2) how many cases of rabies in human beings were reported in eastern Europe during 1993 and in the first half of 1994.

Mrs. Browning: The information the hon. Member requires can be found in the "Rabies Bulletin Europe", compiled by the World Health Organisation collaborating centre for rabies surveillance and research. This is published on a quarterly basis with a consolidated report issued at the end of each year. Copies of the consolidated reports for the last five years and the two quarterly reports issued so far this year have been placed in the Library of the House.

Spongiform Encephalopathies

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many confirmed cases of spongiform encephalopathies in canines there have been; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy has never been confirmed in canines in the United Kingdom, or as far as the Ministry is aware, anywhere else in the world.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Council of Fisheries Ministers held in Brussels on 23 November.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 24 November to the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), *Official Report*, columns *316–17.*

Milk Prices

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to examine milk price rises and the role of the Milk Marque.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friends the Minister, the Secretary of State for Wales and the President of the Board of Trade examined the outcome of Milk Marque's selling arrangements when they turned down the Dairy Trade Federation's request for a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in the summer. Now that the milk marketing scheme has come to an end the milk market is subject to the normal competition rules. Scrutiny of the trading behaviour of Milk Marque is now a matter for the competition authorities.

Salmonella

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress so far made to eradicate salmonella from eggs.

Mrs. Browning: Following a report of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food on Salmonella in Eggs, the Government ceased to require the monitoring of commercial egg laying flocks for salmonella and the compulsory slaughter of those infected with salmonella enteritidis in February 1993. Controls on breeding flocks were brought into line with those required under Council directive 92/117/EEC later that year. A survey of home produced eggs carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service in 1991 revealed that 99.3 per cent. of six-egg packs tested were found not to contain salmonella enteritidis. The steering group for the microbiological safety of food is considering the need for a further survey in 1995. The Government continue to fund research into the control of salmonella in poultry and the survival of salmonella in eggs. The egg industry is actively consolidating best practice for the transport, handling and storage of eggs into an industry code of practice. Much of the industry already had adopted such procedures.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the high cost of the common agricultural policy prior to the introduction of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend is in regular contact with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on matters concerning the cost of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the implications of the European Communities (Finance) Bill for the future of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jack: The European Communities (Finance) Bill does not of itself have direct implications for the future of the common agricultural policy. CAP expenditure is constrained by the agricultural guideline, a legally binding ceiling. Its growth is restricted to 74 per cent. of the growth in EC GNP. As a result, CAP expenditure as a proportion of the total EC budget will continue to fall. It currently represents 50 per cent. of the total EC budget, as compared with 70 per cent. when the guideline was first introduced in 1988.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will place a copy of the European Commission report on reform of the common agricultural policy in the Library.

Mr. Waldegrave: This report, entitled "EC Agriculture in the 21st Century", has now been published in the Journal "European Economy" on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate-General II (Economy and Finance) Copies have been placed in the House Libraries.

I welcome the Commission's decision to publish this radical look at the common argriculture policy and shall be study it with interest.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months, respectively.

Mr. Jack: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, Departments are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their departmental reports. For 1993–94, MAFF paid 85 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the special advisers employed by his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Jack: The names of special advisers who have joined or left the Department in the last five years is as follows:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Joined	Keith Adams	—	—	Elizabeth Cottrell, Ken Leggett	David Rutley
Left	Richard Gueterbock	—	—	Keith Adams	Elizabeth Cottrell, Ken Leggett

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Hill Farming

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what acreage has been put into regeneration of the natural habitat in hill farming; and if he will evaluate the effect this will have on hill farm incomes.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* The environmentally sensitive areas scheme includes provisions for annual payments to farmers for the regeneration of heather moorland and other upland habitats. Some 16,000 hectares of land are being managed under those tiers of the scheme in England. Other schemes also provide assistance to hill farmers for habitat enhancement but it is not possible to quantify the area of land benefiting from those schemes. It is not possible to isolate the effect which any of these measures will have on hill farm incomes.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any of those holding the licences to export live animals from Plymouth on the night of 21 November have any previous convictions for animal cruelty; who are these people; and what their specific convictions are for.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* There is no requirement for such persons to be licensed. We are aware that some involved recently in the export of animals may have past convictions for welfare offences, but prohibition from engaging in the trade is not a penalty provided for by statute.

Secret Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* top secret and *(b)* secret files his Department holds.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* This Department operates a de-centralised record-keeping system and no central records, either of fies or of its individual classification, are kept. There is unlikely to be a great number of top secret and secret files but because no central record is kept in MAFF to obtain this information by a departmental inquiry to al the various registries would be time consuming and at a disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

Market Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the basis of calculating savings on his Department's competing for quality programme; and if he will have a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Savings and efficiency gains against the Department's competing for quality programme are calculated against a baseline of the annual cost of the existing activities before market testing. For costing purposes, it would be expected that full costs, representing the total cost of resources used in providing a particular service, including the direct costs of the service and a proportional share of overhead costs, would be used.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *135*, if he will list the 82 support activities which have been examined in relation to the competing for quality programme.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Counselling

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out his Department's arrangements for counselling service personnel and ex-service personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: There are many forms of counselling, ranging from an interview or discussion with a commanding officer or chaplain to a series of sessions with a doctor, professional social or welfare worker or counsellor, and covering the whole range of personal and professional problems. Illustrative examples would be: the provision of marriage guidance counselling for serving members of the forces and their dependants in Germany through a grant to Relate—to replicate facilities in the United Kingdom— active programmes for the prevention and treatment of the condition known as post-traumatic stress disorder; and a comprehensive system of education and treatment in relation to alcohol abuse. Counselling of former service personnel would generally be through those channels available to the population at large, for example, the national health service or local authorities.

Civil Servants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* by grade those members of his Department who have left his Department in the last two years to join defence or defence-related companies, *(b)* the companies involved and *(c)* the number joining each company.

Mr. Freeman: I have placed a list in the House of Commons Library answering this question and have written to the hon. Member with the details.

Indonesia

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the value, *(b)* the source of finance and *(c)* the work carried out over the last five years by the Defence Research Agency for the Government of Indonesia.

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for such matters rests with the chief executive of the Defence Research Agency. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 1 December 1994:

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to your question concerning work carried out by the Defence Research Agency for the government of Indonesia over the last five years.

The Defence Research Agency was established in April 1991 by bringing together the Royal Aerospace Establishment, Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment, Royal Signals and Radar Establishment and the Admiralty Research Establishment. Since that date the DRA has undertaken no work for the government of Indonesia

Complete records are not available for the period prior to April 1991, but a check of those that are still held has not come up with any instances of work being carried out for the government of Indonesia during the two years in question.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on which dates the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff visited Indonesia last year; at whose invitation and at whose expense.

Mr. Soames: Neither the Chief of Defence Staff nor the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff visited Indonesia in 1993. The Chief of Defence Staff visited Indonesia from 8 to 12 October 1994. The Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff visited Indonesia from 27 February to 2 March 1994. Both visits were at the invitation of their Indonesia counterparts. Travel costs arising from both visits were met by my Department; accommodation was provided by the hosts.

Animal Testing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the Ministry of Defence establishments at which tests are carried out using animals and *(b)* the total number of tests at each establishment over the last five years.

Mr. Soames: Experiments using animals were carried out in the period 1989–1993 at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, the Defence Research Agency at Alverstoke and the Institute of Aviation Medicine, now the Centre for Human Sciences.

Experiments are carried out only when it is judged essential, and fully meet both the spirit and letter of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The locations are registered places under that Act with relevant staff being licensed by the Home Office and subject at all times to Home Office inspection. The total number of experiments for the past five years is as follows:

1989: 9,129
1990: 8,146
1991: 6,100
1992: 4,500
1993: 6,796

Lockheed

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, columns *138–9*, if he will list *(a)* the meetings held with Market Access International and *(b)* the representations received from Market Access International regarding the Lockheed C130-J by his ministerial colleagues or staff.

Mr. Freeman: To the best of my knowledge, neither I nor any of my ministerial colleagues, or our staff, have either received representations from Market Access International, or met any of its personnel in connection with the Hercules rolling replacement programme.

Late Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months;

(2) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months, respectively.

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for such matters rests with the chief executive of the Defence Accounts Agency. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from M. J. Dymond to Mr. Clive Betts, dated 1 December 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months from receipt of invoice, and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

You also asked the Secretary of State for Defence, of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department, how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months respectively. These matters fall to me, as Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency, for reply.

The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Departments, however, are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in the Departmental Reports. For financial year 1993–94 Ministry of Defence paid 99.99 per cent. of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of the presentation of a valid invoice.

The MOD bill payment office at Liverpool also measure their performance against the higher departmental standard of payment within eleven working days of receipt of a valid invoice. They are currently achieving 97 per cent.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of each type of armoured personnel carrier and light tank surplus to his Department's requirements have been or are to be sold in the 1994–95 financial year.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Vehicle Type	Quantity
CENTURION Armoured Recovery Vehicle MK2	54
HUMBER 1 TON PIG Armoured Personnel Carrier	109
CHIEFTAIN Main Battle Tank MK10	29
CHIEFTAIN Armoured Vehicle Recce	1
ABBOT 105mm Self Propelled Gun	15
SULTAN Armoured Command Vehicle	17
FOX 30 mm Gunned Combat Vehicle Recce (Wheeled)	2
SCORPION 76mm Gunned Combat Recce (Tracked)	40
FERRET Scout Car	35
SARACEN Armoured Personnel Carrier (Wheeled)	16
432 Armoured Personnel Carrier	78
SALADIN 76mm Gunned Armoured Car	1
434 Tracked Engineer Support Vehicle	8
M109 GUNS 155mm Self Propelled Howitzer	117

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to whom, and under what procedure, armoured personnel carriers and light tanks surplus to his Department's requirements have been sold since 1985; and what financial gain has resulted for Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Freeman: The Disposals Sales Agency as a general rule sells surplus armoured fighting vehicles, of all types, by invitation to tender. Occasionally, private treaty sales have been agreed, normally to collectors/museums or companies involved in refurbishment and update work aiming to sell similar vehicles overseas. More recently, vehicles have been sold to companies for smelting. Sales to acceptable foreign Governments are either by direct contract or through an agent accredited to the purchaser. Any vehicle which is to be exported requires an export licence from the Department of Trade and Industry. Vehicles which have ordnance fitted are either demilitarised prior to sale or sold to companies which intend to market them for export and have appropriate firearms licences.

Details of financial gain to HMG would require disproportionate effort to establish as previous records are not readily available. It is not our policy to reveal the details of purchasers without their written permission.

Military Contracts

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will take steps to prevent military personnel from evading the terms of their military contracts by deliberate law-breaking;

(2) what evidence he has received of deliberate law-breaking by young Army personnel in order to be dismissed from the service and evade their service contract obligation.

Mr. Soames: Although statistical evidence is not available, it is well known that soldiers do on occasion attempt to gain release from their engagement early by committing a disciplinary offence.

Service personnel do not have contracts but serve under the royal prerogative. All service personnel are made aware that if they are found to have committed an offence under service law, they will be liable for the appropriate punishment. This may not necessarily include administrative discharge or dismissal even if that is the aim of the individual concerned. However, any personnel who commit offences under service or civilian law, for whatever reasons, risk incurring a criminal record.

Military Corrective Training Centre, Colchester

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what dates since 1992 his Ministers have visited the military corrective training centre at Colchester;

(2) when he last visited the military corrective training centre based in Colchester.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has not visited the centre, but the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) visited it on 7 December 1992, and the Under-Secretary of State for Defence visited it on 22 June this year.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans there are for privatising the military corrective training centre at Colchester;

(2) what plans he has to further reduce staffing levels at the military corrective training centre based at Colchester;

(3) what changes in manpower and costs have accompanied the evaluation currently taking place at the Colchester military corrective training centre;

(4) what consideration he is giving to the further privatisation of any services connected with the military corrective training centre in Colchester;

(5) what reports he has commissioned into the possible privatisation of the military corrective training centre based at Colchester or any of its services therein;

(6) what discussions his Department has held aimed at the possibility of handing over to another body responsibility for the military corrective training centre based at Colchester.

Mr. Soames: A feasibility study has been conducted into market testing of the functions of the centre, the results of which are currently being considered by my Department. Appropriate consultation with trades unions and others will be undertaken before any final decisions are taken.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received against the privatisation of the catering services at the military corrective training centre at Colchester.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he is giving to the closure of the Colchester military corrective training centre.

Mr. Soames: There are no plans to close the centre.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the military equipment used for training for prisoners serving sentences at the military corrective training centre at Colchester.

Mr. Soames: The military equipment used for the training of detainees in "A" wing are as follows:

Various weapons

Radios

Webbing and clothing

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the levels of staffing by definition and grade of the military corrective training centre in Colchester since 1992.

Mr. Soames: The levels of staffing at the military corrective training centre since 1992 are:

Number	Rank/Grade	Definition
Military		
1	Lieutenant Colonel	Commanding Officer
5	Majors	Section Managers
3	Captains	
1	Flight Lieutenant	
3	Warrant Officers Class 1	Supervisors
8	Warrant Officers Class 1	Security NCO
1	Warrant Officer Class 2	APTC
1	Warrant Officer Class 2	Catering
5	Warrant Officer (Female)	Security NCO
19	Staff Sergeants	Security NCO
66	Staff Sergeants	Security NCO
1	Sergeant	Medical
1	Sergeant	Armoury
1	Sergeant	Pay
1	Sergeant	Pioneer
9	Se rgeants (RAF)	Security NCO
2	Petty Officers (Male)	Security NCO
1	Sergeant (RM)	Security NCO
1	Sergeant	Catering
4	Sergeant (Female)	Security NCO
6	Sergeants (WRAF)	Security NCO
4	Corporals	Catering
6	Corporals	PTI
1	Corporal Storeman	Armoury
2	Corporals	General Duties
1	Corporal	Driver
3	Lance Corporals	Medical
2	Lance Corporals	Stores
7	Lance Corporals	Catering
Civilian		
1	Retired Officer	
2	Burnham Lecturers	
1	Civil Servant Executive Officer	
4	Instructional Officers	
5	Administrative Officers (Civil Servants)	
2	Administrative Assistants (Civil Servants)	
2	Typists	
2	Storekeepers	

The catering services were contractorised on 1 September 1994. All military catering staff, except for the W02 (Catering), left MCTC during the period June to September 1994.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will state what armaments and live ammunition, by category, are stored at the military corrective training centre in Colchester;

(2) whether the military corrective training centre based at Colchester has a fully operational and stocked armoury on site;

(3) whether prisoners at the military corrective training centre at Colchester have any contact during their incarceration with issued weapons and live ammunition.

Mr. Soames: The centre has a fully operational and stocked armoury. The weapons are for the use of detainees who will be returning to their units at the end of their period of detention. Detainees who are to be dismissed or discharged after serving their period of detention are not given weapon training.

The following weapons are held at the centre, including personal weapons of members of staff:

121 x 5.56 mm rifles
35 x 9 mm pistols
8 x 22" conversion kit
15 x 7.62 mm rifles
24 x 5.56 mm SUSAT rifles
24 x 5.56 mm Iron rifles
4 x 5.6 mm light support weapon (machine gun)

The quantity of ammunition held for these weapons is small and varies on a daily basis depending on training programme.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the ranks held by all prisoners prior to their convictions and subsequent detention at the military corrective training centre in Colchester since 1987.

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Service personnel under sentence arrive at the military corrective training centre in the rank of private, or equivalent.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the director of Prison Services has paid a visit to the military corrective training centre at Colchester.

Mr. Soames: The director of Prison Services, Mr. Derek Lewis, visited the military corrective training centre, Colchester, on 24 March 1994.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he is giving to closing the present discharge wing at the Colchester military corrective training centre.

Mr. Soames: There are no plans at present to close the discharge wing at the centre.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give the numbers and ages of prisoners in military goals dismissed from the services for drug taking since 1992;

(2) if he will give the numbers, ages and convictions of prisoners currently jailed at the military corrective training centre in Colchester since 1992;

(3) when the decision was made to privatise the catering services establishment at the military corrective training centre in Colchester and what was the date of its commencement.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member on those subjects.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the responsibilities of the Colchester military corrective training centre with regard to the rehabilitation of offenders into civilian life.

Mr. Soames: Personnel who are to be dismissed from the service or discharged after serving their period of detention undergo four weeks resettlement training in various trades. The training is designed to prepare them for civilian life by improving their trade skills and developing their self reliance and self respect.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the special advisers employed by

his Department in each of the last five years indicating when they *(a)* joined and *(b)* left his Department and the annual salary they received.

Mr. Freeman: A list of the special advisers employed by my Department in each of the last five years is give below:

Name	*Joined the Department*	*Left the Department*
Keith Simpson	July 1988	December 1990
John Gardner	June 1991	March 1992
Perry Miller	April 1992	February 1993
Crispin Blunt	February 1993	

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points, ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Compensation Payments

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from what vote and subhead compensation payments to former service women dismissed on grounds of pregnancy are currently made; how much has been allowed for in the 1994–95 supply estimates; what recourse has been made to the contingencies fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Compensation payments to former service women dismissed on grounds of pregnancy are made from class 1 vote 1—defence operational and support costs—subhead item J2(2). Within this, provision in the supply estimates for 1994–95 is £25 million. No recourse has been made to the contingencies fund. Some 70 per cent. of these cases have now been settled for an average of about £10,000 each.

Commemorative and Memorial Services, Arnhem

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department made a financial charge to members of the armed forces to participate in the commemorative and memorial services at Arnhem.

Mr. Soames: Essential costs associated with the presence of service men in Arnhem were met from the public purse. The main British presence was provided by the Parachute Regiment. Each soldier and officer who attended was asked to pay £5 to cover the cost of recreational transport provided by the Dutch authorities. This arrangement was considerably cheaper and more convenient than if individuals had been left to find alternative means of transport.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments his Department made and to which United Kingdom warship builders, to encourage or support the submission of tenders for the replacement programme for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Historic Aviation Buildings

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to preserve the historic aviation buildings at Farnborough, Hampshire from demolition; and if he will make statement.

Mr. Soames: On current plans, the buildings occupied at present by the Defence Research Agency at Farnborough will be vacated in the latter part of 1996. We are in the process of defining a strategy for the future of the site. There are at present no plans to demolish any historic aviation buildings at Farnborough.

Gulf War

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration was given to issuing protective clothing to British service personnel in the Gulf conflict using malathion sprays on captured Iraqi service men; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Standard instructions are the MOD personnel applying dusting powder containing 1 per cent. malathion need not wear protective clothing unless performing lengthy collective treatment procedures. The relatively small number of Iraqi prisoners of war infested with lice meant that individual administration with dusting powder could take place and that collective spraying and protective clothing were not necessary. Protective clothing was, however, available had collective treatment taken place.

Convoy, A1 Highway

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the mission of his Department's vehicle, registration number 16 AY 60, which formed part of a convoy that travelled on the A1 highway on 28 October; at what location the convoy *(a)* commenced and *(b)* terminated its journey; what was the total number of vehicles in the convoy; what was the cargo of each vehicle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The military convoy in question was undertaking a routine transport movement. It is not our policy, however, to discuss operational details of military movements.

Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force *(a)* Hawker Siddley Buccaneer, *(b)* English Electric Canberra and *(c)* Hawker Hunter aircraft are currently being preserved; what type marks they have; where they are currently based; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: At present there are four Buccaneers, type mark 2B, in storage and 1 Canberra, type mark T4, held in storage at RAF St Athan. There are no Hawker Hunter aircraft being held in storage by the Royal Air Force. The Buccaneer aircraft have been purchased by Hanifield Metals and are being held for collection by the purchaser. The Canberra is held at present in the Fleet Management Reserve long-term reserve category.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about low flying in each year since 1988 have led to an RAF police investigation being initiated; and how many of the investigations carried out in each year since 1988 have concluded that a breach of low flying regulations had occurred.

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the format requested. The table below details the total number of investigations carried out by the RAF police flying complaints flight each year from 1988 to the end of 1993; and the number of those where the police confirmed a breach of flying regulations. The 1988 figure for the latter is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. It should be noted that, in addition to low flying incidents, the figures for the number of investigations include other military aircraft activity examined by the RAF police.

Year	*Number of RAF Police FCF investigations*	*Number of cases in which a breach was confirmed*
1988	331	not available
1989	423	43
1990	571	13
1991	411	12
1992	718	40
1993	686	47

The above figure of 47 confirmed breaches in 1993 is six more than was listed in the House of Commons Defence Committee Report, HC 314 of Session 1993–94, on low flying. Of these, three were omitted in error from the evidence provided to the Committee; in the other three cases details of the RAF police investigations were not known until after this evidence has been provided.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the 41 low flying avoidance breaches during 1993 listed in his Department's evidence to the Defence Select Committee—HC 314 of Session 1993–94 pp. 35–36—were found by the RAF police investigation not to have been inadvertent.

Mr. Soames: It is not the responsibility of the RAF police to determine whether a breach is inadvertent or deliberate. On receipt of an RAF police report, this is a matter for consideration by the commanding officer of the aircrew concerned, who will take into account the circumstances of the breach, and any factors such as bad weather or flight safety considerations which might be relevant, in determining whether disciplinary or other action is necessary.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent use of Tornado aircraft from Royal Air Force Cottesmore to perform low-level passes over a prison establishment.

Mr. Soames: Several low level passes over HM prison Stocken were made on 27 September 1994 at the request of HM Prison Service. This provided a noise distraction and assisted in resolving an incident at the prison.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many breaches of the Eshott avoidance area have taken place in each year since 1989; what measures have been taken to discourage microlight flying from this site on weekdays; and if he will list the measures taken since 1989 to reduce the incidence of breaches of this avoidance area.

Mr. Soames: The numbers of confirmed breaches of the Eshott avoidance area for each year since 1989 are as follows:

1989: 0
1990: 0
1991: 2
1992: 8
1993: 3

The operating times of the airfield, and the use to which it is put, are matters for the civil operator.

In order to reduce the incidence of breaches, notices to airmen have been issued reminding military aircrews of the airfield's avoidance, which is marked on navigation charts and listed in the UK military low flying handbook. In addition, at the end of 1992, changes were made to instructions to foreign aircraft using RAF Spadeadam to ensure they avoid the airfield by a wider margin than previously.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the minimum authorised altitude of the flight by two Belgian air force Mirages which infringed the Sizewell power station avoidance area on 23 August 1993; and at what height the aircraft were flying at the time of the breach.

Mr. Soames: The two aircraft were authorised to operate at a minimum altitude of 2,000 ft minimum separation distance; the RAF police estimated the aircraft were flying at approx 1,000 ft above ground level at the time of the breach.

Air Show (Bratislava)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British military aircraft, and of what types, took part in the air show at Bratislava airport, Slovakia, on 20 and 21 August; what were the aims of British participation in the event; and what was the total cost of this participation.

Mr. Soames: The following RAF aircraft were present at the airshow in question:

9 Hawks (Red Arrows)
2 Hawks
4 Tornado GR1
2 Harrier
1 Chinook
1 Hercules

Displays were flown by the Red Arrows and two of the Tornado GR1s. The other aircraft were on static display. All extra costs for accommodation, food and fuel were met by the organisers of the airshow.

Attendance at this airshow was part of my Department's wider policy of enhancing military relations with countries of central and eastern Europe.

RAF Bentwaters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has held with British

Aerospace concerning the use of RAF Bentwaters as a base in connection with the showground air combat range.

Mr. Soames: None.

Aircraft Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the air crash at Boscombe Down airfield on the evening of 26 September.

Mr. Soames: I am aware of a press report of such an incident. Staff at Boscombe Down have confirmed, however, that there was no crash at the unit on that date or, indeed, so far this year. The only flying which took place that night was the launch of two Royal Navy Sea King helicopters in support of an exercise.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many man hours were spent on repairs to Tornado ZA611 following its accident in December 1986; and on what dates the aircraft has been flown since its accident.

Mr. Soames: Tornado ZA611 was repaired in industry, and the details of the contract covering the repair remain commercially confidential. Since its accident, the aircraft was flown on 19, 22 and 28 January 1993. The aircraft has since been held in storage pending its entry into a modification programme, after which it will return to active service.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the date and circumstances of the accident to Tornado F.3 serial number carried out on the aircraft since its accident, and by which unit; what is the estimated additional number of man hours required to complete repairs to the aircraft; and what is the estimated total cost of restoring the aircraft to front line service following its accident.

Mr. Soames: Tornado F3 ZE250 was damaged on 27 March 1992 during engine ground runs. To date, RAF tradesman have expended 9,025 man hours on the repair, and it is estimated that a further 7,090 man hours will be required before the aircraft can be restored to service. The labour costs of returning the aircraft to service are estimated at approximately £800,000. The cost of spares and materials, which have been provided from existing stocks, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

International Chart Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the International Chart Service North sea-southern sheet 1:750,000 2182A, INT.1043, published at Taunton on 10 August 1973.

Mr. Soames: It is not our usual practice to lay such charts in the Library. They are widely available, however, from commercial sources.

Hercules Fleet

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be able to make an announcement on the future of the RAF's Hercules fleet.

Mr. Freeman: We hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Staffing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown by military rank and civilian grade of the number of service personnel and civilian staff employed in *(a)* the personnel and training command and *(b)* the logistics command.

Mr. Soames: The strength of the two commands as at 1 October 1994 is as follows:

Military Personnel

	Personnel and Training Command	*Logistics Command*
Officer Ranks		
[1]Air Chief Marshal	2	1
Air Marshal	—	1
Air Vice-Marshal	9	3
Air Commodore	29	15
Group Captain	110	56
Wing Commander	322	182
Squadron Leader	802	514
Flight Lieutenant	1,764	565
Flying Officer/Pilot Officer	905	59
Senior Medical Officer	152	6
Junior Medical Officer	129	4
Dentist	113	—
Chaplains	89	—
Officer Total	4,426	1,406
Airmen Ranks		
Master Aircrew Warrant Officer	284	215
Flight Sergeant/Chief Technician	764	1,054
Sergeant	1,733	1,463
Corporal	2,320	2,434
Junior Technician/Senior Aircraftman/Leading Aircraftman	3,436	3,344
Aircraftman	400	—
Officer Designate	73	—
Airmen Total	9,010	8,510
Overall Total	13,436	9,916

Note:

[1] One of these officers (Chief of the Air Staff) appears on the strength of Personnel and Training Command but is employed elsewhere. This is the case for a number of other personnel, but separate figures could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Civilian Personnel

	Personnel and Training Command	*Logistics Command*
Non-industrial grades		
G3[1]	—	1.0
G5[2]	2.0	5.0
G6[3]	3.5	12.0
G7[4]	9.0	46.0
Senior Executive Officer	31.0	59.0
Higher Executive Officer/Higher Executive Officer (D)	95.5	224.0
Executive Officer	260.0	479.5
Administrative Officer	576.5	1,186.0
Administrative Assistant	479.5	642.5
Co-ordinator Anglo/American Relations	0.5	—
Community Relations Adviser	7.0	—
Mess Manager A	1.0	4.0
Mess Manager B	2.0	1.0
Retired Officer (Principal)	9.0	—

Civilian Personnel	Personnel and Training Command	Logistics Command
Retired Officer 1	27.0	3.0
Retired Officer 2	100.0	20.0
Retired Officer 3	42.0	14.0
Senior Personal Secretary	1.0	1.0
Personal Secretary	46.0	25
Chief Typing Manager	1.0	2.0
Typing Manager	19.0	13.0
Typist	282.0	165.0
Senior Scientific Officer	4.0	8.0
Higher Scientific Officer	4.0	12.0
Scientific Officer	4.0	11.0
Assistant Scientific Officer	2.0	1.0
Graduate Trainee	—	3.0
Senior Instructional Officer	18.0	—
Higher Instructional Officer	93.0	—
Instructional Officer 1	237.0	3.5
Instructional Officer 2	39.0	—
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	4.0	158.0
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	16.0	257.0
Professional and Technology Officer	11.0	425.0
Technician Grade 1	19.0	81.0
Technician Grade 2	2.5	3.0
Senior Telecommunication Technical Officer	—	36.0
Higher Telecommunication Technical Officer	2.0	110.0
Telecommunication Technical Officer	2.0	301.5
Assistant Telecommunication Technical Officer	5.0	366.5
Senior Librarian	2.0	—
Librarian	2.0	—
Assistant Librarian	4.0	—
Historian 2	2.5	—
Senior Information Officer	4.0	1.0
Information Officer	8.0	—
Curatorial Officer E	3.0	—
Curatorial Officer F	1.0	—
Senior Medical Officer	1.0	—
Civilian Medical Practitioner	5.0	3.0
Civilian Consultant	5.0	—
Registrar	1.0	—
Senior Psychologist	3.0	—
Psychologist (Grade T)	1.0	—
Senior Radiographer 2	1.5	—
Senior Physiotherapist 1	7.0	1.0
Senior Physiotherapist 2	5.0	—
Senior Occupational Therapist 1	1.0	—
Senior Occupational Therapist 2	1.0	—
Head Occupational Therapist	1.0	—
Occupational Therapist	1.0	—
Senior Ophthalmic Optician	1.0	—
Senior Orthoptist	1.0	—
Speech Therapist 2	1.0	—
Speech Therapist 3	1.0	—
Dental Auxiliary 1	6.0	1.0
Senior Optometrist C	1.0	—
Staff Grade Practitioner	1.0	—
Pharmacist E	1.0	—
Nurse A	5.0	—
Nurse D	11.5	—
Nurse F	2.0	1.5
Nurse G	2.0	2.0
Chaplains Assistant	4.0	—
Senior Social Worker	2.0	—

Civilian Personnel	Personnel and Training Command	Logistics Command
Senior Investigating Officer	1.0	—
Investigating Officer 1	10.0	—
Investigating Officer 2	35.0	—
Civilian Security Officer 3	1.0	—
Civilian Security Officer 4	3.0	9.0
Civilian Security Officer 5	38.0	81.0
Radio Officer	3.0	—
Communications Officer 2	—	2.0
Communications Officer 3	—	11.0
Communications Officer 4	2.0	15.0
Chef/Chief Cook 1	—	1.0
Senior Lecturer	5.0	5.0
Lecturer	35.0	10.0
Head Teacher 1	2.0	—
Deputy Head Teacher 1	1.0	—
Teacher	4.0	—
Senior Graphics Officer	1.0	1.0
Higher Graphics Officer	5.0	3.0
Graphics Officer	20.0	11.0
Mapping and Charting Officer	—	2.0
Fire Service Officer 1	1.0	2.0
Fire Service Officer 2	2.0	—
Fire Service Officer 3	3.0	5.0
Stores Officer Grade A	—	1.0
Stores Officer Grade B	—	8.5
Stores Officer Grade C	—	36.0
Stores Officer Grade D	1.0	76.0
Process and General Supervisory Class B	—	1.0
Process and General Supervisory Class C	—	3.0
Process and General Supervisory Class D	1.0	13.0
Process and General Supervisory Class E	1.0	1.0
Families Officer	7.0	5.0
Station Warden	19.0	22.0
Support Manager 2	—	2.0
Support Manager 3	9.0	12.0
Support Grade Band 1	59.5	61.0
Support Grade Band 2	83.0	46.0
Medical Laboratory Scientific Officer 1	2.0	—
Medical Laboratory Scientific Officer 2	1.0	—
Higher Professional Photographer	1.0	—
Professional Photographer	5.0	5.0
Total	2,918.0	5,139.5
Industrial grades		
Carpenter	8.0	46.0
Craftsman Instrument Worker	—	1.0
Electrician	—	3.0
Electronic Assembler 1	—	5.0
Electronic Assembler 2	—	7.0
Electronic Assembler 3	—	5.0
Electroplater	—	2.0
Fitter Aero Engine	—	141.0
Fitter Airframe	—	277.0
Fitter Avionics	—	7.0
Fitter Electronics	1.0	186.0
Fitter Engine	—	95.0
Fitter General	4.0	132.0
Fitter Motor Transport	4.0	58.0
Fitter Ex Research and Development	—	1.0

Civilian Personnel

	Personnel and Training Command	*Logistics Command*
Fitter Turner	1.0	22.0
Instrument Maker	—	98.0
Machinist Woodworker	—	5.0
Painter	1.0	19.0
Spray Painter	1.0	1.0
Aircraft Surface Finisher	—	21.0
Sheet Metalworker	—	15.0
Technician	—	61.0
Turner	—	1.0
Upholster	—	3.0
Welder	—	6.0
Armourer	1.0	13.0
Chief Steward 1	4.0	1.0
Chief Steward 2	4.0	2.0
Steward 1	27.0	11.0
Steward 2	280.5	122.5
Mess Hand	395.0	177.5
Head Cook	12.0	3.0
Cook	57.0	31.0
Cinema Projectionist	4.0	—
Labourer Unskilled	—	2.0
Explosive Maintenance Assistant	—	13.0
Battery Charging Hand	—	1.0
Cable Layer	—	12.0
Cleaner	4.0	5.5
Caretaker Keys	1.0	—
Caretaker	1.0	—
Craft Auxiliary A	—	7.0
Craft Auxiliary B	—	32.0
Driver Ambulance	—	1.0
Driver Articulated	—	180.0
Driver Crane	3.0	3.0
Driver Non-Articulated	49.0	34.0
Driver Passenger Vehicle	35.0	32.0
Driver Winch Operator	1.0	—
Driver Locomotive	—	5.0
Crane Driver Overhead Travelling	—	1.0
Fork Lift Truck Operator	—	14.0
Experimental Worker	1.5	2.0
Fabric Worker A	—	1.0
Fabric Worker B	—	1.0
Gardener/Groundsman	4.0	1.0
Gardener/Groundsman 2	4.0	2.0
Gardener/Groundsman Assistant	2.0	—
Gas Plant Overseer	—	2.0
Examiner 2	—	8.0
Examiner 3	—	2.0
Patrolman	5.0	—
Handyman/Woman	1.0	1.0
Hydraulic Test Wall Operator	—	3.0
General Hand (Superior Duties)	15.0	54.0
Labourer	83.5	29.5
Machine Operator	—	3.0
Medical Attendant	—	0.5
Messenger	17.5	16.0
Museum Attendant	—	1.0
Metalliser	—	1.0
Packing Case Maker 1	—	6.0
Rangewarden	9.5	2.0
Refuse Collector	4.0	4.0
Safety Equipment Worker B	—	3.0
Sewage Plant Attendant	9.0	2.0
Shotblaster	—	6.0
Slinger	—	6.0
Senior Storekeeper	20.0	172.0
Storekeeper	69.5	390.0
Storekeeping Assistant 1	9.00	103.0
Storekeeping Assistant 2	18.0	103.0
Sub Officer	7.0	6.0
Leading Fireman	30.0	21.0
Fireman	105.0	75.0

Civilian Personnel

	Personnel and Training Command	*Logistics Command*
Hospital Porter	10.0	—
Seamstress	0.5	—
Servant 1	1.0	—
Sterilising Assistant	6.0	—
Tyre Refitter/Vulcaniser	—	2.0
Total	1,330.5	2,950.5

Notes:

[1] Grade 3 includes: Assistant Under Secretary.

[2] Grade 5 includes: Assistant Secretary, Deputy Chief Scientific Officer and Professional and Technology Director B.

[3] Grade 6 includes: Senior Principal, Academic Professor of Music, Senior Principal Scientific Officer and Professional and Technology Superintending Grade.

[4] Grade 7 includes: Principal, Statistician, Psychologist, Principal Professional and Technology Officer and Head Historian B.

Footnote:

Casual staff have not been included in the above figures.

Bosnia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effects the recently launched offensives by Bosnian Government troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina have had on the safety of British personnel serving under United Nations command; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We do not assess that British personnel serving under United Nations command have been placed in any significantly greater danger by the recent Bosnian Government offensives. However, we remain very concerned about the upsurge in the fighting and are monitoring the situation closely.

Bombing (Bihac)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has that Croatian Serb aircraft based in Udbira have bombed Bihac; and if he will publish that evidence.

Mr. Soames: On 19 November 1994, UN military observers observed two ORAO jet fighters in the vicinity of Bihac. One aircraft dropped its bombs and headed south; the other struck a building and crashed. This and other attacks were widely reported. Croatia is not known to possess ORAO aircraft and no Bosnian-Serb ORAO was reported to have been airborne at the time of attack. The Croatian Serb—Republic of Serb Krajina—airfield at Udbina lies to the south of Bihac and some of its armed ORAO aircraft were reported to have been airborne prior to the attacks at Bihac.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has of the dropping of napalm bombs on Bihac; and if he will publish that evidence.

Mr. Soames: A UN military observer reported that on 18 November 1994 a fixed-wing aircraft dropped three bombs on Bihac. From evidence collected by UNMOs at the impact points, one of the bombs was identified as a napalm bomb, but this was unexploded. The others were cluster bombs.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average and the median time his Department has taken to pay suppliers in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of bills took more than six weeks to pay.

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for such matters rests with the chief executive of the Defence Accounts Agency. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from M. J. Dymond to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 1 December 1994:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average and the median time his Department has taken to pay suppliers in each of the last 12 months, and what proportion of bills took more than 6 weeks to pay. This matter falls to me, as Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency, for reply.

2. Departments are required to provide details of their annual payment performance in their Departmental Reports. For financial year 1993/94, Ministry of Defence paid 99.9 percent of its bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of the presentation of a valid invoice.

3. The MOD bill payment office at Liverpool also measure their performance against the higher departmental standard of payment within 11 working days of receipt of a valid invoice. They are currently achieving 97 percent.

4. As the vast majority of bills are paid within the 11 day target the average and median over the last 12 months would not be meaningful, but I have listed below, for each of the last 12 months for which figures are available, information which I hope you find useful.

Month	*Number of bills received*	*Percentage paid within 11 days*	*Percentage paid within 30 days*	*Number paid after 30 days*
October 1993	258,459	97.94	99.99	15
November 1993	277,925	96.96	99.98	32
December 1993	258,203	96.10	98.09	31
January 1994	249,488	97.72	99.99	21
February 1994	244,325	98.86	99.99	12
March 1994	283,141	97.67	99.98	43
April 1994	272,224	95.6	99.99	10
May 1994	272,133	95.19	99.98	31
June 1994	250,732	96.9	99.99	16
July 1994	244,214	96.28	99.91	208
August 1994	231,125	96.38	99.99	1
September 1994	209,821	97.73	99.99	3
	3,051,790			423

All bills were paid wihtin six weeks of receipt at Liverpool.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide information via Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department already uses Internet to make information widely available. In particular, press releases are made available electronically through the Central Office of Information to be accessible to users of Internet via data-star dialog (Europe) or Mead/Lexis/Nexis. My Department was involved, with the US Department of Defense, in the early development of Internet and has used Internet facilities for research purposes for many years. Security considerations prevent its widespread use within my Department but we are currently considering extending our use of Internet, to include the provision of a facility for making some Defence information, currently published in open literature, available electronically in a similar format to that adopted by the Central Computers and Telecommunications Agency and HM Treasury.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 2 December 1994

HOME DEPARTMENT

Revenge Agency Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has in respect of those who *(a)* advertise and *(b)* publish advertisements for Revenge Agency Services.

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware of this organisation.

School Crossing Patrols

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have transferred responsibility for school crossing patrol services to either local authorities or local education authorities.

Mr. Maclean: Information in the form requested is not available but we understand from a recent survey that about 10 police forces in England and Wales provide school crossing patrol services on behalf of local authorities.

Intoxicating Liquor

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations led him to refuse to give consent over a byelaw on the consumption of intoxicating liquor in public places in Leamington Spa.

Mr. Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend has not refused to give consent to the byelaw. Home Office officials wrote to Warwick district council on 29 November seeking some additional necessary information to enable the byelaw application to be further considered.

Disclosure of Evidence

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for giving effect to the recent High Court judgment on disclosure of evidence in alleged cases of miscarriage of justice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I am considering what action to take in the light of this judgment.

Safer Cities Projects

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make a statement on the further safer cities projects to be established in Wales.

Mr. Maclean: I am pleased to announce that we are setting up two further safer cities projects in Wales to bring the total to three. These will be established in Cardiff and Rhyl early next year to add to the one already running in Merthyr Tydfil. A total of 32 areas have now been selected for projects under phase 2 of the safer cities programme.

Murder (Right to Silence)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he intends to take to ensure that parents who murder their children and refuse to give evidence against each other are brought to justice.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 28 November 1994]:* The courts will impose a life sentence on any person convicted of murder. But a court will not convict if there is no evidence to link a particular person to the murder. Nor, in the absence of any other evidence, will a court convict a defendant on the basis of his silence alone. The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice considered the issue of inferences from silence, but did not recommend any changes to the principle against self-incrimination.

HEALTH

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: to ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the management allowances payments made to general practitioner fund-holding practices and practices preparing to be fundholders *(a)* by wave and *(b)* in total for each (i) family health service agency and (ii) region.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Health gave him on 26 January at column *300*. The available figures for 1993–94 will be placed in the Library.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total loss to public funds of maladministration of Wessex, West Midlands and Trent regional health authorities.

Mr. Malone: The 57th report of the Public Accounts Committee contained an estimate that some £10 million was lost on the management of the former regionally managed services organisation of West Midlands regional health authority. It has also been estimated that some £20 million of expenditure on the regional information systems plan has not resulted in benefits to patients in the former Wessex region. In the case of Trent RHA, the district auditor issued a report to the authority about the transfer of services to the private sector between 1988 and 1992, in which he stated that there was no reliable method of determining the difference between what the authority had spent and what would have been spent if competitive tenders had been sought.

Hospital Wards

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to ensure a choice between single sex and mixed wards for all patients of NHS hospitals; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It is for individual hospitals to decide in the light of local conditions whether, and if so in what circumstances, mixed sex wards should be used. A new standard in the revised and expanded patients charter to be issued in the new year will expect patients to be told in advance if they are to be treated in mixed sex wards. This will allow them to raise any objections with the

hospital which will, where possible, take account of their views.

Health Service Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* health authorities, *(c)* family health service authorities and *(d)* health trusts at 30 September.

Mr. Malone: The numbers of authorities and trusts at 30 September 1994 were:

Authorities and Trusts	*Number*
Regional health authorities	8
District health authorities	111
Family health services authorities	90
NHS trusts	419

NHS Managers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will instruct health authorities and NHS trusts to take urgent steps to reduce the number of managers and increase the number of nursing and care staff; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: No. General and senior managers represent only 2.6 per cent. of the NHS work force compared with 50.3 per cent. for nurses. Between 1983 and 1993 the number of qualified nurses increased by 8.3 per cent. and in 1993 there were additionally about 28,000 Project 2000 learners who are not included in the figures.

Dentistry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure the availability of free national health service dentistry to all who require it; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Family health service authorities report that there are no patients for whom national health service dental treatment cannot be arranged. There are extensive arrangements for exemption from and remission of NHS dental charges. The Green Paper, "Improving NHS Dentistry", makes clear that we have no plans to change these arrangements.

Patients' Complaints

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes to legislation are necessary to enable her to dismiss health authority chiefs who fail to deal properly with patients' complaints.

Mr. Malone: Chief executives are employees of health authorities and, as such, can be dismissed only by them. Primary legislation would, therefore, be required to enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to have such power of dismissal.

Ambulances

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what limitation exists on the total number of hours that ambulance drivers can be called upon to work in any 24-hour period.

Mr. Sackville: Ambulance drivers are subject to the United Kingdom legislation on drivers' hours.

For non-emergency work, these regulations limit driving time to 10 hours a day and impose a daily duty limit of 11 hours.

Any driving in the course of an emergency call-out does not count towards a crew member's daily driving limit, nor to a crew member's daily duty limit.

Diabetics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will reconsider the decision not to provide pen needles to diabetics on NHS prescription.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to do so.

Children (Wandsworth Council)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will institute an inquiry into the role of Wandsworth council in the investigation of alleged rapes of children in its care.

Mr. Bowis: The only such allegation of which we are aware, which relates to an alleged incident in 1984 is currently being considered by the local government ombudsman. If the hon. Member has knowledge of any other cases, he should refer them to the appropriate authorities.

Prednisolone

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she has taken to avoid deaths of children due to the administration of prednisolone.

Mr. Sackville: The Medicines Control Agency and Committee on Safety of Medicines have investigated the issue of the effect of corticosteroids, such as prednisolone, on the body's defence system and in particular the association of severe or fatal chickenpox. Their findings and recommendations were published in the bulletin, "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance", which was sent to all doctors and pharmacists in February 1994. Doctors were also reminded of this issue in the Chief Medical Officer's update in May 1994. Copies of the documents were placed in the Library.

The Medicines Control Agency has also requested that all pharmaceutical companies producing corticosteroids administered by mouth or injection include further warnings and precautions in their product information, and introduce patient information leaflets. This action is expected to be completed in the near future.

Patients' Rights

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to introduce into the patients charter rights as to the holding of open inquiries.

Mr. Malone: None.

Burnley Health Care NHS Trust

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the pension entitlement of Mr. James Rawson the former chairman of Burnley Health Care NHS trust.

Mr. Malone: None.

Ministerial Speeches

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what occasions since 1979 civil servants in her Department have been asked to draft speeches of a

constituency nature for use in a Minister's own constituency.

Mr. Sackville: None. Civil servants may provide briefing of a factual nature for Ministers on matters relating to their own Departments. In addition, Ministers in preparing for a constituency speech can draw on material produced by their Department during the normal course of business.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease there are currently diagnosed in the United Kingdom; and what representations she has received regarding the link with pre-1985 infertility treatment.

Mr. Sackville: One hundred and fifty nine definite or probable cases of Creutzfeldt-jacob disease in the United Kingdom have been reported to the CJD surveillance unit, Edinburgh over the four-year period May 1990 to April 1994. No cases have been reported where there is a link with infertility treatment.

On 1 September 1993 the Department established a helpline for women who had been treated for infertility with human derived pituitary gonadotrophin—a treatment no longer given, but which may be associated with the risk of developing CJD. Since 1 September 1993 we have received 15 letters on the subject from hon. Members on behalf of their constituents.

Private Bed Units

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals had private bed units; and what was the number of beds in each, in 1990–91 and 1993–94, respectively.

Mr. Sackville: These are local matters about which the Department does not collect information.

Child Minders

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to issue further guidance to local authorities on the registration of child minders; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The Department has today issued local authority circular (94)23, "The Children Act 1989: Registration of Child Minders", which clarifies current guidance on the use of physical punishment by child minders. Copies of the circular have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

SSSIs

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will include in the Environment Agencies Bill provisions for the reform of the sites of special scientific interest system.

Mr. Atkins: No.

European Charter of Self-government

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all countries who have *(a)* signed and *(b)* ratified the European charter of self-government, giving individual dates for each country of signature and ratification.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested, relating to the European charter of local self-government, is as follows:

Member state	*Date of signature*	*Date of ratification or accession*
Austria	15 Oct. 1985	23 Sept. 1987
Belgium	15 Oct. 1985	
Bulgaria	3 Oct. 1994	
Cyprus	8 Oct. 1986	16 May 1988
Denmark	15 Oct. 1985	3 Feb. 1988
Estonia	4 Nov. 1993	
Finland	14 June 1990	3 June 1991
France	15 Oct. 1985	
Germany	15 Oct. 1985	17 May 1988
Greece	15 Oct. 1985	6 Sept. 1989
Hungary	6 April 1992	21 March 1994
Iceland	20 Nov. 1985	25 March 1991
Italy	15 Oct. 1985	11 May 1990
Liechtenstein	15 Oct. 1985	11 May 1988
Luxembourg	15 Oct. 1985	15 May 1987
Malta	13 July 1993	6 Sept. 1993
Netherlands	7 Jan. 1988	20 March 1991
Norway	26 May 1989	26 May 1989
Poland	19 Feb. 1993	22 Nov. 1993
Portugal	15 Oct. 1985	18 Dec. 1990
Slovenia	11 Oct. 1994	
Spain	15 Oct. 1985	8 Nov. 1988
Sweden	4 Oct. 1988	29 Aug. 1989
Turkey	21 Nov. 1988	9 Dec. 1992

Energy Conservation Bill

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the parish, town and community councils which have made representations to the Government regarding the Energy Conservation Bill.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: During 1994 the Government have received letters from about 500 members of the public and local councils concerning this Bill, and a larger number on energy efficiency generally. Detailed analysis could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

Water Companies

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of the separate water companies established since privatisation and for each *(a)* month and *(b)* year since the companies were privatised, (i) the total number of disconnections carried out by each company and (ii) the percentage of customers of each company this total represents.

Mr. Gummer: The Director General of Water services publishes data on disconnections twice a year, by water company area, for both domestic and non-domestic customers. Information about the numbers of disconnections in the six months to 30 September 1994 showing, for domestic disconnections, the rate per 10,000 households billed, together with numbers of disconnections in each year since 1989–90, was published in an Ofwat news release on 15 November. Copies of this and earlier Ofwat news releases containing similar information are in the Library.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date he expects to reply to the letter concerning future options for water charging sent to him on 30 September 1994 by the Water Services Association and Water Companies Association; what plans he has for announcing the contents of his reply; if he will place a copy of his reply in the Libraries of both Houses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The letter from the associations setting out their views on future methods of charging for water is still being considered. A reply will be sent in due course.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list *(a)* all areas of activity currently undertaken by the National Rivers Authority to which the duty of the National Rivers Authority to further conservation apply and *(b)* any specific such areas of activity or specific activities to which this duty will not apply under his current plans for an environment agency for England and Wales;

(2) if he will publish the exact wording of the clause which he intends to introduce into the Environment Agency Bill to carry forward the current duty of the National Rivers Authority to further conservation; whether this new duty will apply across the full and complete scope of activities of the proposed environment agency for England and Wales; and if he will list all duties which he currently envisages being carried out by the environment agency for England and Wales to which this new duty will not apply.

Mr. Gummer: As I advised the House on 18 November, I wish there to be no doubt about the conservation and sustainable development role of the agency; I am providing a clear duty for the agency not simply to consider conservation issues in relation to all the agency's functions, but to further conservation as appropriate.

The Environment Bill, presented for first reading in another place on 1 December, sets out the conservation duties of the proposed environment agency in clauses 6 and 7.

The conservation duties of the National Rivers Authority are set out in clauses 2 and 16 of the Water Resources Act 1991.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what arrangements he proposes to make for the costs of local government reorganisation in 1995–96.

Mr. Curry: In his statement yesterday, my right hon. Friend announced that provision of £50 million has been made for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation in 1995–96.

Following extensive consultation with local authorities on draft proposals, I am today issuing the details of arrangements under which reorganised authorities will be able to apply for additional resources, in the form of supplementary credit approvals, to cover reorganisation costs in 1995–96. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Invitations will be issued next week to authorities in the Isle of Wight, Cleveland, Avon, North Yorkshire and Humberside to submit applications under the scheme.

Integrated Pollution Control

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether a change is to be made to the scheme of fees and charges for integrated pollution control operated by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Atkins: A minor change to the HMIP integrated pollution control fees and charges scheme 1994–95 is to take effect retrospectively from 1 June 1994. It introduces a provisional application fee of nil for a number of processes included under IPC by the Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations, pending further consultation on possible amendment to those regulations.

Copies of the amendment to the scheme are being placed in the Library of both Houses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Rape

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will give the number of cases of rape heard by *(a)* male and *(b)* female judges each year since 1990.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Ophthalmology

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the number of referrals from general practitioners to ophthalmology out-patients clinics for 1990–91 and 1991–92.

Mr. Richards: The number of referrals to NHS hospital out-patient departments for the specialty of ophthalmology was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1990–91	45,303
1991–92	44,514

Cable Network Franchising

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for extending cable network franchising in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: Today, the Independent Television Commission is preparing to advertise new franchises for much of south Wales early next year. Franchises for north Wales will follow.

The ITC will consider further franchises as soon as it receives expressions of interest.

I want the whole of Wales to benefit from the broad band communication revolution and look forward to expressions of interest from companies.

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in regard to nuclear proliferation were discussed during his meeting with his Pakistani counterpart on 28 November.

The Prime Minister: Non-proliferation was not raised in my meeting, but my right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary, discussed non-proliferation in south Asia with the Pakistani Prime Minister when he called on her on 30 November 1994.

Honours System

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister upon what grounds the grant of an honour may be withdrawn; and in which cases this has happened since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The statutes of most orders of knighthood and the royal warrants of decorations and medals include provision for the Queen to "cancel and annul" appointments and awards. Cancellation is considered in cases where retention of the appointment or award would bring the honours system into disrepute. There are no set guidelines for cancellations, which are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Since 1979, the *London Gazette* has published details of cancellations of 15 appointments and awards—three knighthoods, one CBE, five OBEs, four MBEs and two BEMs.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister how many Conservative hon. Members have received knighthoods since 1979.

The Prime Minister: One hundred and fifteen Conservative hon. Members have received knighthoods since 1979.

Former Ministers

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister which rules cover former Ministers who wish to take appointments in the private sector; and what plans he has to reconsider such rules.

The Prime Minister: Guidance is contained in paragraph 105 of "Question of Procedure for Ministers". This matter is within the terms of reference of the Nolan committee and I will consider the guidance in the light of any recommendations that it may make.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what documentary evidence is available to Her Majesty's Government to support the belief that the bomb which destroyed Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie was dispatched from Luqa airport, Malta.

The Prime Minister: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to establish the allegations made in the criminal charges against the two Libyans accused, which include the allegation that the bomb was introduced on to an aircraft at Luqa airport, Malta. However, he cannot give details of that evidence while criminal proceedings are pending.

SCOTLAND

Sports Clubs

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount of discretionary rates relief given to Scottish sports clubs in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 1 December 1994]:* Provisional figures provided by regional and islands authorities indicate that the total amount of discretionary rates relief given to Scottish sports clubs in 1994–95 will be £3.464 million.

TRANSPORT

Detective Agencies

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the latest cost of using detective agencies in connection with road building schemes in the last five financial years; and what has been the cost in respect of each scheme.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. The cost to date, encompassing the last five financial years, is £563,450. The expenditure on individual schemes is as follows:

	£
M3 Bar End–Compton	267,000
A12 Hackney Wick M11 link	185,000
A4/A46 Batheaston/Swainswick bypass	109,000
A11 Besthorpe–Wymindham	450
M65 Blackburn southern bypass	2,000

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has yet received either *(a)* an oral or *(b)* a written agreement from any City of London institution that it will support the privatisation of Railtrack; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: Marketing of shares in Railtrack has not yet commenced and expressions of interest from investors have not been sought.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those items of expenditure and receipts, included under the heading "UR/EPs" in the table accompanying his Department's press notice No. 457, issued on 29 November, which are not included under the heading "Union Railways" in table 1.1 in his Department's Transport Report 1994, Cm 2506, and vice versa.

Mr. Watts: The external finance for UR/EPs set out in the table accompanying the Department's press notice No. 457 now includes provision for European Passenger Services Ltd. EPSL became a separate

Government-owned company in May 1994, before which it was part of British Rail.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will update the figure in tables 1.1 and 5.1 of his Department's Transport Report 1994, Cm 2506, to take account of the revised expenditure totals outlined in his Department's press notice, No. 457, issued on 29 November; and if he will show the revised figures alongside the original figures;

(2) if he will update the figures in tables 5.3 and 5.4 of his Department's Transport Report 1994, Cm 2506; and if he will add columns for 1995–96 plans to these updated tables, to take account of the revised expenditure totals outlined in his Department's press notice No. 457, issued on 29 November.

Mr. Watts: The Transport Report 1995 will contain details of the expenditure plans announced in press notice No. 457 on 29 November.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those items of expenditure and receipts, included under the heading "other railway related" in table 1.1 in his Department's Transport Report 1994, Cm 2506; and under what heading these items appear in the table accompanying his Department's press notice No. 457, issued on 29 November.

Mr. Watts : Those items of expenditure included in table 1.1 of the Transport Report 1994 under the heading "other railway related "are listed in table 5.1. These items are included in the table accompanying the Department's press notice No. 457 under the heading, "other departmental programmes and services".

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to disband the Crown Prosecution Service and put the provision of prosecution solicitors out to competitive tender and provide for payment by results.

The Attorney-General: As I announced to the House on 27 April 1994, *Official Report*, column *234*, all my departments are considering the question of prior options and the possibility of agency status. In line with general Government policy, these questions involve consideration of privatisation, contracting out and market testing, but no decisions have yet been made. An inter-departmental group of officials including representatives of the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Treasury and the Office of Public Service and Science are at present examining these options and the possibility of agency status in respect of both the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office.

I expect the group to report to me around the end of the year and that I should then consult ministerial colleagues with the intention of reaching decisions in the earlier part of next year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Agency (Wales)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the cost of the proposed reorganisation and reduction in number of district benefit offices in Wales;

(2) whether in the proposed reorganisation of the Benefits Agency in Wales *(a)* any public outlet will close and *(b)* a full service will continue to be given at each outlet.

Mr. Roger Evans: The structure and operation of the Benefits Agency in Wales are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. John Marek, dated 1 December 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about reorganisation of the Benefits Agency (BA) in Wales.

The latest estimated costs attributable to the reorganisation of BA Districts in Wales is £277,400. In addition, the estimated cost of services provided by the Information Technology Services Agency is £303,800. These latter notional costs are subsumed within a fixed service charge for planned mainframe computer service provision. Resulting savings in management and administrative costs arising from economies of scale will be redirected to enhance service provision to our customers. The estimated resource which will be available for reinvestment as a result of the reorganisation is £700,000 year on year.

No offices will close as a result of the reorganisation of District boundaries in Wales, nor will there be any reduction in the standard of service provided. Indeed, the redirecting of resources saved will enhance the service already provided.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what factors led the Benefits Agency to give notice to Property Holdings that it intends to vacate all the offices it presently occupies in Clwyd.

Mr. Roger Evans: The structure and operation of the Benefits Agency in Wales are matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. John Marek, dated 1 December 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the factors that led to the Benefits Agency giving notice to Property Holdings to vacate all the offices it presently occupies in Clwyd.

As part of its ongoing Estates Strategy, the Benefits Agency keeps the need for maintaining all of its accommodation under regular scrutiny. Local management in Clwyd are considering customer service delivery issues across all offices presently occupied as part of the ongoing business requirement.

The main factor to be considered in respect of future business needs for accommodation is the requirement to ensure that accommodation matches need and that there is no unnecessary and wasteful expenditure on public funds on unsuitable, excessively costed, or overspaced buildings. It is considered essential that full value for money is obtained in delivering the best possible service. A further factor of great importance is the requirement to deliver a One Stop Service to our customers.

Initial research in Clwyd has shown that the amount of accommodation exceeds needs, although no decisions have yet been taken regarding which, if any, accommodation will be vacated and which will be retained. In view of the duration of notice periods required, to ensure that as many options are kept open as possible, and as a precautionary measure to protect public funds, Property

Holdings were initially advised that all properties were to be vacated. Discussions are still on-going and clearly not all properties will be vacated and some properties may be replaced by more suitable ones.

I can assure you that whatever conclusions are reached the prime consideration will be to ensure that customer service outlets are retained in all the current locations in Clwyd and wherever possible the service will be enhanced.

I have arranged for the District Manager to let you know when decisions are reached.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents with care in receipt of income support at each child support agency reporting centre have received reduced maintenance payments as a result of changes to the maintenance arrangements which came into force on 7 February 1994;

(2) how many parents with care not in receipt of benefit at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have received reduced maintenance payments as a result of changes to the maintenance arrangements which came into force on 7 February 1994;

(3) how many parents with care in receipt of family credit at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have received reduced maintenance payments as a result of changes to the maintenance arrangements which came into force on 7 February 1994;

(4) what is the average reduction in child maintenance payments made as a result of the changes to the maintenance arrangements which came into force on 7 February 1994.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 2 December 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security concerning the effects of the changes to maintenance arrangements which came into force on 7 February 1994.

The Agency only keeps details of the total number maintenance assessments that were reduced. Information showing the number of assessments reduced following computerised reassessment of the Agency's Great Britain caseload is shown in the table below.

Maintenance reduced by more than £1 following automated reassessment

CSAC	*Maintenance assessments reduced by more than £1*
Belfast	5,219
Birkenhead	5,806
Dudley	7,799
Falkirk	6,299
Hastings	4,474
Plymouth	5,586
Total	35,183

The average reduction in maintenance, based on the cases which were automatically reassessed and where the assessment actually changes, is £9.00 a week.

In a further 4,000 cases, maintenance was not reduced at this stage as the change was less than £1. Another 2,062 cases had maintenance reduced following a clerical reassessment. Also, as at 30 April 1994, 1,031 absent parents had successfully applied for transitional protection. It is not a requirement of the Agency to record specific information by client group on clients who had their maintenance reduced.

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many maintenance application forms have been returned to each Child Support Agency area reporting centre to date *(a)* from parents with care in receipt of income support, *(b)* from parents with care in receipt of family credit, *(c)* from parents with care in receipt of disability working allowance and *(d)* from parents with care not on benefit;

(2) how many non-custodial parents at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have *(a)* been issued with a maintenance inquiry form, *(b)* returned a maintenance inquiry form, *(c)* been assessed to pay maintenance and (d) actually paid any maintenance either to the Child Support Agency or direct to the parent with care;

(3) how many maintenance application forms have been issued by each Child Support Agency reporting centre to date *(a)* to parents with care in receipt of income support, *(b)* to parents with care in receipt of family credit, *(c)* to parents with care in receipt of disability working allowance and *(d)* to parents with care not on benefit.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 2 December 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about maintenance application forms and maintenance enquiry forms.

I am unable to provide you with all the information you require. The information available is shown below.

Maintenance application forms issued to September 1994

Child Support Agency centre	*Parents with care in receipt of income support*	*Parents with care in receipt of family credit/disability working allowance*[1]	Parents with care not in receipt of a prescribed benefit
Belfast	33,508	4,064	1,481
Birkenhead	25,687	10,464	682
Dudley	24,502	6,796	500
Falkirk	29,029	26,254	397
Hastings	26,836	6,017	1,160
Plymouth	25,855	8,185	382
1993–94[2]	604,565	61,880	4,602
Total	769,982	285,677	24,351

[1] Family credit and disability working allowance (DWA) figures are aggregated as DWA clients represent only 0.01 per cent. of the total number of the Agency's clients.

[2] Figures for 1993–94 are not available broken down by CSAC.

Maintenance applications forms returned to the end of September 1994[1]

Child support agency centre	*Number returned*
Belfast	31,355
Birkenhead	25,297
Dudley	23,570
Falkirk	30,738
Hastings	22,261
Plymouth	23,945
1993–94[2]	628,531
Total	785,697

[1] A breakdown of these figures by client group is not available.
[2] Figures for 1993–94 are not available broken down by CSAC.

Maintenance Enquiry Forms issued and returned to the end of September 1994

CSAC	*MEFs Issued*	*MEFs returned*
Belfast	30,599	23,037
Birkenhead	25,371	17,964
Dudley	23,737	15,516
Falkirk	26,651	17,690
Hastings	23,765	15,752
Plymouth	24,635	15,706
1993–94[1 2]	459,905	297,997
Total	614,663	403,661

[1]Breakdown of these figures by client group is not available.
[2]Figures for 1993–94 are not available broken down by CSAC.

Figures on the number of absent parents who have been assessed to pay and those who are actually paying maintenance are currently being collated; there is no business need for the Agency to collate them in the form you requested. I shall write to you further when the figures are available.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents with care at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have *(a)* had a reduced benefit direction served against them and *(b)* suffered a benefit penalty.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 2 December 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of reduced benefit directions issued and implemented.

Figures for the number of reduced benefit directions issued are given below. All but 627 of these have been issued since April 1994. Figures are not available for the number implemented.

CSAC	*Number issued*
Belfast	744
Birkenhead	1,204
Dudley	995
Falkirk	2,774
Hastings	678
Plymouth	1,302
Total	7,697

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many non-custodial parents at each Child Support Agency reporting centre have *(a)* had deductions made from income support, *(b)* had wage arrestments made against them and *(c)* actually had their wages arrested.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr Adam Ingram, dated 2 December 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about enforcement action taken against absent parents by the Child Support Agency.

Since the Agency's launch an estimated 31,000 absent parents have had child maintenance deducted from their benefit.

In 1993–94, 2,600 deduction from earnings orders (DEO) were issued. The information for this period was collected on a national basis only and is not broken down by Child Support Agency Centre.

Figures for DEOs issued from April 1994 to September 1994 are shown below:

DEO's	*Number*
Belfast	2,006
Birkenhead	1,981
Dudley	1,296
Falkirk	2,162
Hastings	2,323
Plymouth	1,702

Details of the number of DEO's implemented are not required as part of the Agency's business requirements and are not collected.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average maintenance payment at each Child Support Agency reporting centre.

Mr. Burt: The administration of Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 2 December 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the average maintenance payment at each Child Support Agency Centre.

Collection of data on the average amount of maintenance paid is not required to support the business needs of the Agency, and is consequently not collected by it, however the DSS conducts sampling exercises from time to time and at the end of October the national average weekly child maintenance liability is £44 a week.

Mustard Gas

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pension awards have been made in recognition of disablement resulting from exposure to mustard gas during national service.

Mr. Arbuthnot: War pensions are payable for any disablement that is due to service in the armed forces, including national service. However, information relating to awards—if any—arising from exposure to mustard gas during national service is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Incapacity Assessment Panel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether, in seeking the agreement of members of the panel on assessment of incapacity to publication of their names as mentioned in his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1377*, he informed them of the statements made by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People *(a)* in a written answer on 20 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *802*, that the report on the proposed medical test would include the membership of

the panel and *(b)* to Standing Committee E on 1 February 1994, that their names would be publicly available.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 25 November, *Official Report*, column *421*.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what has been the total training budget in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms;

(2) what was the total amount spent on training in each of the last 10 years; and what that figure represents per unemployed person.

Mr. Paice: The table shows expenditure on the Department's training and education programmes:

Year	£ million Cash	Real
1984–85	1,171	1,942
1985–86	1,289	2,025
1986–87	1,474	2,250
1987–88	1,650	2,391
1988–89	2,044	2,776
1989–90	2,606	3,309
1990–91	2,463	2,894
1991–92	1,995	2,205
1992–93	1,683	1,790
1993–94	1,910	1,967

Notes:

Expenditure up to and including 1990–91 is for Great Britain.

Expenditure in 1991–92 is England/Wales and expenditure from 1992–93 is England only.

Real terms figures are at 1994–95 levels.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the amount spent on training by his Department per unemployed person in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is shown in the table:

Year	Amount £	Real Terms (1994–95 Prices) £
1984–85	110	180
1985–86	140	220
1986–87	180	280
1987–88	220	320
1988–89	480	650
1989–90	980	1,240
1990–91	950	1,120
1991–92	560	620
1992–93	430	460

Notes:

1. Expenditure up to and including 1990–91 is for Great Britain. Expenditure in 1991–92 is England/Wales and expenditure from 1992–93 is England only.
2. The amounts are a crude calculation which takes the total amount spent on training, education and administrative costs and divides that by the average number of unemployed people aged 18 and over.
3. For consistency, expenditure on youth programmes has been excluded from the calculations.
4. Employment measures and labour market services are excluded from the calculations.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many weeks training were *(a)* offered and *(b)* undertaken in respect of (1) employment training, and (2) youth training by training and enterprise councils in Lincolnshire and Humberside in the last year for which figures were available; what element of this was provided by (i) a further education college, (ii) any other public sector college, (iii) an outside training provider and (iv) an employer, or prospective employer.

Mr. Paice: The information requested on training weeks offered and undertaken is shown in the table and relates to 1993-94. Information on training providers is not available.

	Youth training TWs Offered	Undertaken	Training for work TWs Offered	Undertaken
Lincolnshire TEC	209,998	204,945	[1]—	91,057
Humberside TEC	324,575	303,099	149,625	147,500

[1] In April 1993 Lincolnshire TEC became a training for work funding pilot and was contracted to deliver output only and not training weeks.

Prior Options Review Group

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which consultants have been engaged by the prior options review group; at what cost; and when they will report.

Miss Widdecombe: As part of the review, and following a competitive tendering process, Ernst and Young were commissioned to carry out a detailed examination of the potential and existing external markets in relation to the delivery of the services under review. They reported their findings on 28 October 1994. The cost for this research is commercial in confidence.

Employment Service (Deptford)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many permanent staff employed by the Employment Service covering the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford have been instructed to take unpaid leave or work shorter hours; for what reasons; and if he is able to estimate the impact on the time taken to process applications and appeals.

Ms Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 2 December 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of permanent staff employed by the Employment Service (ES) covering the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham,

Deptford instructed to take unpaid leave or to work shorter hours, for what reasons and the time taken to process applications and appeals.

The exercise you refer to is an entirely voluntary one. A note has been circulated to all staff within the London and South East Region which sets out our current staffing position in an open and honest manner and offers staff the opportunity to take special unpaid leave or to shorten their hours should they wish to do so. No pressure has been placed on any staff member to take up either of these options. Nor will it be.

Staff wishing to take leave or shorten working hours have been asked to complete a simple stencil, setting out the period of leave or hours preferred. These stencils are returned by the individual directly to a central point within the Region. Due to the simple design of the stencil, it is anticipated that applications can be cleared speedily, and certainly each form should not take no more than a few minutes to action.

Unemployment has fallen by almost 14% within London and the South East over the last twelve months, and by almost 30% in a number of Travel To Work Areas within the Region. Three quarters of ES staff are directly employed in the payment of unemployment benefit. Obviously, lower levels of unemployment mean that fewer staff are required. The offer of unpaid leave and shortened hours is one way in which we can ensure that we are not using more staff time than is required to deliver our service. We very much hope that voluntary measures of this kind will suffice since the alternatives, of reducing overall numbers, would obviously be less attractive to staff concerned. Employing more staff than are required to deliver our services would not be good value for money.

Deptford Employment Service Jobcentre is the only ES office which falls within the boundaries of the constituency of Lewisham Deptford. The Deptford office currently employs 39 permanent staff. As of 29 November, no-one from the Deptford office had applied for either special leave or shortened hours.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many casual staff are currently employed by the Employment Service covering the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford; and what intention there is to cut back on their numbers before the end of the financial year otherwise than to replace them with permanent staff.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 2 December 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about how many casual staff are currently employed by the Employment Service (ES) covering the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford and what intention there is to cut back on their numbers before the end of the financial year otherwise than to replace them with permanent staff.

Deptford Employment Service Jobcentre is the only ES office which falls within the boundaries of the constituency of Lewisham, Deptford. The Deptford office currently employs 39 permanent staff. There are no casual staff employed at the office.

I hope this is helpful.

Remploy

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what targets Remploy has been set in its 1994–95 annual performance agreement.

Miss Widdecombe: I have written to the chairman of Remploy approving the 1994–95 annual performance agreement between the Department and the Company. This agreement covers the year from 1 April 1994. It has been negotiated by the chief executive of the Employment Service, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. The targets are:

the average number of disabled people employed by Remploy Ltd. will be at least 8,900;

of which no more than 7,450 on average must be employed in factories;

at least 74 disabled employees will move from Remploy factories to Interwork having been employed there for at least one year, or from Interwork or factories to open employment;

the unit cost of Interwork should be no more than the supported employment voluntary maximum grant or £4,420;

Remploy Ltd. will keep within a unit cost target or operating deficit per disabled worker of £9,650;

Choices programme to be in place in at least 50 factories by the end of March 1995.

I have today arranged for the text of the annual performance agreement to be placed in the Library.

Long-term Unemployed

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to help the long-term unemployed find work.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 29 November 1994]:* Next year we shall continue to offer unemployed people some 1.5 million opportunities of help. For long-term unemployed people we aim to provide the individual advice and support they need to get back to work as quickly as possible.

Through regular Restart interviews we encourage them to search for jobs actively. Jobclub and the job interview scheme help them find jobs, and present their abilities to employers effectively. Jobplan workshops and Restart courses provide opportunities for self-assessment, confidence building, and action planning. Training for work and Community Action offer them chances to learn new skills, refresh old ones, gain work experience and enhance their job skills.

On Tuesday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out our plans to develop our help to ensure that it is targeted on those who need it most—in particular, the long-term unemployed. We are focusing training for work more sharply on getting people into work. We are extending Community Action and work trials over the next three years. Following successful pilots, jobfinders grant will be available nationally. So too will Workwise and 1-2-1, providing intensive job search help for 18 to 24 year olds out of work for a year or more. New Jobmatch pilots are to be developed and Workstart pilots will be extended.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fossil Fuel Levy

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to change the share of the fossil fuel levy allocation to renewable sources of energy.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I expect payments from the fossil fuel levy to renewable generators to increase during the 1990s, as more renewable electricity generation projects are commissioned under the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Electricity

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the current levels of trade in electricity with France; and what are the projected future levels.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Statistics on United Kingdom electricity trade with France are regularly published in "Energy Trends", table 24, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. A description of how trade across the interconnector was expected to develop in the foreseeable future was given in the Government's Coal Review White Paper, Cm 2235, at paragraphs 7.100 to 7.101.

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report's rejection of the plans of the Daily Mail Company to acquire the seven Nottingham-based titles of T. Bailey Forman Ltd.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *569–70.*

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much funding has been provided to TECs for small and medium-sized businesses in the current financial year and the coming financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department is providing £32.7 million to TECs for enterprise activity by small and medium-sized businesses in the current financial year. A further £6 million is being provided to TECs for the diagnostic and consultancy service delivered by Business Links. My Department is also providing funding totalling £18.7 million for providing a range of advisory services in Business Links and for helping to establish the Business Link network which will mainly assist small and medium sized businesses.

I have not yet finalised my budgets for 1995–96 but I expect to do so shortly and I will provide a further answer at that time.

In addition to DTI funding, other Government Departments, notably the Employment Department provide TECs with funds which they may use to support small and medium sized businesses.

Digital Audio Broadcasting

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what his Department is doing to encourage the development by manufacturers of radio sets capable of receiving the BBC's DAB broadcasts, to be launched in 1995; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Taylor: On 16 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *134*, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced to the House the setting up of a national forum to co-ordinate and promote the plans for the introduction of DAB in the UK. Participants of the forum included broadcasters, equipment manufacturers, retailers, service providers and other interested parties. They have made considerable progress over the intervening months.

One of the forum's working groups is concerned with consumer equipment for receiving DAB broadcasts. It currently numbers all of the major UK market players, including far Eastern inward investors, in its membership.

At least five of these have indicated their intentions to manufacture products in the UK once DAB chipsets become available. Another far eastern company that does not currently manufacturer in the UK has expressed a desire to develop a DAB receiver in the UK.

At the present time, however, there is a lack of DAB chipsets in commercial quantities and at commercial prices. Some UK companies have formed a club to develop a UK source of DAB chipsets to alleviate this.

Officials in my Department are giving strong encouragement to these activities.

EC Package Travel Directive

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to make a further announcement on the EC package travel directive.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I expect to publish revised guidance notes to the Package Travel Regulations 1992, which implement the Package Travel Directive in UK law, within the next few weeks.

Advisory Bodies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing the number of meetings held, the secretarial and advisory arrangements, the budgeted and actual expenditure and the subjects of any reports and submissions produced by the Standards Quality and Measurement Advisory Committee in each of the last three years.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Secretarial support for the Standards, Quality and Measurement Advisory Committee has been provided by officials from the national measurement system policy unit, a section within the technology and innovation policy division of the Department.

Advisory arrangements were covered within the terms of reference for the committee. The terms of reference for the committee were:

(a) To identify and review the requirement of the United Kingdom national measurement system and the needs for its harmonisation internationally.

(b) To advise the Department on the broad objectives, balance and strategy for departmental support of metrology, including its relationship to specification standards and other quality activities.

(c) To advise the Department on the allocation of resources necessary to secure those objectives; to consider proposals referred by the Department to the committee for advice against such criteria as the Department may propose; to make recommendations for programmes to be considered by the Department; and to advise the Department on the effectiveness of its expenditure.

(d) To propose other measures which will further the objectives of the national measurement system and related activities within the committee's area of responsibility.

(e) To advise the Department on any other matters within the committee's competence.

The Standards, Quality and Measurement Advisory Committee has now become the Measurement Advisory Committee.

The table shows the number of meetings held, the budgeted and actual expenditure and the subjects of reports and submissions produced by the committee over the last three financial years.

SQMAC Activity and Budgetary Information
(financial years 1991–94)

Financial Year	*Number of formal meetings of SQMAC*	*Budget*[1] *£*	*Out-turn*[1] *£*	*Reports and submissions by SQMAC*
1991–92	4		[2]—	None
1992–93	4	25,000	22,747.88	None
1993–94	5	25,000	13,760,69	19 February 1993 Submission urging the consideration of planned reductions in programme funding. 1 June 1993 Submission expressing concern at the reduction in funding of the mass, length and flow metrology programmes.

[1] Includes budget and out-turn for regular meetings of SQMAC working groups.
[2] This information is available only at disproportionate cost.

Wave Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to reassess his Department's policy announcement on 31 March 1994 on the future funding for wave energy, *Official Report*, columns *1009–10*, following the subsequent decision of the European Commission to fund the wave power device designed by Queen's university, Belfast.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government's strategy for the development of new and renewable energy in the United Kingdom was published on 31 March 1994 as Energy Paper No. 62, copies of which are in the Libraries of both Houses. Resources will be concentrated on key technologies with good prospects of commercial application in the coming decades—such as solar, energy from coppice and waste, wind and fuel cells. The existing work on wave energy will be completed, but no further commitments undertaken, as this technology has limited potential to contribute commercially to energy supplies in the next few decades. A watching brief on wave energy developments, including the work of Queen's university, Belfast, will be maintained. The progress of the programme and the prospects for the technologies are regularly reviewed.

Colliery Transfers

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he now expects the regional packages and former collieries owned by British Coal to be transferred to the private sector.

Mr. Eggar: Subject to further detailed negotiation, the Department aims to complete the sales by the end of the year.

India

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement regarding the Minister for Trade's recent visit to India as part of the Indo-British partnership technology week.

Mr. Heseltine: The technology week, which was led by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, involved a series of seminars and exhibitions in Calcutta, New Delhi, Bombay and Madras. The trade mission was the largest of its kind to date.

Organised under the Indo-British partnership initiative, in which the private sector works closely with my Department, the mission was designed to demonstrate United Kingdom technological capability across a number of industrial sectors. These include infrastructure, power, electronics, food processing, design and telecommunications.

Using Concorde, itself an example of British technology, to fly more than 80 business men to the four major business centres in India enabled the mission to secure considerable additional local publicity.

I am pleased to say that more than half the business group were small to medium-sized companies, many of them visiting this undoubtedly expanding market for the first time.

During a highly successful week a significant number of business transactions were completed, as the summary shows. Other business deals are expected to develop in the future. Further events are planned for next year and beyond.

Agreements and Announcements during "Concorde Week"

	Agreement/Announcement
Rolls Royce/RPG	An agreement to refurbish power stations
Caparo/Maruti	Motor components
Phillips Electronics	Launch of pagers
High Value Horticulture	Three agreements (fast growing trees for matches/soya beans/nursery development for medicinal plants)
Checkpoint Security Services	Security printing
Taylor Woodrow	JV for roads in Rajasthan
Costain	Narmada bridge in Gujarat
RBF International	JV for industrial parks
TR Fastenings	JV for industrial fasteners
Warwick University	JV with CII on centres of excellence
Indo-British Partnership	New science and technology scheme with Government of India, including advanced technical training.

Agreements and Announcements during "Concorde Week"

	Agreement/Announcement
Indo-British Partnership	Restoration of selected historic of selected historic buildings with industrial sponsorship.
Indo-British Partnership	Proposal for an industrial park in Tamil Nadu.

Opening of new factory by Munradtech (industrial generators)

New Collaborative relationship in specialised but vital area of electro-magnetic compatibility.

Also many direct deals e.g. moulded plastics/electronic testing equipment/construction.

Positive discussions on revitalisation of jute industry in West Bengal.

New commercial relationship in coal mining.

British Coal

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress in discussions with the preferred bidders for the regional coal companies in the privatisation of the mining business of British Coal.

Mr. Eggar: Discussions with each of the preferred bidders—RJB Mining plc, Celtic Energy Limited and Mining (Scotland) Limited—are on course to be concluded this month.

Each of the bids has been subject to a detailed process of clarification and negotiation since preferred bidders were announced on 12 October.

The Government have agreed with RJB, subject to contract, that RJB will acquire the English Coal Company and Thorne and Ellington collieries for £815 million; £698.1 million would be payable at completion, with the balance payable, with interest, in instalments over the three following years.

The Government have agreed with Mining (Scotland) Limited, subject to contract, that Mining (Scotland) Limited will acquire the Scottish Coal Company for £39.4 million and an additional consideration, which may amount to up to £10 million, mainly for increased levels of coal stocks.

In both cases, the bid price has been adjusted as envisaged in the information memorandum. The adjustments reflect developments since tenders were submitted in September 1994 or information which was not available to bidders at the time. In the case of RJB, the bulk of the adjustments relate to changes in expected levels of coal stocks, and liabilities disclosed after bids were submitted. RJB's bid price following these adjustments still clearly represents best value for money. This is also the case for Mining (Scotland) Limited.

The Department will shortly lay minutes before the House describing certain limited warranties and indemnities which it proposes to give to RJB and Mining (Scotland) Limited. The question of possible warranties and indemnities is also under discussion with Celtic Energy Limited.

The acquisition price for all three preferred bidders would also be subject to technical adjustments following completion to take account of differences between the value of certain assets and liabilities as estimated at signature of the acquisition agreement and the corresponding value to be established as at completion.

Discussions are continuing with Celtic Energy Limited.

Nursery Furnishing

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions took place with Mothercare in 1989 and 1990 over the results of its tests into cot mattresses containing toxic substances and the reasons for them replacing such mattresses at that time.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* No such tests were made known to the Department during 1989 and 1990. The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, as amended, do not specify the use of fire retardants. The regulations are made in terms of a series of ignition resistance tests for different furniture components and manufacturers can meet the required standards for mattresses safely in a number of ways.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he received from industry about the adverse affects on children from the use of fire retardant chemicals in nursery furniture prior to the introduction of the legislation.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* My Department consulted industry and other interested organisations when making the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 and full consideration was given to the use of fire retardant chemicals in nursery furniture. The risk to young children of being killed or injured in fires involving nursery furniture outweighed the possibility of skin irritations to some babies, cited by industry, from contact with fire retardant chemicals. This took into account the variety of options available to industry to meet the match resistance requirements. Not all fabrics need the application of chemicals to make them match resistant.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the reasons for his 1989 decision to *(a)* exempt baby nests from the provisions of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 and *(b)* not exempt nursery furniture coverings from the provisions of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 25 November 1994]:* Baby nests were exempted from the requirements of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, as amended, because of the need for them to be made of permeable materials to avoid the risk of suffocation because of the purpose of their design. Nursery furniture coverings were not exempted from fire safety protection because there is no attendant risk of suffocation.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) of the bills currently awaiting payment in his Department how many are over the advised payment date by *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over six months respectively;

(2) how many of the bills paid by his Department during the last month for which figures are available were paid within *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* up to two months, *(c)* up to three months, *(d)* up to six months and *(e)* over

six months from receipt of invoice; and how many were over the date for payment by (i) up to one month, (ii) up to two months, (iii) up to three months, (iv) up to six months and (v) over six months.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 1 December 1994]:* The information is not available in the form requested. The survey of my Department's payment performance for the 1994 Trade and Industry expenditure plans report based on a sample of payments made in October 1993 stated that 90 per cent. of bills were paid either in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receipt of goods or services or the presentation of a valid invoice. A further 7 per cent. were paid within 60 days of receipt of goods or services or the presentation of a valid invoice.

TREASURY

European Communities

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the net United Kingdom contribution to the European Community in 1992; and what he estimates it will be in 1994.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Community in 1992–93 was £2,167 million and the Government's latest estimate of our net contribution for 1994–95 is £2,446 million.

Customs and Excise

Mr. McFall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are being considered in the deployment of officers involved in anti-smuggling activities as a result of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise fundamental expenditure review.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Changes resulting from the Customs fundamental expenditure review are consistent with the department's existing anti-smuggling strategy and will enable Customs to play a key role in the Government's anti-drugs strategy. Customs effectiveness will not be diminished.

FER changes mean that Customs will allocate its anti-smuggling resources more effectively. There will be a focusing of static staff on areas of greatest risk. For other locations, anti-smuggling effort will be grouped together in task forces which will ensure a fast and flexible response to specific threats as well as providing high-profile deterrence. There will be a greater emphasis placed on quality results in terms of seizures and the impact that the department has on organised criminals. There will be a strengthening of the department's intelligence organisation, raising its profile and improving national co-ordination—indeed, some of the reductions in posts which result from the deployment of task forces in certain locations will be recycled into this areas.

It is too early to indicate what the implications will be at particular locations. Decisions about the deployment of Customs staff will be taken by operational managers in consultation with the centre.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the estimates given by every other EEC Government to its own people of *(a)* their increase in EEC budget contributions consequent on the Edinburgh agreement, *(b)* the payments/gains per capita and *(c)* whether they will be in surplus or deficit.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: So far as we have been able to ascertain, of other member states, only Germany has made public estimates of the impact of the Edinburgh agreement on its EC budget contribution.

Germany

Additional gross contributions from implementing Edinburgh, as compared with arrangements in the present own Resources decision

Year	*Billion DM*
1995	0.5
1999	3.5

Source:
Estimate published in December 1993.

A list of the factors determining the impact of Edinburgh on member states' contributions was given in my answer to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 24 November at column *353*.

Capital Gains

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy that the new rules in respect of capital gains tax reinvestment relief include all capital gains for reinvestment in the existing three year period.

Sir George Young: Relaxations to the rules for re-investment relief will take effect from 29 November. As before, companies will still have to meet the other qualifying conditions for three years. Full details of the proposals will be found in the Finance Bill, which is due to be published early in January.

Capital Gains

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he plans that the abolition of the restrictions in respect of capital gains tax reinvestment relief announced in the Budget be made to apply only to disposals on or after Budget day.

Sir George Young: Relaxation of the restrictions will affect only the activities of qualifying companies, and not individual investors in those companies. These changes take effect from 29 November. Full details of the proposals will be contained in the Finance bill, which is due to be published early in January.

DEFENCE

Air Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the accident involving a Tornado aircraft at Royal Air Force Cottesmore on 3 August.

Mr. Soames: The incident involved an Italian air force Tornado based at RAF Cottesmore, which was on this

occasion being flown by a German air force instructor pilot and a German air force navigator. After a normal approach to landing with the undercarriage down and locked, the Tornado sank on to the runway with its undercarriage fully retracted. It came to rest on the runway and both crew emerged without injury.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the accident to Tornado F.3 ZG751 during 1993; and what is the current status of the aircraft.

Mr. Soames: Tornado F3 aircraft ZG751 has not been involved in any accidents since it entered service. It is currently in service with No. 11 group of the RAF. The only Tornado F3 aircraft to be involved in an accident in 1993 was ZE858. A copy of the accident summary for this aircraft is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the collision between two Royal Air Force Tornados over Canada on 1 August.

Mr. Soames: The RAF board of inquiry into this accident is not yet complete. A summary of its findings will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the agreement with the Italian authorities pertaining to the use by Italian Air Force combat aircraft of low flying and range facilities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: No formal agreement exists. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 4 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *996*.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the deployment of Italian Air Force AMX aircraft to *(a)* Royal Air Force Coningsby from 11 to 15 July, *(b)* Royal Air Force Cottesmore from 11 to 14 July, *(c)* Royal Air Force Cottesmore from 22 to 26 July, *(d)* Royal Air Force Waddington from 5 September and *(e)* Royal Air Force Cottesmore from 10 to 14 October; how many aircraft took part; which Royal Air Force unit hosted the visits; how many low-level sorties were undertaken by the aircraft during the deployment, and at what minimum permitted altitudes; and how many of these sorties included use of the Spadeadam range.

Mr. Soames: The purpose of the Italian air force deployments was to utilise the electronic warfare tactics range at RAF Spadeadam and to carry out low flying training within the United Kingdom low flying system. The authorised minimum separation distance on each occasion was 500 ft.

Details of the individual deployments are as follows:

Dates	*Host station and unit*	*Numbers of participating aircraft*	*Total numbers of sorties*
11–14 July	RAF Cottesmore No specific unit	6	24
11–15 July	RAF Coningsby 56 Squadron	6	24
22–26 August	RAF Cottesmore No specific unit	6	16
5–16 September	RAF Waddington	6	50
10–14 October	No specific unit RAF Cottesmore No specific unit	6	12

All of the sorties listed included use of Spadeadam range. It should be noted that the second deployment to RAF Cottesmore took place in August, and not July as stated in the question.

Correspondence

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary or State for Defence when the hon. Member for Don Valley can expect a reply to his letter of 20 May addressed to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence replied to the letter in question on 21 June 1994.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on publication of joint air miss working group reports of air miss investigations.

Mr. Soames: Joint air miss working group reports of air miss investigations in the United Kingdom are printed three times a year by the Civil Aviation Authority and are made widely available to interested groups within the aviation community. Copies are also placed in the Library of the House and provided to the House of Commons Defence Committee. It is circulated widely to increase awareness of flight safety.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will send to the hon. Member for Don Valley the results of the inquiry into the air miss incident on 11 November involving a helicopter and a Tornado jet aircraft near Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A copy of the report of the investigation into this occurrence, which took place on 5 November 1993, is included in the joint air miss working group's "Analysis of Air Misses in the United Kingdom, Report No. 3/93", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. As a result of this report, crews have been reminded of the continuing need for extra vigilance during flying training.

Officer Selection

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce the requirement that all candidates for officer selection shall have served a minimum of one year in the ranks.

Mr. Soames: There are already arrangements in each of the services to commission suitably qualified personnel from the ranks, including those of junior rank. We have no plans to introduce a requirement that all candidates for officer selection serve a minimum of one year in the ranks as this is considered neither essential nor cost-effective.

Spitfire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to preserve the Battle of Britain Flight Supermarine P.R. XIX Spitfire that has currently been put up for auction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: None. The Spitfire Mk XIX which was sold at auction on 26 November was on of five airworthy Spitfires operated by the Battle of Britain memorial flight, including two other Mk XIX variants. The four remaining airworthy Spitfires are adequate to ensure representation of the aircraft in future BBMF activities. Proceeds from the sale of the Spitfire will meet most of the costs of restoring the flight's Hurricane.

Italian Air Force

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the flight by four Italian air force AMX aircraft from RAF Coningsby to the Loch Ness area on 14 July.

Mr. Soames: The purpose of the flight, which was properly authorised, was to carry out low-level training and to utilise the electronic warfare tactics range at RAF Spadeadam.

Royal Marine Reserve

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current strength of the Royal Marine Reserve in each of the five main centres and 12 smaller detachments.

Mr. Soames: The information requested, as at 1 November 1994, is as follows:

RMR	*Centre*	*Total Strength*	*Detachments*
RMR	London	19	London—99 Chatham—20 Henley on Thames—30 Portsmouth—42
RMR	Scotland	172	Glasgow—94 Greenock—26 Grangemouth—18 Dundee—34
RMR	Bristol	267	Bristol—90 Cardiff—32 Poole—46 Lympstone—46 Plymouth—53
RMR	Merseyside	198	Liverpool—121 Rochdale—53 Birmingham—24
RMR	Tyne	179	(no detachments)

Bombing (Bihac)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library aerial and ground photographs of the bomb craters and bomb damage at Bihac caused by aircraft attack.

Mr. Soames: There is no aerial or ground photographic evidence of bomb craters or bomb damage in Bihac available.

Hercules Aircraft

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects the decision on the replacement for FLAC130J.

Mr. Freeman: We hope to be in a position to make an announcement on tranche 1 of the Hercules rolling replacement programme shortly.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the timetable for an announcement of his decision on the replacement of the Hercules C-130.

Mr. Freeman: We hope to be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what offers he has received from British Aerospace to offset the cost of maintaining and repairing of the existing fleet of Hercules C-130s.

Mr. Freeman: British Aerospace forwarded a proposal for the maintenance of the existing Hercules fleet on 3 November this year.

Contracts (Former Personnel)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* senior officers of the armed forces and *(b)* civil servants of assistant secretary grade or above have in each year since 1979 within two years of leaving their posts joined companies engaged in contracts with his Department; and for each year how many in each rank in both the armed forces and the civil service did so;

(2) how many *(a)* senior officers of the armed forces and *(b)* civil servants have within two years of leaving the armed forces joined companies engaged on contracts with his Department since 4 May 1979.

Mr. Freeman: My Department keeps no record of this information.

Operation Seafire

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the times at which, during exercise Operation Seafire on 17 October off the west Wales coast a helicopter from RAF Chivenor *(a)* was alerted, *(b)* was tasked, *(c)* took off from Chivenor, *(d)* landed at Menistan, *(e)* took off from Menistan, *(f)* arrived over the casualty and *(g)* began lowering fire fighters.

Mr. Soames: Exercise Seafire took place on 10 October. RAF records show the times requested as:

	Times requested
Helicopter alerted.	0620
Helicopter tasked.	0635
Helicopter took off from RAF Chivenor.	0645
Helicopter landed Morriston.	0705 approximately
Helicopter took off from Morriston.	0710 approximately

	Times requested
Helicopter arrived over the ferry.	0730 approximately
Helicopter began lowering fire fighters.	0735 approximately

The response was well within the guidelines laid down for civil search and rescue operations. The answer given to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) on 23 November, *Official Report*, column *148*, unfortunately contained an error; the distance from RAF Chivenor to the rendezvous point is 36 nautical miles, not 86 nautical miles.

Military Corrective Training Centre, Colchester

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long the military corrective training centre at Colchester has been operational; and how many *(a)* escapes and *(b)* attempted escapes have occurred at the establishment since it opened.

Mr. Soames: The military corrective training centre has been in operation since 1 January 1956. Since then there has been a recorded total of 215 escapes and 38 attempted escapes, most of which took place between 1956 and 1961. Since 1990, there have been a total of four recorded escapes and no attempts.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British-Japanese Parliamentary Group

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he said about the role of THORP in United Kingdom-Japanese trade at the British-Japanese parliamentary group in London on 23 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The role of THORP in UK-Japanese trade was not mentioned in my right hon. Friend's speech to the UK-Japan parliamentary group seminar. However, in response to a question from the floor regarding the recovery of plutonium from reprocessing spent fuel from countries such as Japan, he explained that all views had been carefully considered before the decision was taken in favour of going ahead with THORP. We attach great importance to the continuance of such trade with Japan, which is commercially beneficial to both countries.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of his speech to the British-Japanese parliamentary group in London on 23 November.

Mr. Goodlad: No transcript of my right hon. Friend's remarks on this occasion is available.

Slovenia

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relationship with Slovenia; what ministerial visits have taken place there in the past 12 months; what bilateral trade initiatives and contracts the United Kingdom has with that country; and how many official Slovenian visits have been made to the United Kingdom in the past year.

Mr. David Davis: Relations between the United Kingdom and Slovenia are very good. In the past year there have been visits to Slovenia by two British Ministers and four Slovenian Ministers have visited the UK. Prime Minister Drnovšek also paid a visit as a guest of Government from 7 to 9 November.

As a result of an increase in interest being shown by British companies in Slovenia, which has recently entered into our top 80 list of overseas markets, the DTI has recently appointed an export promoter to cover the country. A trade mission is also due to visit Slovenia from 5 to 9 December.

Iraq

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that United Nations sanctions should not be lifted until all United National resolutions against Iraq have been complied with, with particular reference to the release of missing Kuwaitis.

Mr. David Davis: The UN has repeatedly made clear to the Iraqi regime that there can be no question of relaxing sanctions until they are in full compliance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. We raise the subject of missing Kuwaitis and other third country nationals at every opportunity for example, when the Security Council last reviewed sanctions on 14 November.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in talks with the Iraquis in relation to Kuwaiti detainees and prisoners of war.

Mr. David Davis: Iraq is beginning to co-operate with the ICRC in commenting on ICRC case files on missing persons passed to Iraq over 18 months ago. It has so far offered an incomplete response on 127 of the 609 case files. The tripartite commission will meet again on 8 December to review progress and approve the establishment of a technical sub-commission to speed up the substantive review of the case files. We continue to attach great importance to this issue.

Estonia

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relationship with Estonia; what ministerial visits have taken place there in the past 12 months; what bilateral trade initiatives and contracts the United Kingdom has with that country; and how many official Estonian visits have been made to the United Kingdom in the past year.

Mr. David Davis: We have good relations with Estonia based on our strong support for her independence and democratic and economic development. My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, have visited Estonia in the past 12 months. We are actively promoting trade and investment, for example through the appointment of an export promoter and support for trade-related events. There have been four visits by Estonian Ministers, including the then Prime

Minister, to the United Kingdom in the past year, and numerous other official visits.

UN Year of Tolerance

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding the UN Year of Tolerance 1995.

Mr. Baldry: We are content that non-governmental organisations should play an active role in the activities of the UN Year of Tolerance 1995, but it is not our policy, given heavy demands on public expenditure, to commit scarce resources to the marking of UN years dedicated to specific themes. We therefore have no plans at present to engage in specific activity to mark this UN year.

UNESCO

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterpart in South Africa regarding membership of UNESCO; and what assessment he makes of the impact of South Africa's policy on UNESCO.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has not had any discussions with his South African counterpart regarding membership of UNESCO. I understand, however, that the Government of South Africa have expressed the wish to rejoin the organisation but as of yet has not done so.

The South African Government's position on UNESCO has been noted. We are keeping the question of a United Kingdom return to UNESCO under close review. For the moment, however, we have taken no decision.

EU Council

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will publish a statement on the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union.

Mr. David Davis: The information is as follows:

Monthly Forecast of Business for December 1994

Justice and Home Affairs and Research Councils were held on 30 November and 1 December.

The following meetings are planned:

Date	*Subject*
5 December	ECOFIN, Education
6 December	Social Affairs
8 December	Internal Market
8 December	Consumer Affairs
9 December	European Council Essen
10 December	European Council Essen
12 December	Agriculture
13 December	Agriculture
15 December	ECOFIN meeting not yet confirmed
15 December	Environment
16 December	Environment
19 December	FAC, Fisheries
20 December	FAC, Fisheries
22 December	Health

The following subjects were discussed:
30 November to 1 December
Justice and Home Affairs Council
Agenda:

Adoption of the agenda

Approval of the list of 'A' items

Presidency progress report on the draft convention on the establishment of Europol

EDU/Europol staff

Presidency report to the Council on burden-sharing with regard to the admission and residence of displaced persons

Draft common measure on travel facilities for third country nationals (school pupils resident in a member state)

Draft resolution on minimum guarantees for asylum procedures

Presidency progress report to the Council on the proposal for a Council regulation laying down a uniform format for visas

Draft Council resolution on the further improvement in security at external borders

Draft resolution on the admission of third country nationals to the territory of member states of the European Union for study purposes

Draft Council resolution relating to limitations on the admission of third country nationals to the territory of the member states for the purposes of pursuing activities as self-employed persons

1994 Budget—draft Council decision on a joint action concerning cooperation measures to be taken in the JHA sector

Relations with Cyprus and Malta

Implementation of the Berlin declaration of 8 September 1994

Draft interim report on combating racism and xenophobia

Draft interim report on cooperation in the campaign against international organised crime

Report and draft resolution on protection of the financial interests of the Communities

Draft convention to improve extradition between the member states of the European Union

Draft convention jurisdiction and the enforcement of judgements in matrimonial matters—Brussels 11 convention

Draft convention on insolvency proceedings

Draft report to the European Council on the implementation of the December 1993 action plan in the JHA field

Other Business

1 December

Research Council

Agenda

Adoption of 10 specific research programmes

Council conclusions on future work of CREST

Commission presentation of its communication on research co-ordination

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

5 December

Ecofin

White paper follow up

Report on implementation of broad economic guidelines and multilateral surveillance

Fraud

Financial perspectives

Macro-economic assistance to third countries

Taxation of savings

Bio-fuels

C02 tax

Adoption of agenda

Adoption of the list of 'A'points

Decision establishing the community action programme Socrates

Training

The quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training.

The promotion of education and training statistics in the European Union

Negotiations on EC/United States and EC/Canada agreements in the field of higher education and training

Cooperation in the field of education with the associated countries of central and eastern Europe and with the Russian Federation.

Education aspects of a European Union overall strategy against racism and xenophobia.
White paper on growth, competitiveness and employment.

6 December

Social affairs
Adoption of agenda
Adoption of the list of "A" points
Draft directive on posted workers
Draft directive on part time work and fixed term employment relations and draft resolution on social security.
Commission report on employment: preparation for the Essen European Council.
Draft decision on the Leonardo vocational training programme.
White paper on European social policy—political debate.
Draft resolution on women and employment.
Draft decision on the continuation of the handynet system.
Application of regulation 1408/71 EEC—on social security for migrant workers—to posted workers: note from the Belgian delegation.
AOB

8 December Consumer Affairs Council
Unit pricing
Commission Green Paper on access to justice and consumer guarantees.
Product labelling
Distance selling

8 December

Internal Market Council

Agenda (including possible "A" points)
Functioning of the internal market
Legislative and administrative simplification
Information procedure
Cross-border payments
Information society
Data protection directive
Legal protection of databases
Community patents
Pension funds
External trade statistics—possible "A" point
Counterfeit goods regulation—possible
Mutual assistance in customs and agricultural matters—possible
European medicines evaluation agency fees regulation
Food additives directive
New foodstuffs and ingredients
Flavourings
Food labelling
Irradiated foodstuffs
Motor vehicle flammability—possible "A" point
'Multipurpose directive' on two and three-wheeled vehicles—possible "A" point for particular common position
Marketing and use of dangerous substances: fourteenth, formerly thriteenth, amendment—false "B" point
Measuring instrument
Novel foods
Flavourings
Food labelling
Miscellaneous food additives
9–10 December
European Council Essen

Agenda not available

12–13 December

Agriculture
Wine regime
GATT
CAP simplification
Agrimoney
Durum wheat and oilseeds—possible
Aid for private storage in Norway, Finland and Austria—possible
Deseasonalisation premium for beef—possible
Sugar
Fresh meat directive
Mince meat directive
BST
Animal welfare in transport—possible
List of third country establishments—possible
Inspection fee—possible
15–16 December
Environment
Agenda not available
19–20 December
Fisheries
FACs and quotas
NAFO
French Guyana
Annual fisheries agreement with:
Iceland
Greenland
Norway
Sweden
Baltic States
Faroes
Annual Spanish and Portuguese control regulations
Spanish and Portuguese accession review—possible
22 December
Health

Agenda not available

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 250**

SESSION 1994–95

16th November—2nd December 1994

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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